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THE DILLI WAY OF LIFE: FOUR NOVELS

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ABSTRACT
'Culture' has figured centrally in all discourses arising in and from this space in all senses of the term as Shahjahanabad (alternatively referred to as 'Dilli' and post-independence, 'Old Delhi') has boasted of a heady "way of life", refined material and non-material culture and iconic artistic accomplishments. Nazir Ahmad's *Mirat-ul Uroos (The Bride's Mirror)* is credited to be the first proto-novel to emanate from Shahjahanabad. Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* is a much cited and acclaimed work that immerses us into a somewhat later date Shahjahanabad. While Krishna Sobti's *Dil-o-danish (The Heart has its Reasons*, recaptures this unique way of life, Anita Desai's *In Custody* chronicles its demise (Desai, 1984). Through a study of these texts, it is possible to foreground both the cultural practices embedded in them as well as the material conditions which have produced them. On the other hand, the study also examines how living in Shahjahananbad has catalysed in various periods of its history the act and quality of writing and how the conditions of living in the city in general and Delhi in particular shape the narrative and characters. Offering valuable insight into the rise and fall of this culture, the four novels narrate Shahjahanbad as the hybrid city between existence and extinction, identity and hegemony and belonging and alienation. The present study combines inputs from literary studies, cultural studies, urban studies and memory studies to compile an imaginative and cognitive audit of the give and take between the city and the city-zen.

***Keywords**: Shahjahanabad, Delhi novel, Delhi culture, Nazir Ahmad, Ahmed Ali, Krishna Sobti, Anita Desai*

I. INTRODUCTION

Shahjahanabad has been a contested site culturally, historically and geographically. Not surprising, therefore, that the literary expressions engaging with this disputed space have had to work their way through many negotiations and contradictions. 'Culture' has figured centrally in all discourses arising in and from this space in all senses of the term as Shahjahanabad (alternatively referred to as 'Dilli' and post-independence, 'Old Delhi') has boasted of a heady "way of life", refined material and non-material culture and iconic artistic accomplishments. Nazir Ahmad's *Mirat-ul Uroos* (between 1868 and 1869, Arabic for *The Bride's Mirror*, translated into English by G.E. Ward in 1903) is credited to be the first proto-novel to emanate from Shahjahanabad. Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* is a much cited and acclaimed work that immerses us into a somewhat later date Shahjahanabad (Ali, 1940). While Krishna Sobti's *Dil-o-danish* (1993), translated in English as *The Heart Has Its Reasons* (2005), recaptures this unique way of life, Anita Desai's *In Custody* chronicles its demise (Desai, 1984). Through a study of these texts, it is possible to

foreground both the cultural practices embedded in them as well as the material conditions which have produced them. Literary analysis is a rewarding technique in cultural sociology as both underscore the impact of urban ethos on human behavior and relationships. Literature, as well as sociology, focuses on groups to which individuals belong in order to unravel human behavior in society. While the biggest group is society itself, there are smaller groups as well and city and culture figure significantly among them. The novels examined in this paper illustrate how the matrix of urbanism and culture shape and influence the lives of city-zens. The four texts mentioned above figure seminally in the literary discourse on Delhi culture. Through these texts, a cultural sociology scholar can begin to observe how living in Shahjahanabad catalyses the act and quality of writing as well as colors the lives of the characters. The conditions of living in the city in general and Shahjahanabad in particular shape the narrative which partly or wholly, explicitly or implicitly, constitutes an imaginative and cognitive document on the give and take between the city and the city-zen. It examines how the rules of the game of culture in Delhi have been revisited and revised time and again to stand as they do when these writers undertake to write Shahajahanabad (Berkowitch, 1998). However, each intervention in this game, whether literary or otherwise, adds to the direction and dimension of the game and hence, each text matters not only as an individual move but also as a serial link in the chain. Culture and culture of a city is the uninterrupted story of each move, game, sets, series, and so on and so forth in totality- a story which commences in literary terms with the four texts examined here.

II. COLONIZATION: EARLY EFFECTS

Nazir Ahmad Dehlavi's *Mirat* is a widely discussed book in the context of Urdu literature and also the early Indian novels. In the context of Delhi, it is the earliest example of ethos in Shahjahanabad as well as a glimpse into the interiors of the homes and minds of both the male and female native population. This is a Shahjahanabad which is well incorporated into the colonization project, without quite realizing it. The city space, the domestic space, the educational space, the linguistic space and the literary space are all challenged by the invisible hegemonic intervention- visible retrospectively in the ambiguity of 'progress' and 'preservation" in the native response to all the sweeping changes around it. Ahmad's contemporary biographer, Sir Abdul Qadir, in his *The New School of Urdu Literature*, underscores the chief contribution of *Mirat* as:

> Maulvi Nazir ahmad's great service to Urdu knowing India is his supplying it with books specially adapted for female education and it may safely be said that its chief feature of his subsequent writings is that each one of them may be placed in the hands of a girl of tender years by the most scrupulous and conscientious of fathers. (Qadir, 1898, p.55)

Qadir as well as Ahmad are unaware of the invisible and insidious impacts of colonization and how the British contact has already stamped the creator and the creation in an indelible manner- the imprints of which are manifest in the text in various ways. The paper focuses on this picture of Shahjahanbad from the point of

view of the incipient cultural subjectivity of the space and its residents in the early dawn of colonization.

Nazir Ahmad Dehlavi (1830-1912) also known as "Diptee" (Deputy) Nazir Ahmad, was an Urdu scholar and writer, and a social and religious reformer. Ahmad hailed from a family of maulavis and muftis of Bijnor (Uttar Pradesh) and Delhi. His father was a teacher in a small town near Bijnore who trained him in Persian and Arabic. In 1842, Ahmad was enrolled to study at the Aurangabadi Mosque under the tutelage of Abd ul-Khaliq in Delhi. In 1846, Ahmad joined the Delhi College. He was a disciple in its Urdu section because of his father's injunction that "he would rather see me die than learn English"· (Pritchett, 1903, p. 205). He was engaged in studies till 1853. During this period he also got married to Abd ul-Khaliq's granddaughter. After a brief stint as a teacher of Arabic, he joined the British colonial administration in 1854. He was appointed deputy inspector of schools in the Department of Public Instruction in Kanpur in1856 and Allahabad in 1857. He took the valuable advice of a friend to learn English which he did in 1859-60. He translated the Income Tax Law and the Indian Penal Code into Urdu in 1860-61. For these contributions, he was posted as deputy collector in the North-West Provinces (thus the title "diptee"). In 1877, Ahmad proceeded on an administrative assignment to the princely state of Hyderabad but in 1884, political feuds forced him to quit and return to Delhi. He remained in Delhi till the time of his death from stroke in 1912.

