

IN WHOSE CUSTODY? – A STUDY OF CULTURE IN CRISIS WITH REFERENCE TO THE NOVEL AND THE FILM

¿EN CUSTODIA DE QUIÉN? – UN ESTUDIO DE LA CULTURA EN CRISIS CON REFERENCIA A LA NOVELA Y EL CINE

Astha Singh

Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, India
asthasingh3438@gmail.com

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Abstract

In Custody is a novel by Anita Desai that studies the extinction of Urdu culture in post-partition India. The film adaptation of the novel has been done by Merchant Ivory Production in an attempt to not only convert the narrative from one art form to another, but also to use cinematic techniques to explore the socio-culture of India with the Urdu language being the central theme. This paper tries to explore the diminished Urdu culture and tries to analyze the question of its preservation in the modern world using technologies that have also been put forward in both art forms. The verses of Urdu poets and Faiz Ahmad Faiz used in the novel and in the film along with the progressive writers' thought have also been dealt with. Hence, the theme of Urdu culture playing centrally, this paper studies various other aspects that have been presented in the film adaptation.

Keywords: Culture, Urdu, India, partition, Urdu poetry, language.

Resumen

In Custody es una novela de Anita Desai que estudia la extinción de la cultura urdu en la India posterior a la partición. La adaptación cinematográfica de la novela ha sido realizada por Merchant Ivory Production en un intento no solo de convertir la narrativa de una forma de arte a otra, sino también de

utilizar técnicas cinematográficas para explorar la sociocultura de la India con el urdu como lengua central. tema. Este artículo intenta explorar la cultura urdu disminuida y trata de analizar la cuestión de su preservación en el mundo moderno utilizando tecnologías que también se han propuesto en ambas formas de arte. También se han tratado los versos de los poetas urdu y Faiz Ahmad Faiz utilizados en la novela y en la película junto con el pensamiento de los escritores progresistas. Por lo tanto, el tema de la cultura urdu juega un papel central, este artículo estudia varios otros aspectos que se han presentado en la adaptación cinematográfica.

Palabras clave: Cultura, Urdu, India, partición, poema, idioma.

1. Introduction

Anita Desai is the author of the famous novel *In Custody*, published in 1984. Being a quintessential diasporic writer, Desai beautifully blends the cultural richness of India with its modern picture. She is one of the remarkable women writers whose novels provide a satire on the changes that post-independence India went through and how these effects impacted the larger context.

Nominated for the Booker Prize in 1984, *In Custody* is a novel that brings out different themes reflecting on the larger realities of society. The setting of the novel is Delhi, in India, bringing out the historical context of the place which also plays the dominant theme in it. According to Inder Jit Lal (1976), Urdu is the language said to have flourished in 12th century India and was the amalgamation of the vernacular language and Persian. The stature of Urdu present today is the result of years of transformation. Desai has highlighted in the novel the declining culture of the Urdu language, which was the result of the change in the socio-political scenario in post-independence India. Originated in the Indian subcontinent as a language of the locals, Persian became the language of courts while Urdu was used by the common population. Poets like Amir Khusrau (1253-1325) and Mushafi (1748-1824) made Urdu poetry and *ghazals*¹ reach their zenith. They were then followed by various other writers. Under the influence of Siraj Aurangabadi (1715-1763), Mirza Galib (1797-1869), etc. Delhi became the center for the Urdu language. It was after the First War of Independence in 1857 and the fall of Delhi to the British that Lucknow became the hub for Urdu. Thus, having flourished in India as a language, a communalization of language happened which followed the gradual decline in the usage of the Urdu language after partition. Hence, through

this novel, Anita Desai is trying to revisit her life experiences and explore the reasons for the extinction of Urdu and how it can sustain modernity. She said,

I was trying to portray the world of Urdu poets. Living in Delhi I was always surrounded by the sound of Urdu poetry, which is mostly recited. Nobody reads it, but one goes to recitations. It was very much the voice of North India. But although there is such a reverence for Urdu poetry, the fact that most Muslims left India to go to Pakistan meant that most schools and universities of Urdu were closed. So it's a language I don't think is going to survive in India.... There are many Muslims and they do write in Urdu; but it has a kind of very artificial existence. People are not going to study Urdu in school and college anymore, so who are going to be their readers? Where is the audience? (qtd. by Yaqin 3-4)

