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## Echoes of Partition in Clear Light of Day: Memory, Trauma, and Conflict

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### Abstract

This research paper examines the complex depiction of conflict within families and religion in Anita Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day*, specifically in the context of Partition fiction. Through a focus on the relationships between siblings, namely Raja, Bimla, and Tara, the story reflects larger tensions between Hindus and Muslims during India's Partition. The research delves into how Desai utilizes indirect techniques to portray the aftermath of Partition, shedding light on the psychological distress and cultural fragmentation experienced by Indian families. It also explores the influence of British colonial policies, including their "divide and rule" approach, in perpetuating mistrust between communities. Moreover, the paper analyzes the transformation of female characters, particularly Bim, who embodies the "new woman" challenging traditional gender roles and societal expectations. By examining these elements, it emphasizes how the novel captures both personal and collective struggles during a significant historical era.

**Keywords:** Partition fiction, familial conflict, psychological trauma, gender roles, new woman

### Introduction

The Partition of India in 1947 is regarded as one of the most distressing occurrences in the history of South Asia, having a long-lasting impact on the social, cultural, and familial landscapes of the region. Referred to as "Partition fiction," literature from this time offers deep insights into the human experiences and societal disruptions that accompanied this significant separation. In Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*, which falls under this genre, the aftermath of partition is portrayed with more complexity rather than a direct portrayal of violent events. The novel follows the lives of the Das family, whose internal conflicts mirror the wider tensions between Hindus and Muslims, as well as between India and Pakistan. Through a multi-layered narrative structure, Desai delves into the psychological and emotional effects of partition on her characters. The strained relationships between siblings Raja, Bimla, and Tara represent the fractured identities and cultural discord that emerged after partition. Raja's fascination with Islamic culture and Urdu literature, despite his Hindu upbringing, highlights how communal divisions were intensified by British policies such as "divide and rule." The novel also sheds light on the psychological trauma endured by survivors, a recurring theme in Desai's writing. This trauma is evident in their unconscious behavior and choices,

reflecting Freud's concept of reliving traumatic experiences. Raja's departure to Pakistan, his tense relationship with Bimla, and Bimla's transformation into an independent woman all encapsulate the personal and societal changes brought about by partition.

Moreover, *Clear Light of Day* delves into the role of women in post-partition India, with Bim emerging as a resilient and independent character who challenges traditional gender norms. This depiction challenges the societal expectations of women in a patriarchal society, positioning Bim as a progressive "new woman" who rejects subservience and embraces self-sufficiency. In essence, Desai's novel offers a localized yet profound examination of the ongoing effects of partition on Indian families. Through its nuanced character dynamics and exploration of cultural tensions, the book provides a poignant commentary on the complexities of identity, trauma, and resilience in the aftermath of historical upheaval. This research paper aims to thoroughly analyze these themes by drawing connections between the experiences of the Das family and the broader socio-political context of partition, while also examining the evolving roles of women during this transformative period.

### Methodology

The research methodology utilizes a qualitative literary

analysis framework in order to investigate how conflict and its consequences are depicted in Anita Desai's novel. The study involves a thorough examination of the text to identify key themes related to the partition of India, such as cultural discord, emotional trauma, and the changing roles of women. To contextualize these themes, secondary sources such as historical accounts of the partition, critical essays on Desai's work, and theoretical frameworks like Freud's concept of trauma and re-enactment will be incorporated. Additionally, feminist literary criticism will be employed to analyze the portrayal of female characters and their evolving roles in post-partition society. This interdisciplinary approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Desai's narrative reflects the lasting impact of partition on individual identities and family dynamics. A list of references of the books and articles used in the study will be included at the end of the article. The research study follows the APA 7<sup>th</sup> manual for the citation and references of the works and quotations used in this paper.