Nazir Ahmad writes *Mirat* as he says for the edification and instruction of his daughters. He explains:

> I began writing books at a time when my own children were of an age to start their schooling. I had my own experience of learning and teaching, and as an employee in the Education Department had also had the occasion to supervise teaching. I knew in every detail all the defects of educational methods and of the books in use. "Once you have seen the fly in your drink, you cannot swallow it"- and so I began to write books on my own account and to teach from them. This was the motive which first impelled me to write. (Ahmad, 1992, p.118)

Mirat is a claimant to the distinction of being the first novel in Urdu. While there are other works which contend to the same title, as F B Pritchett says, "*The Bride's Mirror* may or may not have been the first Urdu novel, but it certainly was the first Urdu bestseller" (Pritchett, 1903, p. 204). It certainly was the first literary success of Ahmad. A notice by the Northern Provinces Lieutenant Governor no. 791 A dated August 20, 1868, announced a cash prize for any book which

> … shall subserve some useful purpose, ... that it shall be written in one of the current dialects, Oordoo or Hindee, and there shall be excellence both in the style and treatment. … Books suitable for the women of India will be especially acceptable, and well rewarded. (Pritchett, 1903, p. 205)

Mirat won a cash prize of Rs.1000 in 1870 in addition to a watch for its author from the Lieutenant Governor and a recommendation for inclusion in school curricula.

After its release in 1869, within twenty years, it went into continuous reprints with over 1,00,000 copies to date and was also translated into Bengali, Brajbhasha, Kashmiri, Punjabi, and Gujarati. A sequel followed in the form of *Binat-ul-Nash* (*The Daughters of the Bier*, a name for the constellation Ursa Major). *Taubat-un-Nasuh* (*The Repentance of Nasuh*) was written in 1873-74, *Fasaana-e-Mubtalaa* in 1885, *Ibn'ul Waqt* in 1888, *Ayyamah* in1891 and *Ruya-e Sadiqah* in1892.

In 1903, translated into English by G. E. Ward as *The Bride's Mirror*, its subtitle reads '*A Tale of Life in Delhi a Hundred Years ago*'. Explaining the need for this translation, he writes,

> It makes no claim to literary merit; but since so little is known in England about the social and domestic life of our Indian fellow subjects, an authentic picture of one phase of it by a distinguished Muhammadan gentleman may perhaps be not devoid of interest to the British public in general. (Ward, 1903, Translator's Note)

It is interesting to note that exactly hundred years ago from the year of the translation, an event occurred which was of equal significance to the British as well as the natives of Delhi. It propelled the city and its people towards their appointed destiny- the occupation of Delhi by the British after their victory over the Marathas in 1803. Nazir Ahmad's own purpose behind writing this book was to teach his own daughters in particular and the "secluded sex" (Ahmad, 1869, 1903, p.1) in general some valuable lessons of life. While he writes *Mirat* from this reformist perspective, the translation is made from an imperialist perspective. It affords a glimpse into the *mohallas*, *havelis* and *zenanas* of the Dilli which the British had neither desire nor ardour to penetrate physically. Legend has it that *Mirat* was "discovered" accidentally by Matthew Kempson, Director of Public Instruction, through Ahmad's son. Unlike later books like *Binat ul-nash* and *Tauba ul--nasuh*, it is believed that at least this text was meant entirely for family consumption and private circulation. Whether it was written with an eye on government appreciation and recognition or not, yet it is very clear from Ahmad's statement that it was written under the influence of his British employers and their policies. Shaista Bano Suhrawardy looks at *Mirat* as a "realist" text which describes "Indian life as yet untouched (or unaltered for it had already come into touch) by contact with the West" (Suhrawardy, 1945, p.42). The distinction which she draws between "untouched" and "unaltered" is significant. We have already seen how *Mirat* embodies a critique of prevalent teaching-learning methods originating in the British government education department. On close examination, it is possible to see how it also bears the consequences of the British contact in many more ways as well. Hence, the ideas and images presented in the text are very much "altered" by the British contact, whether self consciously as stated by Ahmad, or hegemonically, without him being quite being aware of the colonialist intervention. The latter is truer for Ahmad's generation, as the colonized is far too innocent at this juncture in history to sense the cultural teeth or bite of political domination.

Mirat voices the need for women's education passionately in the 'Introduction'. The purposes served by acquiring education as cited by Ahmad range

from safeguarding personal modesty and interests and tiding over adversity if there be to being self reliant and useful in the house. Regretting the non-existence of serious urge and apparatus to impart education to women in his country, he attempts to fill in this void by writing a moral parable for empowering women to transact the business of their lives efficiently and commendably. In the 'Introduction' to this work, Ahmad voices the conviction that if women gain knowledge, then it will not only alleviate their own suffering and inconsequence but will also be in the best interest of family, community and society (Ahmad, 1869/ 1903, p.1-17). There seems little doubt that women are meant for housekeeping, so the extent and content of education is also specified accordingly. To learn to be an efficient housekeeper is a must by learning to manage accounts, to cook, to offer gracious hospitality to guests and to be an expert in cutting and stitching of clothes. Although women do not have the compulsion to earn livelihoods or distinguish themselves in the intellectual world, yet learning to read and write is a big advantage as these skills make them worldly wise. Another very compelling reason for getting educated stressed by Ahmad is that women are treated shabbily by men due to their own laziness and if they emerge out of this inertia, then they will emerge out of their disrepute. They will also emerge out of seclusion for while they cannot physically transgress the *purdah*, mentally they can, through books and leaning. And finally, women's education can transform the way they can physically and morally nurture their children.

While there is a passionate plea for women's education, yet in this society generally the idea is that it cannot overflow the measure of the role prescribed for women in society. As Gail Minault writes, "… women were the chief agents of cultural continuity. In an age when the men were forsaking their culture for the loaves and fishes of the British Raj, it was more than ever necessary for the women to be anchored in their own religion and culture" (Minault, 1986, 2002, p.181). The Deobandi School, with its Islamic revivalism, produced Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi's *Bihishti Zevar* (Heavenly Ornaments) to school them in the "true' practices of Islam. Thanawi was not interested in plight of women as such but Muslim women in particular and advocated that Islam is the only acceptable route to impart upliftment to women's lives. Thanawi proscribes *Mirat* for several reasons. It is radical in its outlook as it equates Islam with other religions, he felt such writings "weaken faith". Apart from clerical disapproval and these paradoxes inherent in the issue of women's education, there is also the risk of women outperforming men- just as Asghari emerges to be the most shrewd, diplomatic, officious, self dependent, reputed and rich member of the entire clan. This radicalism can be attributed to the imprint of western modernization that has sneaked into Ahmad's world view. Ahmad's received westernization and colonized subjectivity juxtapose religious against secular, traditional against modern, scriptural against practical and piety against success. The guidelines of conduct Ahmad proposes for men and women also carry an imprint of the west. He readily empathises with the British agenda of imparting education to women. He speaks almost in despair of the purdah system which severely restricts the potential of women. Asghari tells her pupils how she found women without purdah of the village where her family had sought shelter during the 1857 uprising to be no less dignified and respectable. She makes a strong case for the equality of women by

convincing her astonished pupils that a woman can also be "king" and do everything which her male counterpart would. The robust and noble nature of English women is valorised by Asghari. The narrative veers towards the western construct of family life where the difference makes for a mutually complimentary equilibrium (Ahmad, 1869, 1903, p. 62).