2. Exploration of the novel *In Custody*, by Anita Desai

This novel explores the cultural significance of the last surviving popular Urdu poet Nur Shahjehanabadi. His prolific poetry is known to people, yet he is deprived of admirers and has deteriorating health. The concept of identity is infused with language and as Urdu is on the verge of extinction in the place it was born, the poet is also on his death bed trying to protect the remains of his loved language. The condition of Urdu is akin to the character of Nur in the novel: although the irreplaceable beauty of expression is there, the search for admirers continues. Nur is known to be a prolific poet. Yet, his writing is struggling to be recognized, like it used to be in older times. Hence, the title *In Custody* signifies this concept of the Urdu language being in the custody of the poet as he is the most deserving human.

The novel throws light on the status of Urdu in the opening chapters per se as Deven is met by his friend Murad and they discuss an attractive topic to be covered in the magazine. While for Murad matters have shifted from contributing to Urdu to making money for his expenses through his journal—as he expresses when he says ‘Who reads Urdu anymore?’ (Desai 4)—Deven, on the other hand, is trying to keep the tradition of Urdu alive. This struggle faced by Murad to keep intact the popularity of his magazine is the fact that puts forward the dominance of the Hindi language post-independence. Hence, Desai introduces the declining condition of Urdu through Murad’s magazine and how difficult it is to get some good Urdu

writers. She also comments on the historical aspect of Urdu being the language of the locals and Hindi becoming the administrative language. This change of scenario in the language is also remarkably highlighted by Desai through the background of Deven. Being a firm admirer of Urdu poems he ends up being the professor of Hindi in a college. Earning sufficient livelihood for the family becomes his reason to put Urdu on a lower pedestal as, according to him, following his passion for Urdu would not have resulted in good monetary possessions. Hence, Urdu becoming a mere hobby for Deven explains how people had to search for alternatives while the former lost its grasp over society. This conversation between Murad and Deven pops up the idea of interviewing Nur, the only famous Urdu poet alive, in order to attract more admirers.

The thought of writing about Nur is also driven by the thought that Murad's magazine should reach more people and gain more attention. Desai takes us on the journey to post-independence Delhi through the lenses of Deven, who is able to mark the changes after revisiting the place years later. The description of forgotten towns and unappreciated historical buildings is brought to focus so as to beautify our history and all that remains unseen. Desai writes, "history had scattered a few marks and imprints here and there but no one in Mirpore thought much of them and certainly gave them no honor in the form of special signs, space or protection" (7). The effects of modernity on the sculptures, which remind us of our past, are highlighted. Thus, Desai makes a subtle remark on the effects that followed independence and how people forgot their heritage. The division area between Hindu and Muslim population is also giving the impression of the policies of colonialists which resulted in the communalization of language as well. Partition of the Indian subcontinent not only separated people into communities but also divided them in terms of language and culture. Desai is trying to explore the beauty of the past that eventually degraded in the covering of modernism. The acknowledgment of our roots is an important aspect to keep our heritage safe.

Nur, in Deven's imagination, held a God-like stature. He describes him as "if God had leaned over a cloud and called for him to come up, and angels might have been drawing him up these ancient splintered stairs to meet the deity: so jubilantly, so timorously, so gratefully did he rise" (Desai 13). The contrast between this image of Nur and reality was quite astonishing. Nur lying in a darkened room seemed to have abandoned society. He calls himself to be the corpse of a dead Urdu language and is astonished to know that people still value his writings. Nur's admirers are the representation of the

modern sensibility where the recitation of Urdu poetry is done only for the sake of entertainment accompanied by alcohol and food. Deven's fantasy of experiencing legit Urdu culture around Nur is distorted after seeing the crowd of drunkards reciting verses of Urdu poetry. Though it appeared to Deven that Nur must be having the magnitude like a God surrounded by literates reciting their poetry inculcating splendid beauty, the reality was the polar opposite. The sparkling lights of the city have definitely put rural areas in dark, signifying the loss of grassroots in the wind of modernity. This demeaning position of Nur was the result of the same darkness that the Urdu language faced while the country moved towards independence. Nur expresses his hurt sentiments about how post-independence times have considered Urdu not to be a valuable asset. Post-partition, while Pakistan took Urdu as the official language, Indian poets of Urdu had to struggle to keep the tradition alive.