### Analysis and Discussion

Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day* falls under the category of Partition fiction, a genre that explores the events surrounding the Partition of India. This genre has captured the attention of many Indian and Pakistani writers who delve into the distressing stories leading up to this historic division, highlighting its devastating effects on the people. While these novels are heavily influenced by the Partition, they often do not directly focus on its chaotic events. Instead, they touch upon significant incidents such as Mahatma Gandhi's assassination but avoid vividly depicting the violent clashes between Muslims and Hindus, political turmoil, or British involvement during that time period. Desai's work specifically focuses on the aftermath of Partition within Indian families. In recent years, there has been a shift in Partition literature where authors use indirect methods to portray the social upheaval before the division. In *Clear Light of Day*, Desai uses conflicts between siblings as a symbol for broader tensions between Hindus and Muslims, as well as India and Pakistan. This effectively showcases the profound impact of Partition on familial relationships. As it is said, "Clear Light of Day offers a localized perspective on history by illustrating how deeply Partition affected members of the Das family" (Osman, 2015, p. 15) <sup>[8]</sup>.

The core of the novel centres revolves around Raja's close connection with his sisters Bimla and Tara, as well as their interactions with their affluent Muslim neighbor and landlord, Hyder Ali. The story begins with Tara coming back to her childhood home, where Bimla and their younger brother Baba have been living for many years. Meanwhile, Raja is living in Pakistan and busily preparing for his daughter's wedding. The novel uses a complex narrative structure, functioning as a "memory within a memory," guiding readers through India during the time of Partition through the recollections of Tara and Bimla from their childhood to adulthood. The narrator smoothly goes back and forth between past and present, providing insights into the dynamics of sibling relationships against the backdrop of British departure from India.

Coming back to the Das family home in Old Delhi brings back memories of Tara's youth, both pre-and post 1947.

Reuniting with Bimla causes them both to reflect on the past days of their family.

The story begins with the reunion of the two sisters at their ancestral house in Delhi, where issues arise due to their contrasting personalities. Tara is portrayed as introverted, timid, and lacking in confidence compared to her confident and self-assured sister, Bim. However, Tara presents a more modern image of herself. The main source of conflict revolves around Bim's bitterness towards Raja for leaving his family and dreams of becoming a famous poet to settle in Pakistan. As adults, Bim takes on the responsibility of looking after their family members, including their mentally unstable brother, Baba, and their aunt Mira before her passing. She also cares for Raja during his illness, while Raja himself is captivated by their Muslim neighbor Hyder Ali and eventually marries his daughter, Benazir, moving to Hyderabad after inheriting Ali's property. As Hashmi says,

"The two sisters have vivid recollections of experiencing unhappiness and monotony in their home, but the presence of friendly and caring neighbors provided some solace. However, Tara's life took a turn after she got married and stay abroad. Their brother Raja had a contrasting life even in Delhi, but it underwent a drastic transformation once he left."

The novel *Clear Light of Day* reveals the underlying religious prejudices between Muslims and Hindus that were ingrained in Indian culture for many years before the Partition. This hostility between various social classes and faiths was intensified by the British policy of "divide and rule." (Gairola, 2017, p. 124) <sup>[4]</sup>.

In the work "The British Influence on India: Control and Division," Aziz Rahman asserts that British rulers utilized various tactics to effectively govern India. They took advantage of the diverse nature of Indian society, specifically utilizing the strategy of "divide and rule" to maintain power effortlessly. By creating conflicts between different social classes and religious groups, the British aimed to exploit Indian territories. Through legislative measures, they deliberately stirred up animosity between Muslims and Hindus, constantly changing laws that either favored or disadvantaged each group. They also used propaganda to provoke civil unrest. The British were wary of any potential unity between Muslims and Hindus, and when such alliances formed, as seen in the support for the Mughal prince against British rule, they favored Hindus by providing better education opportunities while marginalizing Muslims. Moreover, they manipulated economic policies to create hostility between the two groups, taking advantage of Muslim resistance against British rule (Rahman *et al.*, 2018, p. 4) <sup>[9]</sup>.