Pritchett makes a very interesting point that her larger than life role goes unnoticed and unchallenged by the family and the community which is so enamoured by the "energy, organisation, diplomatic skills and managerial prowess" of this paragon of good qualities that she gets away with all her meddlesomeness. Pritchett concludes that

> What her story really demonstrates is that in practice, smart, shrewd people (including women) can manipulate less capable people (including men) to great advantage. What Asghari's story shows is that nothing succeeds like success. (Pritchett, 1903, p. 215)

Isn't the story of Asghari another version of the success story of the British in India and elsewhere? This serves a quid pro quo for the phenomenon of the language and its ideology permeating tangibly into the psyche of the learner. Belonging to the Macaulayan class of interpreters, Nazir Ahmad overwrites the Islamic narrative with western correctives. Writes Naim:

> These novels of Nadhir Ahmad are just the right kind of success stories that the Muslims of India needed to hear in the trying years after the failure of the mutiny and the dissolution of the symbols of their temporal power. Separating the world of God from the world of Caesar … these novels were precisely the kind of adab that both the rulers and the ruled seemed to have desired at that particular time in history. (Naim, 1984, p.306)

While writing his tale, Ahmad adopts quite a few devices in order to make it eligible for favourable British consideration. First and foremost, it is written in a straightforward fictional form. The setting is naturalist like the European novel. The language is credible and accessible with quite a bit of the story unfolding through the dialogue mode. One immediately noticeable quality of this work is its robust narration and colloquial diction of the *begamati zubaan*- the Urdu spoken in the *zenanas* of houses to great effect (Minault, 1986, 2002). The authorial omniscient voice of the *daastaan* narrator takes a backseat and there emerge a multiplicity of voices speaking in character and verisimilitude. The Fort Williams College had already popularised the no-frills Urdu. This Urdu, though derided by purists at Delhi and Lucknow, became the preferred medium by the British, the periodicals, the printing and publication houses in Lucknow like the Naval Kishore Press, the emerging literate middle class readers and the social reformists like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. One feature where Ahmad deviates from the realist European novel is in the outspoken didacticism of *Mirat*. This is done with one eye on the notice and another on the general trait of the British superiors. Moral agenda is frontal and pivotal in *Mirat* because just as the British administrators had no qualms in preaching to the native

populace in the name of educational uplift with unabashed superior and paternalist benevolence, so Nazir Ahmad has no qualms in doing the same to women.

III. THE NATIVE WRITES BACK

The initial experience of colonial intervention translated into the earliest phase of Indian engagement with modernity which consisted in the simplistic recasting of the indigenous cultural identity in the image of the political victor. As political victory was pitched as the touchstone of cultural superiority, hence imitation of the victor and repudiation of the loser through criticism and reform became the thumb rule for early modernity. Nazir Ahmad's *Mirat,* therefore, makes for an interesting study in the context of Delhi city both as a predecessor to the more popular and accessible *Twilight in Delhi* which is poised at a later phase where the Muslim native is compelled and equipped to question its compromised identity as well as for the nugget of cultural history embedded in it that quite distinctly is the "dawn" which catches the somnolent erstwhile ruling elite and culturally decadent gentry off guard by springing the unholy surprise of colonialism, modernity and westernization. Sahitya Akademi commemorated the writer's work in a three day seminar under Prof. Harish Trivedi's guidance. "What is Ahmed Ali doing?" in *Twilight in Delhi* is an oft asked and variously answered question. His contemporary and compatriot Muhammad Hasan Askari observed that there was a non-literary and a literary purpose behind the novel. The non-literary comprised of writing a "guide" to Delhi for Englishmen: "I can, as a result, repeat without fear that the book has been written for Englishmen who are unfamiliar with life in Delhi and the author wishes to acquaint them with this way of living" (Askari, 1949, 2013, p. 14). The novel's uneasy relationship with Delhi has also been noted in terms of its singular focus on a particular version of the past as well as modernity, a particular religious community, a particular class of that religious community and literariness that overshadows progressive politics. The novel, however, occupies a very significant place in writings and readings on Delhi as it takes us into the lanes and homes in Shahjahanabad. The reason why Askari feels it is a guide for Englishmen is because it is written in English and because of the minutiae of Shahjahanbad it touches upon at all levels. The lenses through which Ahmed Ali gazes at this space and to read the book in conjunction with the other three examined in this paper is an especially rewarding experience to not only catch a glimpse of the culture of Shahjahanabad but also the impact of colonization on representational practices of that culture.

Ahmed Ali was an Indian (later Pakistani) writer, translator, critic and diplomat. Ahmed Ali was born to Syed Shujauddin, a civil servant, and Ahmad Kaniz Asghar Begum in 1910 in Delhi. Ali attended Wesley Mission High School in Azamgarh and Government High School in Aligarh before commencing his graduation in 1926 at Aligharh Muslim University where he met Raja Rao and Eric C. Dickinson (Ali's poetry teacher and first mentor). Like many other Indian Muslim intellectuals of this era, Ali's first brush with western modernity was at the Aligarh Muslim Anglo-Oriental College (MOAC, today known as Aligarh Muslim University), an English-medium college that was the reformist epicentre. A year later he shifted to Lucknow University graduating in 1930 with the highest marks in English in the history of the University. From here he also completed his M.A. in English in 1931. He taught at leading Indian universities including Lucknow

and Allahabad from 1932–46 and joined the Bengal Senior Educational Service as professor and head of the English Department at Presidency College, Calcutta (1944–47). Ali worked as the BBC's Representative and Director in India during 1942–44. At the time of the Partition of India, he was the British Council Visiting Professor to the University of China in Nanking as appointed by the British government of India. He wished to return to India in 1948 but was prevented by K.P.S. Menon (then India's Ambassador to China) and was forced to relocate to Pakistan. In 1948, he settled in Karachi – a city he says he was never fond of. Later, he was appointed Director of Foreign Publicity, Government of Pakistan. Persuaded by the Pakistani Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, he joined the Pakistan Foreign Service in 1950. During the 1950s he worked towards establishing embassies in Morocco and China. He was eventually retired from government service by General Muhammad Ayub Khan's military regime in 1960, and he went on to start his own business. He was married to Bilquis Jahan and had three sons and a daughter. Ali was a Distinguished Visiting Professor of Humanities at Michigan State University in 1975, Fulbright Visiting Professor of History at Western Kentucky University and Fulbright Visiting Professor of English at Southern Illinois University in 1978–79. He was Visiting Professor at the University of Karachi during 1977–79, which later conferred on him an honorary degree of Doctor of Literature in 1993.