Deven's idea of interviewing Nur makes them meet again and this time he witnesses Nur's wife, Imtiaz Begum, attracting all the eyes while reciting the verses. Nur can be seen keeping distance from these gatherings where the false idea of poetry takes hype. His bad health is one reason for his disinterest, while another could be his love for poetry which, when used for shows, becomes saddening for him. Hence, while through the character of Nur we get to know the rich culture of Urdu, Desai is also trying to emphasize how post-independence led to its downfall. Nur considers the interview to be a loot which people did with him along with his wife. Using his verses to gather audiences while the poet himself lies unnoticed is the kind of loot that Nur is scared of.

Eventually, Nur's agreement to get his poetry recorded leads Deven to put more effort into preserving the last surviving beauty of Urdu. The less monetary help people are willing to invest in this process hints at the status of Urdu in society and questions its admirers. The conflict between husband and wife is also prevalent in the novel, which reflects on the professional stature of an individual: women shoving off their dreams because of the household burden is portrayed through the characters of Sarla and Imtiaz Begum. Even Nur's first wife asks for money in order to help his husband gain admiration. On the other hand, Deven and Nur portray how the economic challenges in life take away their dreams, and then family pressure snatches away their individuality as well. According to N.R. Gopal, "Desai is concerned with 'human condition' and also shows profound skill in exploring the 'emotional life' of the people in the stories" (10).

This process of recording has a lot of hindrances, like the behavior of Imtiaz Begum, funding, etc. but Deven eventually manages to get Nur to recite his verses for the recording. The seriousness of the recording is nowhere to be seen as Nur starts demanding drinks and eatables before he begins. The disturbances from the admirers along with the glitches in the tape recorder turned out to give a disastrous result. Deven was held responsible for all the expenses, which eventually highlights the fact that the preservation of Urdu became difficult even for true admirers. Even the authorities of the Urdu department backed off to accept the recording as one of the last surviving manuscripts of an Urdu poet.

Desai, while subtly highlighting the disinterest of people to contribute to this great work, also brings in the feminist perspective in the form of letters received by Deven from Imtiaz Begum. She calls herself to be a poetess as worthy as Nur, if not more, and is not merely a dancing girl like everyone perceives of her. She attaches her writings with the letter, challenging Deven to have a look. This idea of Imtiaz Begum showcasing the poetess in her is the fact that might be highlighting those female writers who remained unrecognized. Enclosing her manuscript to prove her talent, in a letter to Deven, Imtiaz Begum writes, "I am a woman and have had no education but what I have found and seized for myself [...] Let me see if you are strong enough to face them (poetries) and admit to their merit. Or if they fill you with fear and insecurity because they threaten you with danger—danger that your superiority to women may become questionable" (Desai 65.) Desai has not failed in highlighting the smaller themes like the condition of women in the Indian household, and with Imtiaz's efforts to gain admiration through her writings it also signifies how most of the women writers felt short of admirers and remained oppressed in the patriarchal society. It is only through dancing and attracting Nur's admirers that she gets to live her dreams.

The novel ends with Deven having custody of not only the last manuscript of Urdu poetry but also of Nur's genius. This responsibility gets heavy on him but he feels content having experienced the brilliance of a poet. Although there might be a lot of debt that can come over him, having kept safe the finest extract of Urdu poetry satisfies him. Hence, the novel shows the difficulties under which people who try to contribute to Urdu are put, and this might have been the reason for its extinction.

3. Film Adaptation - *Muhafiz*

The film adaptation of the novel was done in 1993 by Merchant Ivory productions. It was also titled *Muhafiz*, which means one who keeps

something safe. Directed by Ismail Merchant, this film not only adapts the images as they are presented in the novel but also brings a wider concept using the tools of cinema. While the novel allows the readers to form their own imagination as the story proceeds, through a film the imagination of the director is put through visual images, giving the audience a clearer image of the storyline. Hence, the novel and the film have their own beauty in narrating a story and an individual cannot place one form over the other.