The powerful impact of the "divide and rule" tactic can be seen in the disdain of Hyder Ali's clerk towards Raja's Hindu background at the library, as well as his aunt Mira's disapproval of Raja accompanying their Muslim neighbor. The old man, who serves as a guard or clerk in Hyder Ali's library, is bothered by Raja's frequent visits and shows a clear aversion to his presence there. Through Raja's presence, Desai exposes the old man's biased views towards Hindus. Desai says,

He presented himself at the Hyder Ali's next day, was shown in by a suspicious servant, Hyder Ali, who seemed preoccupied in his office, motioned for him to enter the library. There, he was surrounded by books and manuscripts that were like treasures to him, akin to those of Haroun al Raschid. He made a habit of spending hours each day perusing through the more valuable manuscripts belonging to Hyder Ali. However, an old clerk kept a close eye on him, glaring at him through his wire-rimmed spectacles with suspicion. This observer saw him as a heathen who had been granted permission by the wealthy landlords to handle sacred manuscripts that were out of his reach. (Desai, 1980, p. 48)<sup>[2]</sup>.

Aunt Mira is concerned about Raja's daily visits to Hyder Ali's house, which is also causing her worry. Desai observes Aunt Mira's behavior, noting that she is troubled by this unusual friendship between Raja and Hyder Ali. Being a Hindu, Aunt Mira seems to have a lack of trust towards their Muslim neighbor. This mindset reflects the prevalent attitude among Hindus during this time, when conflicts between the two groups were common. Such conflicts resulted in a deep-seated mistrust between them. Desai herself refers to Raja and Hyder Ali's relationship as an uncommon one, given the prevailing circumstances where it was rare for individuals from both groups to be friends. Due to this, Aunt Mira sees it as risky for Raja to associate with Muslims, even if they are neighbors. She disapproves of Raja attending gatherings at Hyder Ali's house. Aunt Mira's expression arouses Bim's curiosity:

'Why, Mira-masi(aunt)?' Bim asked... Her aunt sat helplessly sucking the thread that dangled from her lips like a fine tail. As she put up her hand to remove it, her hand trembled, 'He should not... It is not safe.' 'They are our neighbor, Mira-masi' Bim exclaimed in surprise. 'But Muslims, it is not safe,' her aunt whispered, trembling. (Desai, 1980, p. 56)<sup>[2]</sup>.

Hyder Ali, who symbolize noble Muslims, is depicted as a benevolent and compassionate character. He is shown as a philanthropic and honorable individual who treats Raja with compassion, regardless of their religious disparities. In contrast, Raja's main concern is gaining knowledge in literature and he remains detached from the ongoing religious tensions. He separates himself from the harsh truths of his surroundings and indulges in the peaceful realm of Urdu and English literature. This clarifies his favoritism towards Urdu rather than Hindi.

Raja has a deep affinity for Hyder Ali's family, often joining them for evening events to engage in discussions about poetry with Hyder Ali himself. Hyder Ali, in return, treats Raja as if he were his own son. As time passes, Raja starts to feel like a member of the family and values Hyder Ali's advice. From a young age, Raja is enchanted by Hyder Ali's regal demeanor and sophistication, as Desai writes: "Hyder Ali Sahib saw himself as a kind of royal figure...and Raja was enamored by this" (p. 25). Noticing Raja's interest in poetry, Hyder Ali warmly invites him to

attend their evening gatherings where they recite poetry. Raja becomes a regular attendee at these gatherings, where they also delve into various Islamic topics, further fueling his fascination with Islamic culture. This depiction can be viewed as Desai's recollections of pre-partition India where different cultures coexisted harmoniously (Sannrud, 2008, p. 21)<sup>[12]</sup>.

It is significant to mention that Raja's fascination with the Urdu language and Islamic studies is influenced by his understanding, as a Hindu, of the historical importance of Urdu. Desai clarifies that during the Mughal rule, Urdu was considered a sophisticated language and even after the decline of the Mughal Empire, it retained its esteemed status. Before the Partition, it was common and safe for Hindus to study the language of Muslims. As Desai points out, "prior to the Partition... students had the choice between Hindi and Urdu" (1980, p. 47). This suggests that Hindus and Muslims once held mutual respect and coexisted peacefully until the British implemented a "divide and rule" tactic, which sparked conflict and animosity between them. As a result of these religious tensions, Raja's options were limited. His father, aware of the tumultuous situation in India during this time, disapproved of Raja's decision.