Ali started his literary career at a young age. He published his first poem in *Aligarh Magazine and* his first short story at Lucknow University in 1930 and 1931 respectively. It was in this year that he also met Sajjad Zaheer and Mahmud-uz-Zaffar. With Rashid Jahan, the daughter of the well-known votary of women's education in India, Shaikh Muhammad Abdullah, the trio produced an anthology of short stories titled *Anghare* (Burning Coals) in 1934 which, owing to its political radicalism and also, allegedly, obscenity, triggered controversy and hostility and was eventually banned. Shortly afterwards, Ali and Mahmud-uz-Zaffar formed a League of Progressive Authors, which later broadened to emerge as the All India Progressive Writers' Association (AIPWA). Ali presented his paper 'Art ka Taraqqi-Pasand Nazariya' (A Progressive View of Art) in its inaugural Conference in 1936. A pioneer of the modern Urdu short story, Ali's works include collections of short stories: *Sho'le* (Flames), *Hamari Gali* (Our Lane), 1940; *Qaid Khana* (The Prison-house), 1942; and *Maut Se Pehle* (Before Death), 1945. However, a rift developed within AIPWA close on the heels of its inception. Ali differed with Zaheer and others about the role of literature in society, maintaining that it should not be reduced to political propaganda. He renounced his ties with the Association, leaving for London in 1939 armed with the manuscript of his first novel *Twilight in Delhi*. While he was in Britain for over a year, he got acquainted with writers, both Indian and English. Introduced to E. M. Forster by his distant relative Syed Ross Masood, Ali shared a warm relationship with him which became his entry ticket to London's literary circles in general and the Bloomsbury Group in particular. He was one of the editors of the magazine *Indian Writing*. He had short fiction published in John Lehmann's journal *New Writing*. After a series of arguments over objectionable content in the novel, he was eventually successful in securing a publishing deal for his first novel, *Twilight in Delhi*, with Virginia and Leonard Woolf's press, the Hogarth Press.

In the following year, he attended the first All-India PEN conference in Jaipur which had E M Forster as chief speaker. Later, he founded Pakistan PEN with Hasan Shahid Suhrawardy. In the 1960s, he brought out a second work of literary fiction in English, *Ocean of Night.* In the 1980s, he completed his political satire called *Of Rats and Diplomats*, as well as a self-translated volume of his earlier Urdu short stories from the 1930s and 40s, *The Prison-House*. In his last years, Ali published volumes of short stories and poetry in Urdu and in translation, the first anthology of Pakistani writing in English translation, the first anthology of Chinese and Indonesian poetry in English translation and a study of China's Muslim population.

Ali achieved international fame with his first novel written in English *Twilight in Delhi* in 1940. In his introduction to *Twilight in Delhi*, Ahmad Ali articulates his reason for documenting the culture "born and nourished between city walls" (Ali, 1993, 2007, p. xxi) of Shahjahanabad thus,

> In the process of transformation from Indian to 'brown Englishman', I found that I had lost not only my freedom but also my culture and individuality, and I have been engaged ever since in search of myself, my identity. ... Slowly, through the years light began to filter through the pictures of Delhi to which I turned for my past. The story of my immediate ancestors held the key to a treasure trove of mysteries. (Ali, 1993, 2007, p. xiv)

Familiar no doubt with Edward Said's *Orientalism* which he quotes in the Introduction and Western Marxism in the works of "the radical writers of Europe and Russia" (Ali, 1993, 2007, p. xiii) which locates political power in the cultural matrix, Ali emerges as one of the earliest Indian writers to recognize the importance of cultural resistance to political struggle. He decides to write in the language of the foreigner despite ruing the displacement of Persian and Urdu languages as mediums of expression and instruction by the English language. Here again the purpose is political. Born out of his association with the Progressive Writers Movement (AIPWA) and belonging to the young breed of Indian Nationalists, he aspires to represent to the western world, the London government, the British King and Parliament, the "British injustices in India". (Ali, 1993, 2007, p. xvi) The novel, thus, attempts to trace the sense of dislocation experienced by the native through a counter-hegemonic imaginary reversal to a fast disappearing time and place. The Mughal 'Twilight' Delhi was turbulent in political-economic terms but culture flourished unimpeded in its lanes and by-lanes. The 1803 occupation of Delhi and the 1857 uprising made the font of that culture extinct, relegating it to the memory, habits, lifestyles and conservative convictions of a few people. The cultural penury is symbolized in the beggar who appears in the novel nicknamed 'Bahadur Shah' reciting the last Mughal's verses about exile and loss. Bahadur Shah is a recurring and haunting presence in the novel. The last of the Mughal kings, Bahadur Shah's traumatised poetry echoes throughout the novel. It is as if the downfall of the poet king has let loose universal downfall, with the city and its people falling under the same curse of impoverishment and disempowerment. Mir Nihal's son Asghar, on the other hand, shuffles hopelessly between present and future. Enchanted by western

ideas and appearances, he strives for unconventional choices like studying at Aligarh MOAC, love marriage, nuclear family, European medicine and dress codes, only to be checkmated again and again by the 'conservative' social order as he makes these choices blindly without understanding his relationship with the emergent and the dominant. The narrative in the novel remains hovering over father as well as son, sparking the debate as to who the real hero is. In other words, what is more privileged, the present or the past? Ultimately in the end, the paralysed, blind gaze of Mir Nihal in the twilight seems to create an impression in favour of the past, but the characters are literally and metaphorically crippled, unable to grasp the complex interplay of past, present and future.

At the simplest level, the book documents Delhi life in the 1910s, just before the inauguration of the mega building project of creation of New Delhi. The choice of place is as significant as the choice of time. The significance of Delhi lies in it being the dwelling place of Ali's ancestors and himself to which he turns to revisit his past for as he says it holds a "treasure trove of mysteries". (Ali, 1993, 2007, p. xiv) It was the political, architectural and cultural epitome of the Mughal and Islamic power and in 1911, proposed to become the same for colonial power. At the topical level, *Twilight in Delhi* is precise, realistic and unrelenting. The novel projects what the arrival of colonialism has meant to the city of Delhi from long as well as close shot. The author personifies the city into a stoic survivor which has been "mourned and sung, raped and conquered, yet whole and alive, lies indifferent in the arms of sleep" (Ali, 1940, 2007, p. 3). His stark realism, almost the naturalist European brand, captures the mohalla life, street scenes, rising calls of azaan from the mosques, professions, festivals, rituals and pastimes. Within the households, the Indian extended families, life in the zenana, patriarchal domination, illnesses, cures, superstitions, deaths, births, marriages, bondings, rivalries, conversations and attitudes of people are documented. Ali indeed scans down everything to the minutest detail. Steering clear of political agenda or nostalgic tenderness, here is how the author comments on Delhi's *galis* and *kuchas,* "Dogs go about sniffing the gutters in search of offal; and cats slink out of narrow by lanes, from under the planks jutting out of shops, and lick the earthen cups out of which men had drunk milk and thrown away" (Ali, 1940, 2007, p. 3)