The film opens with the images of famous monuments like Jama Masjid, invoking its historical and cultural importance, instantly introducing the central theme. It also uses Faiz Ahmad Faiz's poem about a writer's search for a perfect word whereas the novel mentions the encounter of Deven with his old friend Murad. Unlike the novel, the setting of the film is Bhopal. This setting is used in the film to bring into light its story. Bhopal flourished in terms of culture and art under the female rulers known as Begums. Hence, this intentional change of setting is used by the director to highlight historical facts of pre-independence India and how it declined after partition. The importance of women along with the essence of Urdu culture is symbolized using the architectural images of Bhopal in the film. As the novel mentions, "At least Deven had his poetry; she (Sarla) had nothing, and so there was an added accusation and bitterness in her look" (Desai 22). This aspect has also been inculcated in the film. In the introductory shot, we see the household chores of Deven's wife Sarla. She is always bound with these activities and serves her husband and son entirely. Thus, the director's understanding of the minor themes in this novel, like women's condition, deteriorating architectural history, shifted attention of people from their cultural richness to modernity, etc. has not gone missing in this adaptation. The film explores and offers to the audience the chance to study these minor themes and how they add up to larger reality.

The novel uses an extensive description of the friendship between Murad and Deven by throwing light on their childhood memories as well, but this is only showcased in the film through their conversation. The film does not talk about Deven's background along with Murad, rather it gradually gives an idea while following the storyline. An extensive description of the Delhi region is given by Desai, presenting a contrast between the pre-independent India and the modern one, while in the film it is done through visuals of the town. It is also the beauty of adaptation and its techniques that Merchant has used in the depiction of Nur as a poet using Godlike imagery. Deven's journey to Nur's house is also used to show the architecture of Bhopal being

similar to that of Delhi. According to the novelist, Nur's house is located in Chandni Chowk while in the film it is set near Moti Masjid in Bhopal. The modernity of the place is also overlapped with Deven's struggle to find Nur's house, which also portrays the fact that the core of Urdu language is only found somewhere surviving barely. The old house, which had not so well maintained infrastructure, also shows the monetary condition of the poet, symbolizing the struggle Urdu poets had to go through. Hence, one can interpret various ideas in one shot which the director has shown openly. Deven has to take stairs to meet the poet, which is brilliantly shown through the camera to consider him the one equivalent to God. The dark and light shadow is used to show the contrast of how a talented poet has to stay in the dark, unrecognized by society. The technique of parallelism is used to show the childhood of Deven when he talks about his father introducing him to Urdu poetry. The use of open and closed spaces is portrayed in the film to show freedom. Nur is fond of open space and shows Deven his pigeons while sitting on the terrace in the evening. As his admirers take him inside the house and recite their verses, Nur also expresses his views on the beauty of Urdu. As soon as he dislikes his admirers reciting poems, he moves to the open space again watching the sky, symbolizing his suffocation and want for the original essence of poetry.

The financial condition of Deven is described elaborately in the novel but the film uses the setting of an Indian household to show the small rooms and space which he could afford. Deven's monetary condition could only be fulfilled through teaching Hindi, which again points out the value of Urdu and its extinction post-independence. Nur invites Deven for the celebration at his house but it is followed by Imtiaz Begum's performance. The verses recited by Imtiaz Begum are given a creative turn by adding music to show her singing and dancing skills in the film. The beauty of expression is used in the film to highlight the fact of how Begum is living her dreams by reciting Nur's poetry while he is seated in the corner disliking his admirers following her. Nur's expressions are passive; he is disheartened to see this scenario while a smile on Imtiaz Begum's face shows her contentment by getting all the attention. The concept of family problems is also highlighted with the shot where Nur cries while his two wives fight after the celebration. Though the mention of Nur's relation with his wife is not expressed in the novel, it can be known from the behavior of Imtiaz Begum and how she doesn't want the process of recording to happen while, on the other hand, Safiya Begum helps Deven for the same but only for financial benefits. Though Deven put all the

effort into arranging things for the recording, Nur simply feels disinterested and lost. Even Nur's family issues act as a hindrance, which again explains the sense of identity of a true poet which his family doesn't recognize. His first wife's concern lies in the financial benefits while the second wife exploits him by reciting his verses and stopping him to give an interview. Hence, the film has not failed in depicting how family issues act as a declining factor in people's life.