Rituparna Roy observes father's advice, acknowledging the significance of a particular passage in the novel that sheds light on how the Partition deeply affected everyone on the subcontinent in 1947 (Roy, 2010, p.84)<sup>[10]</sup>. As for Raja, he is surprised by his father's disapproval and it emphasizes his lack of understanding of societal issues. This detachment makes it challenging for him to comprehend his father's concerns, causing him to question who would betray him (Desai, 1980, p.52)<sup>[2]</sup>. Raja's father recognizes the consequences of his son's decision and predicts that both Hindus and Muslims will view him with suspicion. He explains that Muslims will see Raja as trying to join them while Hindus will see him as abandoning them (Desai, 1980, p.52)<sup>[2]</sup>.

Raja and Bim were once very close, but their relationship soured when Raja decided to move to Hyderabad after receiving a letter from Hyder Ali, who had moved to Pakistan. Bim was hurt by Raja's decision to join Hyder Ali in Pakistan, especially since she had taken care of him during his illness. The tension between the siblings only increased after Hyder Ali's death. Raja wrote to Bim, saying she could stay in the family home if she paid the same rent as before. Bim found this letter offensive and it added to her anger. The growing hostility between Raja and Bim reflects the larger conflict between Muslims and Hindus, as well as between India and Pakistan.

The devastating occurrences of the Partition resulted in extensive physical damage and loss of life for Indians, as stated by Biswas and Talukder (2024, p. 549)<sup>[1]</sup>. Desai, on the other hand, focuses on delving deep into the psychological aspects of her characters. She emphasizes the profound psychological distress endured by survivors during and after the violent events. This trauma greatly affects their mental state, causing them to subconsciously repeat behaviors similar to those that caused their initial trauma. Tarun Saint says referring to Freud's explanation of the influence of the trauma:

The traumatic event is repeated by the survivors through their unintentional actions, sometimes against their own wishes. This experience, which affects both the body and mind, often manifests as a wound on the mind that is not immediately recognized and only becomes apparent through recurring nightmares and behaviors. Therefore, trauma is not solely rooted in the initial violent event from one's past, but rather in its unresolved state and how it resurfaces to trouble the survivor later on (2010, p. 199).

Saint links Freud's idea of trauma to Raja's choice to leave his siblings. The violent occurrences of the Partition continue to haunt Raja's mind, causing him to subconsciously recreate similar scenarios. While he is not physically harmed, the memories of the Partition deeply impact his mental state, leading him to behave in ways that attempt to reconstruct their broken culture. Despite the Muslim community being the primary sufferers of the Partition, Raja is also affected by the intense events in India. This traumatic experience prompts him to cut ties with Bim, who responds by reciprocating the mutual division between Muslims and Hindus.

Building on Saint's observations, Raja is greatly intrigued by the culture of Islamic India. While it may seem that his departure for Pakistan is solely based on his admiration for Hyder Ali, there is a deeper symbolic meaning behind it. Hyder Ali serves as a representation of the fading Islamic culture in India due to the Partition. As a Hindu who values and sees Islamic culture as an essential part of Indian heritage, Raja does not want to lose his connection to it. Desai underlines the importance of Urdu language, stating that it was once the language used in courts during the Muslim and Mughal reigns and has remained significant among the educated and cultured individuals (Desai, 1980, p.47) <sup>[2]</sup>.

Desai portrays the role of colleges during the Partition era as centers for political discussions and conspiracies against perceived enemies. She also highlights the predicament faced by Hindus like Raja, who sympathize with Muslims. Despite this, extremist Hindus are willing to fight even against their fellow Hindus who are neutral or support Muslims. Raja realizes that his college acquaintances, who are Hindu, oppose the idea of dividing India and creating a separate Muslim country. However, he openly expresses his compassion for Muslims without fully understanding the consequences. This unexpected stance causes his Hindu friends to try and recruit him into their anti-Muslim group, assuming he would be a strong supporter of their cause. To their surprise, they find that Raja empathizes with their Muslim rivals instead. This results in them distrusting him and plotting against him due to his unusual interest in Islamic culture, viewing him as a potential threat. Desai comments:

Raja, who grew up in a very protected and private environment with his family, took a long time to understand this. His friends had invited him to tea places and offered him cigarettes... he had gone to watch movies with them and sang songs as they rode their bikes home at night. Now, they had changed in a confusing and sudden way. When he mentioned

Pakistan as something he fully accepted, they labeled him a traitor (1980, p. 57).