However, Ali is writing this novel in 1930s when the backdrop of 1911 is a thing of the past. The colonial impact on India as well as the city is writ large for all to see and the freedom struggle has crossed over from the moderate phase to the extremist, eventually anchoring itself in Gandhian leadership by this time. It is no longer twilight but dark night and the morning will bring freedom with cosmopolitanism and democracy in its wake, and not the Mughal-Islamic monarchy or civilization. Then what is the point of dwelling on this edifice which by 1930s is no longer crumbling but has all but collapsed? We realise that Ali is in a mode of "cultural recall" as part of locating the cause and consequence of colonisation in the attitudes and mindset of himself and his people (Faruqi, 2011). What the Muslim community had hitherto taken for granted as inheritors of Delhi culture stands challenged and threatened. Questions about race, religion, region, origin, caste and class now unsettle the placidity regarding who owns the city. The re-engineering of

urban and intellectual space under the influence of western which leads to a re-engineering of domestic and social space makes Ali all too aware that 'his' Delhi, by which he means both Muslim Delhi and Walled Delhi, is endangered. The elegiac tone of the novel echoes the strains of *shahr-ashob* poetry-the trope of lamenting degeneration of city culture. The lyricism of decline of a high culture is intensified by the sprinkling of poetic passages from various Urdu poets. The epigraphs attached to chapters are from eminent poets like Hafiz, Ghalib, Mir Taqi Mir and Zeb un nisa. The melancholia of the words, both supremely sorrowful and uplifting, is the vintage flavour of the Urdu ghazal which speaks through hyperboles and sentimentality. In these words, Ali evokes Sufi mysticism expressed in qawwalis well known to the audience of his times. What makes Ali's work interesting is the play of bilingualism in his work. According to Muhammad Hasan Askari, Ali was able to adapt the English language to accommodate Urdu cultural nuances. Ali's prose has been noted by some to be cumbersome and by others to be charming in its oddness. (Askari, 1949, 2013, p. 14) Why does Ali sound as if he is translating? This is because he *is* translating. Twilight in Delhi is a translation without an original because though Ali has mastered the language of the colonial master, yet he infuses it with Urdu semiotics in such a way that he creates a style that is English but not really English, which can adequately receive and transmit the cultural nuances of Delhi life in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. To write in English is a political choice to write to the empire, but to make that English sound alien to the English ear is to write back to the empire.

The topical micro-focus on the environs of Shahjahanabad fast converting to 'Old Delhi' becomes the tool to interrogate the legacy of Islamic culture and speculate the arrival of national culture. This was the time when Muslim power had dwindled in the subcontinent. Ali belongs to that section of this community which felt a strong urge to reform Muslim society. Improvement in the condition of the lives of Muslim women was high on the reformist agenda. Says Ali, "The condition of the Muslim women was the barometer with which the life of the Indian society could be judged." (Ali, 2000) The women in *Twilight*, however, are the silent majority whose lives were dominated by men. The tradition versus modernity dichotomy is fleshed out in Mir Nihal's conservative resistance to change and his son Asghar's tentative trysts with change but whether backward looking or forward looking, whether allowed to study in Aligarh or not, whether married to a girl of parent's choice or of one's own choice, the real point being made about this Muslim gentility is that they do not know the real point. The carpet has been swept away from under their feet but their mundane lives lived in inert apathy wish to chart more or less the old course. *Twilight* attempts a brutally candid evaluation of the Islamic culture which has become effete and enclosed over the previous century. Ali singularly depicts the Muslim way of life despite the Shahjahanabad of 1911 having a sizable Hindu and immigrant population. He quotes only Muslim poets. Mourning the passing away of a great art and culture, Mir Nihal recites only poets like Mir, Ghalib and Insha as the "great poets of Hindustan" (Ali, 1940, 2007, p. 176). The Mughal Empire and monuments are regarded as the only flag posts of greatness and splendour of Delhi, though there are passing references to the Kauravas and the Pandavas. The novel shows no social

interaction between Muslim and other communities. All this simultaneously indicates two things: the claims of pride and proprietary possessiveness the Muslims had over the geographical and cultural space of Delhi and how this complacent arrogance and exclusivity had gnawed its strength to deal with a superior power on the one hand, and to prepare itself for the secular, democratic, socialist future of the nation on the other. Where the emergence of the nationalist movement on the streets of Delhi is concerned, it is not depicted in explicit terms. Two most important changes in Delhi that Ali's cultural recall leaves out are the humungous construction of a sprawling new city adjacent to the existing city of Delhi and the goal of freedom getting nearer every day. The novel mentions New Delhi in apocalyptic terms where the characters see immigrants as a source of contamination, rather than rejuvenation. Never waking up from its cultural recall, the central paradox of *Twilight* is that Delhi remains precariously dangling on the verge of a cataclysmic abyss - a city where a time bomb is ticking away. This central paradox of the novel in a way thus, spotlights the national question and prefigures the partition. Is it the long career of Muslims in India as rulers, Islamic revivalism of the nineteenth century, and separatist politics of the last phase of the Indian struggle for independence that makes Ali stop short of engaging with contemporary and imminent "national life" and "whole culture"? The singular identification of so-called "national life" and "whole culture" with Islamic and Mughal grandeur rather than the famed syncretic *Ganga-Jamuni tahzeeb* of Shahjahanabad and the imminently emergent cosmopolitan Delhi drive home the point that British Delhi as well as National Capital Delhi of independent India were both equal anathema to Muslim pride.

In the final analysis, Ali's reading of Indian Muslim culture signifies, not as simply a moment in time, not as a reading which is not temporally, politically or epistemically bound, but as capturing the internal dynamic of Muslim gentry through the experience of colonisation, de-colonisation, multilingualism, multiculturalism and emerging nationalism. (Mehr Afshaan Farooqui, 2013). *Twilight in Delhi* thus forms an important text for students and enthusiasts of Delhi. The culture in Muslim homes of Shahjahanabad of 1910s was a whirlpool of tradition and modernity, stasis and reform, resistance and alienation and nation and community. The modernist pen of Ali writing in English for the British is at the same time delving into spaces of tortured subjectivity, identity and creativity. While it is a literary masterpiece of the modernist genre, breaking self-consciously away from the progressive agenda, indigenizing the ideology and idiom *enroute*, it is also an unrelenting gaze into the political, cultural and geographical turbulence that engulfed the city space. As we read *Twilight in Delhi* together with Nazeer Ahmad's *Mirat-ul-Uroos*, we see the hegemonized colonial city spaces struggling to both transact and transcend 'nativity'.

IV. SHAHJAHANABAD: TRAUMA AND BEFORE

Krishna Sobti's *The Heart has its Reasons* shares the same time and space but writing back from Lutyens Delhi and Independent India as well as from the homes and lives of Kayastha community known for its cultural progressivism and economic mobility, she chooses to freeze the throbbing vitality and plenty of that culture in immortal memory, rather than in aesthetics or polemics of change (Mittal, 2015). Krishna Sobti was born in Gujarat (West Punjab, now in Pakistan). Popularly referred

to as the grand old dame of Hindi fiction, she has been writing for more than fifty years now. *Daar Se Bicchudi* (1958), *Mitro Marjani* (1966), *Surajmukhi Andhere Ke* (1972), *Zindaginama* (1979), *Ai Ladki* (1991), *DiloDanish* (1993) and *Samay Sargam* (2000) are some of her major works. Some of her well known stories are 'Nafisa', 'Sikka Badal Gaya', and 'Badlon Ke Ghere'. Sobti has also produced *Tin Pahad* and *Yaaron Ke Yaar* (1968) – two very different works but published in a single binding. *Sobti Ek Sohbat* (1989) is an anthology of excerpts from her selected works. Krishna Sobti also writes as her alter ego- Hashmat. Her compilation of pen portraits of fellow writers and friends is called *Ham Hashmat*.