The process of recording is held in the room reserved in the prostitutes' society and it is shown in the film. Deven's efforts to record Nur's verses show the contrast between technology and books. While Deven makes multiple attempts to make the recording successful, he eventually turns to write them down. Towards the end of the film, Deven receives a letter followed by the manuscript of Nur's verses while in the novel he takes a walk at night and thinks of Nur moving to another world. The destruction of Urdu culture is shown in the film through the house of Mr. Siddiqui, which he gets rid of by breaking it. Deven is seen standing holding the manuscript of Nur while the ruins of the house of Mr. Siddiqui forms mist in front of him. This beautiful use of camera angle depicts how Deven holds the last surviving essence of the Urdu language while others are happily getting rid of their inheritance. The film ends with the death of the poet and while he is being taken for cremation, it is also the cremation of Urdu poetry. Deven attends the ceremony holding the verses of Nur symbolizing the fact that in his custody lies the last remains of Urdu language and the poet as well.

4. Study of Urdu poetry and its relevance in the film adaptation

While we analyze the poems of Nur given in the novel and in the film, most of them have been taken from the works of the famous poets Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Mirza Galib, and some others. The film opens with the poem of Faiz *Aaj ik harf ko phir dhoondta phirta hai khayaal* "My mind is groping for a word" (*In Custody* 0:00-1:00). This poem talks about the poet's search for a word that is sweet, poisonous, full of rage, has passion in it and feels like the comfort of the lover, etc. The poet's mind is eagerly looking for a word "that could forever annihilate a city of torment" (Dalvi, *Aaj ik harf* 2). This poem is a spectacular way used by Merchant to open the film, which searches for the literature that is lost in its own birthplace. While this poem is sung in the background, the director has overlapped it with the images of monuments that give us the idea of the historical background where Urdu flourished.

While the film continues, the next *sher* used in it is of Mirza Galib titled *Na-Karda Gunahon Ki Bhi Hasrat* which says, “Applaud the uncommitted sins, O Lord If punishments await those sins I have committed” (*In Custody* 20:29-20:41). This famous verse is recited by Deven to prove his love for Urdu to Nur. This is continued by another poem of Faiz, *Aaye kuch abr kuch sharaab aaye*: “Some clouds and wine should be here and then, let any agony come to me” (*In Custody* 24:32-24:43) which is recited by Nur’s admirers while they are trying to impress Nur. This poem is mentioned only in the film to cleverly showcase how Nur’s admirers are drunk and using these famous poems to enjoy their time. The purpose of choosing these lines signifies that their prior need for wine and rest of the things is secondary. They call themselves the lovers of Urdu but the contrast is presented when Nur dislikes the way they present it by calling them cowards. Hence, these poems by Faiz are used accurately in the film by Merchant to make an impact on the particular shot. The fact that they resemble the emotion which the film wants to present, shows the beauty of Faiz’s poetry.

The song used for Imtiaz Begum’s performance on her birthday is a poem by Behzad Lakhnawi, *Ae jazba-e-dil gar main chahoon*. He was a famous Urdu poet who moved to Pakistan post-partition and was known for his exceptional writing in Urdu. His *ghazal* “O Desire of my heart if I so wanted All things would appear before me” (*In Custody* 35:20-39:13) is used to portray the intentions of Imtiaz Begum, who succeeded in enjoying Nur’s fame. Her desire of being called a poetess used to be fulfilled when she recited Nur’s poetry shamelessly in front of his admirers. The lines by Lakhnawi “If you face troubles in this path of love, I’ll be there for you” (1) hint at her desire to seek attention from others. This *ghazal* is another brilliant representation used by Merchant to show how things can be achieved when desired by a willing heart.

The director uses another enchanting *ghazal* of Faiz Ahmad Faiz *Nasib aazmane ke din aa rabe hain*: “It is time to test my fate” (*In Custody* 1:03:07-1:03:37) while Deven is trying his luck to get some funds from the college for the interview. This is sung by a boy at Mr. Siddiqui’s house in the background while Deven and Siddiqui are having a conversation. This poem revolves around the theme of the willingness which the poet has in order to meet his lover. Hence, the use of this *ghazal* shows Deven’s eagerness to arrange things in order to meet his idol Nur. This is followed by two more poems by Faiz used in the writings of Nur which are yet other beautiful poems used to represent how lovers of Urdu are waiting for its revival. The decline of

the Urdu language is compared with the dawn and how things have reached the end of an era. Nur's poetry reflects on the aspect of how the beauty of Urdu culture came to an end leaving its admirers alone, barely surviving. Faiz's poem *Gham na kar* "Do not grieve, do not grieve" (*In Custody* 1:47:48-1:47:49) may have been used as a song at the end of the film to comfort those who have lost their dreams because of the declining Urdu. The lines of the poem, "The heart will be calmed, do not grieve, do not grieve, Wounds will find balm, do not grieve, do not grieve" (Dalvi, *Gham na kar* 2) suggest that sadness by this pain should not be there as things will change.

