
Can past cultural hibridity be revived? Old Delhi in Anita Desai's fiction

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Abstract

The paper explores the dynamic relationship between spatiality and social processes in the city, the “lived spaces” negotiated by writers/characters/ readers. It focuses on Shahjahanabad/Old Delhi and its grandiose past of rich history, linguistic and poetic traditions with reference to Anita Desai's novels *Clear Light of Day* and *In Custody*, and unravels connections at the intersection of the real and the fictional city. The Mughal city was famed not just for its architectural magnificence but its composite culture and its art connoisseurs. Historical forces destroyed the city physically, dismantled its cultural life and in the process strangled its soul. The two novels repeatedly invoke nostalgia for past grandeur and harmony, and the paper suggests the need to move beyond mourning for lost traditions in the text and outside by reader-citizens, and raises possibilities of cultural hybridity in the transformed spatialities.

Keywords

Anita Desai, *Clear Light of Day*, *In Custody*, spatiality, social processes, cultural hibridity.

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