Dilo-Danish (1993), translated in English as *The Heart Has Its Reasons* (2005), is a narrative set in the Dilli of the 1920s. An illicit relationship between Vakil Kripanarayan, a scion of an affluent Kayasth family of established lawyers, and Mehak Bano, a client's daughter, threatens to tear apart the joint family system and traditions of a conservative society. The Mehak, Kripanarayan and Kutumb triangle at various levels is the eternal triangle. It can be seen as a product of the cultural conditions of a patriarchal and enclosed society. The 'Haveli' Charburzi, the palatial abode of Kripanarayan's clan, as an edifice, symbolises the patriarchal power. The meta-narrative of the joint family stands juxtaposed against Kripanarayan's privileged equanimity and complacency towards adultery. Another cultural institution which impinges on the triangle is that of the courtesan. Mehak's mother, Nasim Bano, is a courtesan and is robbed of her sanity and riches by a Nawab Sahib. The taint of prostitution as well as poverty continues to haunt Mehak who becomes a vulnerable victim to an apparently suave and well meaning lover, Kripanarayan. The courtesan culture determines Mehak's identity as an object of pleasure. Her past and present are constantly at odds and it is a battle for her to walk the tight rope between "*ghar*" (home) and "*gharana*" (legacy). She is doomed to be the 'other' in domestic and legal terms. The children also suffer from the same duality. Badru and Masooma both agonise over their status of the 'outsiders' in the Haveli. The culture of this society institutionalizes exploitation of the woman through legitimization of differences on the basis of caste, religion, rituals and customs also. Kripanarayan belongs to the Kayastha community which is reputed for its intellectual, professional and cultural accomplishments. From the traditional profession as the King's and the nobility's scribes, it had a meteoric rise in terms of power and property. They were among the first communities to display the same initiative in adopting western modes of living and education as they showed in adopting the Islamic modes earlier. Thus, law was one of the many professions on which they left an early mark during the British rule. They have traditionally shared close culinary and cultural affinity with the Muslims on account of their longstanding association with the Muslim rulers of India. Yet, Mehak is discriminated against on caste and religious grounds and her children are derided as the offspring of a 'Musalmani'. Similarly, rituals and customs at birth, birthdays, marriages, and numerous other social occasions, highlight differences in the position of women. Money serves as the most effective instrument of control. The locality in which Mehak and her children live, Farashkhana, is a locality where people with limited means live. It is in stark contrast to Haveli Charburzi which faces the Fort and has "huge courtyards and fountains and four imposing pillars" (Sobti, 1993, 2005, p. 22). In hierarchically arranged Shahjahanabad, closeness to the fort indicated

both political influence and material affluence. Kripanarayan knows that real power is economic power and thus, while he attempts to keep Kutumb's aggression sedated by satisfying her lust for jewellery, he keeps Mehak's defiance and desertion in check by controlling her family heirlooms of jewellery.

Ahmad Ali's Dilli in *Twilight in Delhi* is also of the same period-the 1920s- as Sobti's Dilli. There are several similarities as well as differences. Ali's Dilli is Muslim Dilli and the way of life is markedly Muslim. Sobti's Dilli is cosmopolitan in the sense that characters from both the communities share narrative space. The Kripanarayan-Mehak relationship is a Hindu-Muslim relationship but the tension caused therein does not arise from religion. Kripanarayan says that Kayasths are not Brahmins that they will be repulsed by Muslims. According to the Puranas, Kayasthas have descended from Chitragupta Maharaj, the god who records the deeds of humanity and decides their outcome for determining which human being will go to heaven and which to hell after death. The word *kayastha* means "scribe" in Sanskrit, referring to the caste's traditional profession of record-keeping and administration. Their identity was more of a community rather than a caste because they were united by professional expertise in Persian (the state language in Islamic India), Turkish, Arabic, economics, administration and taxation. This spurred their promotion well past the Brahmins who confined their study only to Sanskrit. They quickly adapted themselves to the Islamic rule and later to the British rule. Their secular viewpoint and lifestyle was an asset to themselves and to the kings. It is interesting that Sobti trains her focus on this community. It has risen more as a community than a caste by virtue of merit more than heredity, talent more than tradition, adaptability more than fixity and fusion more than puritanism. It is almost a bridge between the Hindus and Muslims and the Ruler and the Ruled in India. The large estate which Kripanarayan bequeaths to his dependants testifies to the wealth this cerebral community has amassed. The culinary culture, the patronage to the arts, the keenness for an English education, allowing the widow Chhunna to work and remarry, treating wine as Devi's *prasada*- all spell an unidirectional approach to lead a rich and rewarding life. Thus, Sobti's Dilli, with the Kayastha community at the centre, fills in for the conspicuously absent cosmopolitan counterpart of Ahmed Ali's exclusively Islamic Dilli in *Twilight in Delhi*.

It is not just in the last few paragraphs of the novel or the line drawing appended to the Rajkamal Publication that Dilli exists in the novel. Depicting the Dilli way of life is at the very core of the novel's political and thematic purpose. In Sobti's *The Heart has its Reasons*, the Dilli way of life, despite playing second fiddle to a "universal theme" or Sobti's social and psychological realism, is closely enmeshed in the warp and weft of the novel's fabric. Ghantewala Halwai, Chandni Chowk, Chawri bazaar and Farashkhana dot the backdrop of the Dilli of 1920s in the novel. Havelis, mehfils, mushairas, ikkas on the streets, newly erected electric street lights, bustle on the streets of Chandni chowk, "stunningly feminine Ghata Masjid" "parrots, pigeons, partridges, muniya, the throngs at Jama Masjid", kite flying, picnics at Qutub Minar are some of the landmarks which come alive on the panoramic vista of the novel (Sobti, 1993, 2005, p. 45). The bounteous products available on its streets range from colourful quilts, emeralds, pearls, brocades in Dariba, diamonds at Netrachand

jeweller, shawls from Hukumtani's shop, stationary at Raghbardayal Bishandayal shop. Culinary delights are similarly in plenty. Gajrela, til laddoos, gajak rewri, dry fruits are winter's offerings. Nankhatais from Badshah Bulle and Hashim, quail and partridge from Jama Masjid, mutton and rotis from Shahjahanpuri, paranthas from parathewali gali, Ghantewala Halwai's motichoor laddoos, malai laddoos, baadaam barfi, pista lauj, rasmalai and pethe ke angoor, fruits and panjiri from Moti Bazar, namkeen from Abdullah's, murabbas and aam paapar. The sounds of azaan in *Twilight* are replaced by the bells of Gaurishankar temple. The ghazal and Urdu poetry are equally popular in both the novels.