The ending poem in the film is from *Na ganwao nawak-e-nim-kash dil-e-reza-reza ganwa diya* by Faiz, which signifies Nur's death and the walk from this world of all the poets who have contributed to Urdu: "Once I was steady as a mountain but now I leave life behind me" (*In Custody* 1:53:15-1:53:29). Deven reads this poem in Nur's memoir symbolizing that his life has contributed a lot so that Urdu never dies. At last, Faiz's poem *Aaj bazaar main pa ba jolan chalo* "Walk through the market today with feet in chains" (*In Custody* 1:53:45-1:57:07) is used as a song to give tribute to all those poets who devoted their life to Urdu. Hence, the director has chosen a kind of ethos at the end of the film in order for people to feel optimism when it comes to the Urdu language: "Go as the city of my beloved is waiting" (1). He is also trying to give a message through the poems that the revival of Urdu can only be achieved if all the admirers put effort together.

Faiz Ahmad Faiz was a member of the progressive writers who became famous for their contribution to Urdu literature in the 1930s. They forwarded a movement in the literature field with a belief that it should inculcate the issues of society. Moving away from the conventions of highly stylized writing, it was the social awareness and reality that manifested literature. In the words of Tagore, "To-day our country is like a vast desert which does not have a trace of greenery and life...it must be a writer's duty to instill new life into the country, to sing the songs of awakening and valor, to carry the message of hope and happiness..." (qtd. by Sahni 181). They kept man at the center and all their writings were expected to be a mirror of society.

Around 1916, progressive thought began losing its grasp on people. With the occurrence of World War I, the loss of center was felt among people which brought with them the sense of oblivion. The horrendous effects of the war were felt, which led to the gradual decline of the progressive thoughts taking along with it the cultural manifestation of the Urdu language as well. Hence,

as the gradual decline in the Urdu language was felt in post-independence India, there came a need for revolutionary zeal to revive its stature in the land it was born. Faiz was a revolutionary poet as his views dealt with all aspects of society. His poetry blends love with that of life and its sorrows, adding avidity of thoughts in the youth. His poems not only dealt with a handful of themes to be read in the times when they were written, rather they have the perpetual issue which can be related with the themes in the modern world.

5. Conclusion

Ismail Merchant and Anita Desai used Faiz Ahmad Faiz's poetry to bring about a revolution in the diminishing Urdu language so that the beauty of Urdu never loses its essence. Faiz's poetry dealt with ageless concerns and he was a voice to the voiceless, making his writing universally acknowledged. Faiz's poems not only inspire people to walk back and attain what was theirs: rather he also talks about how culture is nothing without its admirers. This is just similar to Nur's feeling of a void in the world without his admirers. No matter what instruments were used to record his poetry, his writings could be kept alive only by the admirers. Therefore, as the culture of Urdu started to lose its fire, progressive thought was needed to resuscitate its place and Faiz's poetry had the spark. The poetry used in the novel and the film remind the Indian readers and viewers of the dying culture in post-colonial India in which languages have wrongly been associated with communities. Communalization of language—i.e. Urdu for Muslims and Hindi for Hindus—is a grave setback to the *Hindustani tehzeeb* of India. Both Desai and Merchant raise the question at different times through their respective medium of expression. Desai has used Delhi as the setting of the novel while Bhopal has been used in the film adaptation to emphasize the expansion of boundaries where Urdu was acknowledged. The culture of Urdu was not restricted to regions like Delhi, Lucknow, etc. rather it was widely popular at other places as well where it flourished. Hence, by choosing different settings in the film, Merchant is trying to expand the horizons where the admirers of Urdu reside. The concern is to preserve the syncretic culture of India, which can be safeguarded only through its practitioners. Dependence on technology is, thus, questioned in both the artistic forms—the novel and the film. Therefore, the question remains regarding the true custodian, whether it is the people or technology.

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Notes

1. Ghazal is a traditional form of poetry in Persian or Urdu usually set to music with a fixed number of verses.