Raja's character represents Anita Desai's own beliefs and viewpoints. He not only embodies the idea of Hindus living together peacefully, but also reflects Desai's desire for a harmonious household that accepts individuals from different religious and cultural backgrounds. Similar to Desai and the renowned national figure Gandhi, Raja shares certain convictions and qualities that are central to the novel. Desai's upbringing, attending a Christian English school in close proximity to her home, exposed her to Urdu and the Islamic heritage of India, significantly influencing her perspective of the country. She witnessed firsthand the harmonious integration of Hindu and Muslim customs in India, noting that it was a place where cultures blended rather than clashed. Despite being Hindu, Raja embraces Islamic culture as an essential part of India's diverse history. In this way, he symbolizes the peaceful coexistence of cultures that Desai celebrates and echoes Gandhi's principles, who also advocated for similar ideals.

Although Gandhi is only mentioned briefly in the novel, his name holds great symbolic significance. In his vision for India, he saw a society where people of all races and social classes lived together peacefully. He promoted unity between Hindus and Muslims, emphasizing the need for a harmonious atmosphere to support their coexistence. As Kripalani says,

"Gandhiji viewed the issue of Hindu-Muslim unity as equally significant as eradicating untouchability. He firmly believed that failure to resolve this issue would result in violent conflicts in India. He also emphasized that Hindu-Muslim unity was crucial for our fight for independence" (1970, p. 388).

Gandhi and Desai shared a positive outlook on the harmonious integration of India's varied cultures and were clearly against the partitioning of the country. Raja symbolizes this vision by being the unifying force between the divided cultures, embodying the beliefs of Gandhi and Desai. He is connected to both Islamic culture through his ties with Hyder Ali and Hindu culture through his sister Tara, who keeps in touch with him.

The Partition has caused a division within the Das family and has greatly influenced the identity of each member. This has resulted in significant changes and conflicts within the family. The impact of the Partition and British culture have directly contributed to this transformation, causing a rift between the family members. Raja is not the only one affected by this, as Bim, who used to be close to him and shared a passion for poetry, has also undergone notable changes since Raja's move to Pakistan. She now openly mocks Raja's poetry in front of Tara, showing how her feelings towards her brother have hardened due to his absence and the passing of time. The conversation between Tara and Bim exposes the tension between Bim and Raja:

She (Tara) said: ' ... d'you remember Raja marching up and down here on the roof, swinging his arms and reciting his poems... I used to feel like crying, it was so

beautiful- those poems about death, and love, and wine, and flames.’ ‘They weren’t. They were terrible,’ Bim said icily, tossing her head with a stubborn air, like a badtempered mare’s. ‘Terrible verses he wrote’ (Desai, 1980, p. 25) <sup>[2]</sup>.

Raja’s departure creates an opportunity for Bim to become a prominent, independent figure, something unfamiliar in Indian society. The arrival of British colonizers brought about a change in the mentality of Indian women, as they imposed their cultural values on the society. According to Ramesh Kumar Gupta, modern women reject the traditional image of the submissive "Angel in the house" and instead choose to challenge societal norms. This "new woman" is aware of the belief that women hold a lower position in the family (2007, p. 152) and chooses to rebel against such restrictive norms. Therefore, Meera Bai defines this idea of a "New Woman,"

The term New Woman now represents the idea of women becoming more aware of their role and status within the family and society. Conscious of her individuality, the new woman has been trying to assert her rights as a human being and is determined to fight for equal treatment with man” (Devi and Sanasam, 2014, p. 165) <sup>[3]</sup>.

In Anita Desai’s literary works, her female characters are not only revolutionary, but they also possess incredible strength to face the consequences of their choices. Desai herself expresses her fascination with characters who defy societal norms and challenge the prevailing conventions. She states that she is drawn to characters who have experienced extreme despair and have gone against the general flow. Among the female characters in her novel, Bim stands out as an exceptional woman. She demonstrates exceptional leadership skills and a strong independent spirit, firmly believing in her own uniqueness and ability to navigate life without depending on a man. According to Neeru Tandon, Bim’s self-reliance and independence attract admiration from men like Dr. Biswas and Bakul (Tara’s husband). Despite this admiration, Bim refuses Dr. Biswas’s marriage proposal to protect her autonomy (1980, pp. 49-50).