Kripanarayan's zest for life has often been noted and is linked to his life in Dilli. He credits the farsightedness of his ancestors of having purchased property in Dilli so that his family could partake in this urban experience. (Sobti, 1993, 2005, p. 214) He is grateful to Dilli for his family's flourishing legal practice. The Haveli is his identity and all his choices in life are guided by the 'honour' attached to his lineage. The streets of Dilli are full of temptations and Kripanarayan succumbs to them. The raging passion for the material pleasures of life is cradled in the consumerist paradise which exists in the urban economy. Both Mir Nihal of *Twilight* and Kripanarayan do not have to slog much for a living. While Mir Nihal has the pretensions of a depleted aristocracy, Kripanarayan has the leisure and privilege available to the noveaux riche of the emerging middle classes. Kripanarayan's ancestors have made enough money to purchase Kothi Kilamukh from the bankrupt aristocracy. Kothi Kilamukh is Begam Samru's Haveli which stood in full glory facing the Fort. The urban lifestyle, steeped in luxurious products produced by the labour inside and outside the city to capitalise on the disposable income of people like Kripanarayan, both produces and sustains this gluttonous disposition. This gluttonous disposition extends to women as well. Women in Ahmad Ali's *Twilight* suffer far greater claustrophobic confinement on account of the *purdah*. Trivialities rule their lives. Extramarital relations literally drive them insane. The urge to avenge their miseries found in Sobti's women is absent in Ali's women characters who are metaphorically and physically blind to their conditions. We can attribute this difference to the feminist streak in the novelist or her empathetic capability to flesh out the silences of these invisible women but it can also be attributed to the socio-cultural attitudes of the upwardly mobile Kayastha family as compared to the stasis ridden Muslim household.

Sobti's Dilli, however, does not betray even a trace of the cataclysmic events which are occurring in its surroundings. Civil Lines is mentioned in the novel as one of the characters Chhail Bihari is in the process of purchasing property there but all these events evoke neither direct nor tacit comment from the characters. Unlike Mir Nihal's lonely and miserable end, Kripanarayan is surrounded by his family in his last moments. The life of copious comforts lived by Kripanarayan gets distilled in bottles of *itrs* (perfumes) which he begins to smell in the twilight zone between consciousness and unconsciousness. He says, "I know after I am gone I will still wander the streets of Dilli". (Sobti, 1993, 2005, p. 220) The noisy racket of Dilli's people, cool summer evenings, ominous dark monsoon clouds, bustling streets, *paan* (betel) from Rasiya Banarasi, confections from Ghantewala Halwai, *mushairas* at Mission College eternalize the "taste and romance" of this city that Kripanarayan

wishes he and his generations will continue to enjoy. Is this difference once again on account of the self assurance of a community which is politically, economically and culturally malleable? Though unvanquished politically and geographically, the city undergoes a sea change from the 1920s to the 1990s when the novel was published. Sobti has seen the building of Lutyen's Delhi, the partition of India, cultural transitions with the influx of Punjabi refugee population, establishment of the Indian governmental institutions, emergency imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the commencement of economic liberalization. For someone who is a sensitive index of change, to have frozen culture like a picture frame in a temporal mould is rather surprising. It is a case of cultural recall like Ahmad Ali but with a difference. Ahmad Ali, writing in the 1920s about a way of life which is all but gone, is pitted against the colonial onslaught on political and cultural autonomy of the native. However, when Krishna Sobti reminisces Shahjahanabad culture, she uses cultural recall as a tool to deal with change and trauma. She remembers and not remembers at the same time the shock of cultural decline, independence, partition and expansion of Delhi. *The Heart has its Reasons* serves the slice of Shahjahanabad/ Dilli life in all its ravishing glory. As "it's hard to capture a city that is constantly reinventing itself, a city always Under Construction", hence it is more practical to capture its antithesis- the city as it was, before the days of reinvention and reconstruction" (Roy, 2014). Thus, in *The Heart has its Reasons*, the cultural recall becomes a favored instrument of political comment by erasing the devastating colonial and post-colonial impact on Delhi and reminding its denizens of a unique way of life that once throbbed and thrived in the city.

V. SHAHJAHANABAD: TRAUMA ANF AFTER

Anita Desai's *In Custody*, on the other hand, brings out images of a Delhi, which antithetically to Krishna Sobti's Dilli, mirrors the debacle of this high culture. While Shahjahanabad has become Old Delhi post independence and partition, the legacies of the wiped out dynasty stick out like befuddled pebbles on a riverbed from where the river has changed its course. *In Custod*y has a Delhi which tests the endurance and fecundity of individuals and cultures by subjecting them to a whirlwind of cataclysmic change. Nur, his house, his poetry and his predicament are all reminders of how en masse political, demographic and consequent, cultural change can be excruciating in many different ways. Since culture is a sum total of learned patterns of behavior and ideas (beliefs, attitudes, values and ideals) characteristic to a particular populace, these patterns are improvised, shed and replaced as human needs and conditions change. Like biological adaptation, the cultures in which maladaptive traits abound tend to die, while those which are able to incorporate adaptive traits adequately and quickly survive. Revolutions are regarded to be the most unsettling of all changes as there is a violent replacement of one cultural ethos by another. Shahjahanabad has seen it all. Despite being home to natural cultural refinement and evolution, creation of composite culture from Hindu and Muslim contact, interference by imperialist Christian powers and adaptive responses to colonization, it is caught off-guard by the violent revolution which engulfs it in the form of independence and partition.

Tracing the transformation of Shahjahanabad to what is today called 'Old Delhi', Krafft outlines the major forces and factors which fuelled this transition. The population of the walled city jumped from an estimated 170,000 to 380,000 between

1941 and 1951 and peaked to 400,000 in 1961. Thousands of houses changed ownership through mostly illegal takeovers and allocation of "evacuee" properties to refugees by the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation. As far as the Muslim population was concerned, the upper and middle strata left for Pakistan. Only the economically and educationally backward segment stayed behind. Thus, it was a cakewalk for the robust and literate Punjabi migrants from Pakistan to establish economic and demographic dominance in the area. Old Delhi emerged as the hub of wholesale trade owing to these new enterprises spanning over more than 20 commodity groups like textiles, grain, construction material, hardware, iron, electronic goods, paper, dry fruit, spices, vehicle and motor parts. The residents of this area continued to move out to more habitable neighborhoods. Between 1961 and 1981, a loss of 40% resident population was recorded by DDA registers. Interviews and field studies in DDA planning zones A-16 to A-24 revealed that while Hindus, Jains and Sikhs were quick to shift out, Muslims showed a tendency towards "residential persistence". (Krafft, 1993, p. 111) Muslims cited cultural identity and security as the predominant reasons for continuing to live in the Old Delhi area. The Delhi Rent Control Act of 1958 also contributed to the buildings' state of disrepair as it allowed old tenants to continue paying very low rates and also made it impossible to evict underpaying old tenants. This led to a resource crunch which made the owners reluctant about investing in the upkeep of the buildings.

It is against this backdrop that the story of Nur in *In Custody* has been wrought. Nur recollects a Delhi when

> ...Delhi was like a shining tapestry- not the thick quilt of smoke and fumes it is now. The air was as brilliant as a piece of silk, the sun sparkled upon it like a huge pendant fashioned by a jeweller ... even with only two rupees in my pocket, I was a rich man then. (Desai, 1984, 2007, p. 173)

In contrast to this radiance and prosperity, the picture which Nur's house and neighborhood presents after 30 years of independence is dismal. As Deven enters this "pullulating honeycomb of commerce" (Desai, 1984, 2007, p. 33) to seek an interview with Nur, he observes that

> If it had not been for the colour and the noise, Chandni Chowk might have been a bazaar encountered in a nightmare; it was so like a maze from which he could find no exit, in which he wandered between the peeling, stained walls of office buildings, the overflowing counters of shops and stalls, ... (Desai, 1984, 2007, p. 32)

The nightmarish, surreal, psychedelic quality is accentuated as Deven walks past an ill-assorted pastiche of things and people like lurid Japanese sarees, nets of gold and silver embroidery looking like flashy but shimmering prostitutes, pyramids of crystallised fruit, milk steaming and bubbling in drowsy pans, evil smelling shops of herbal medicines, booths of astrologers, palmists and soothsayers with illustrated scrolls, mynah birds and gemstones spread out in front, pavement stalls of scarves, underwear, glasses and enamel plates followed by silversmiths and jewelry shops. A near accident with a rickshaw, a narrow lane lined with gutters and refuse, an

overflowing blocked gutter, a humped bull munching a paper bag from an open dustbin and a row of small, high green wall of an ayurvedic hospital which barred any sunlight from entering in the area on one side and tightly shut wooden doors set into straight, faded walls on the other marked the narrow alley in which Nur's house was located. The arrival of evening only added to this phantasmagoric feel. The house which is hired for tape recording Nur's memoirs close to Nur's own house turns out to be a brothel. Nur's companions now are "lafangas of the bazaar world- shopkeepers, clerks, bookies and unemployed parasites". (Desai, 1984, 2007, p. 49) They speak an unrefined language "as if they belonged to a world of hectic activity on the fringes of art and creativity". (Desai, 1984, 2007, p. 49) It is not just these louts of the bazaar who feed like parasites on Nur's poetic genius living "out the fantasy of being poets, artists and bohemians" on his terrace evening after evening, but also Imtiaz Bibi who manipulates and apes the poet in a bid to fulfill her own poetic pretensions and aspirations. His beloved language Urdu has also come a long way. From the lived and lilting lingua franca of the commoner, the poet and the king, it has got reduced to the language of the 'minority community', identified with Islam and relegated to Urdu departments or publications.

For Nur, these dizzying changes trace a personal and poetic calamity, and he finds himself quite inadequate in dealing with it. The inadequacy has partly to do with the scale and speed of change and partly with languor and lethargy of a dissolute life style which is difficult to shake off. Nur has experienced the precipitous fall from the heyday of an integrated culture and community to the post independence and post partition reality where that way of life is no more than a tattered rag flailing against the restructured urban and cultural identity of Delhi. The ravages of time is a stock theme of Urdu poetry and the pathos of what Nur has gone through, he can best express it in his wonted symbol and style but Nur realises that in the era of polarised and political war of languages, the comfortable time when Urdu poetry existed in the realm of aesthetics and not politics, has passed in India. He is used to an aristocratic way of life where language and art were one among the many material pleasures of life. What Nur calls the "soiled, discoloured and odorous rags of his life" (Desai, 1984, 2007, p. 189) are in fact the relics of his ancestral tradition. Deven is dismayed by the evening soirees of hoi-polloi on his terrace, his interest in wrestling and *akhadas* on the banks of river Yamuna, his appetite for rich foods and liquor despite being afflicted by piles and the control which his two wives have over him. The retarded and contorted response of the Muslim gentry in the face of sweeping sea change of circumstances results in the feeling of alienation which decapacitates Nur and his ilk. The toppled and crumbled *weltanschauung* of the poet gives birth to the sense of alienation in the poet. Alienation is defined as an emptiness stemming from "the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements, he seeks." (Seeman, 1971, p. 135) Powerlessness, normlessness (anomie) and meaninglessness are the constituents of this emptiness in alienation. Thus, while a traditional *weltanschauung* gives the security of being in control, a rapidly transforming one gives a nauseating feel of things whirring out of control (Seeman, 1959). Nur comes across as an alienated individual. His powerlessness is evident in the despair and defeat he seems

to have accepted about the future of Urdu, his poetry and his community in India. He sees very little hope of Urdu being revitalised by the debates on his rooftop or the efforts of people like Murad or Deven or university departments. He calls himself the corpse of the language, waiting to be buried. If the disappearance of the social mores he is accustomed to is a predominant cause of his dysfunctional gentility, the shifts in gender and marital roles also contribute to his impaired judgement about propriety. His second wife is a shrew who wants to cure him not only of his degenerate ways but also of any illusions he might be having of being a great poet. The rise of the woman contender in the male bastion confounds his sanity further. Nur flounders from situation to situation because in his transitioning society where norms of behaviour are in a dizzy state of flux, the conviction or courage to resist or enforce is not easy to retain. Nur's is a case of shrinking space as his infringed claim to the status of the insider leaves him confined to a reclusive corner. The centre has become the corner. Any attempt to possess, claim, preserve or retain space in kaleidoscopic landscape of this changing and expanding Delhi leads to a sense of loss and alienation. Thus, Anita Desai's *In Custody* portrays a scooped up cultural space which can be both devastating and uplifting, but is a tragic reality for the populace trapped buried under the debris of a collapsed culture.

VI. CONCLUSION

City is integrally related to these products of culture as in trying to make sense of the past and present, these products write and highlight dominant symbols, practices, inclusions, techniques, genres, meanings and identities which are embraced or rejected at crossroads of culture. The city, in itself, as an organisation and as an economy, is a terminus for engendering and imposing particular kind of cultural roles on individuals (Katznelson, 1993). These cultural recollections and ruminations not only borrow from the already existing tropes in the collective memory of a culture but also add to it (Erll, 2008, p. 2-3). These recollections and retellings therefore function like cultural biographies assessing the mutual impact the individual and the city have on each other and also of documenting how public and private practices of memory unfold in city specific cultural productions (Eakin, 1985; 1992). Cultural production is also the interpretive grid to understand the shifting boundaries of public and private, past and present, signification and erasure, affiliation and disowning and harmony and conflict ('Proceedings of the Memory Studies Thematic Workshop Zentrum Moderner Orient', n.d.). City and the human mind have much in common and hence narratives of self like autobiographies inevitably present the city-ness which they encounter (Pile, 2002). Space always accosts the body and the mind in a variety of ways. While recollecting and retelling we go in reverse gear to enter, re-enter, dismantle or improvise those spaces. Thus, the hybrid city existing in between the real and the memory city is an important cultural document (Pizzi, 2011, p.1). Nazir Ahmad Dehlavi's *The Bride's Mirror*, Ahmad Alis's *Twilight*, Krishna Sobti's *The Heart has its Reasons* and Anita Desai's *In Custody* present Shahjahanbad as the hybrid city between existence and extinction, identity and hegemony and belonging and alienation.

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