During her childhood, Bim displays a keen interest in the “man’s world” she boldly enters Raja’s room, examining his belongings and even trying on his clothes. Her decision to dress in masculine attire foreshadows her future as a self-sufficient woman who challenges traditional gender roles. It also reveals her awareness of being a “new woman” in her family, where she is often treated as inferior to Raja. As she holds up Raja’s trousers against her waist, she proudly tells Tara that she looks almost as tall as him, showing her belief in gender equality and defiance against male dominance. However, Tara dismisses Bim’s statement, claiming that the trousers are too long for her, representing society’s rejection of women’s desire for equality. Both girls are intrigued by the idea of wearing male clothing, indicating their consciousness of their subordinate position. The trousers symbolize masculinity and superiority, motivating Tara and Bim to seek a new and more empowered identity through their adoption.

In an instant, they realized the reason behind their stark contrast to their brother. They felt inferior and insignificant in comparison because they did not wear trousers. As they placed their hands into their pockets, they felt a newfound sense of superiority. The possession of pockets gave them a sense of confidence and independence, as if owning pockets equated to owning wealth (Desai, 1980, p. 132) <sup>[2]</sup>.

In Bim, the British principles are rooted in the Indian woman. Bim enjoys being a leader in her school when she is a young girl. Her efforts to establish her distinct identity are seen as a hybrid identity (Stoican, 2019, p. 47) <sup>[13]</sup>:

At school, Bim transformed into a new person – energetic, engaged, and determined. Naturally good at organizing, she took charge of the Bluebirds when she was still a young student with pig tails, and later led the Girl Guides, became the captain of the netball team, served as class prefect, and was proudly appointed Head Girl in her last year... For Bim, school, along with its educators and subjects, presented a stimulating challenge to her innate intelligence and thirst for knowledge, which she welcomed (Desai, 1980, pp. 122-123) <sup>[2]</sup>.

Bim fully embraces her influential role in society and rejects the idea of being an outsider. She actively seeks to engage in social events and works towards creating positive change within her community. On the other hand, Tara lacks ambition and strength of character. She holds a strong dislike for school and prefers to be alone, avoiding any form of participation – a quality that irritates Bim. When Tara expresses reluctance to volunteer at the hospital, Bim scolds her for what she perceives as weakness, emphasizing the goals of the “new woman,” who strives to break free from isolation and domestic limitations, instead aiming to make a significant impact on society. Bim’s rejection of traditional female roles showcases her determination to challenge societal expectations and assert her independence. As Bim says:

Too fine a lady to step into the hospital ward? Are the odors disturbing to you? Do the sights haunt you at night? My dear, you must toughen up a bit, my darling niece. Otherwise, what use will you be? If you can’t even do this little bit for the poor, what will you ever be able to do when you grow up? (Desai, 1980, p. 126) <sup>[2]</sup>.

In Hindu culture, there is a belief that women should prioritize taking care of their husbands and children. They are also seen as weak and in need of male protection, incapable of living on their own. Tara represents these traditional ideas and relies on men for protection. However, Bim goes against this stereotype and actively challenges it. Early on, it becomes clear that there is a stark contrast between the two sisters. Tara longs to become a mother, while Bim ridicules her and shares Raja’s dream of becoming a hero. Bim constantly struggles to break free from the restrictive confines of her gender role. Bim struggles to abolish “her imprisoning female condition,” (Stoican, 2019, p. 47) <sup>[13]</sup>. Bim strives to assert herself in a

society that often disregards the individuality of Indian women, but this is made even more challenging by the lack of support from those around her, including the women in her life. Her determination to prioritize education and independence, values that go against traditional expectations for women, only adds to her frustration. This frustration is evident when she speaks out against the early marriages of the Misra girls and stresses the value of education over marriage.

‘But they are not educated yet... They haven’t any degrees. They should go to college... because they might find marriage isn’t enough to last them the whole of their lives’ ‘What else could there be?’ countered Tara. ‘What else?’ asked Bim. ‘Can’t you think? I can think of hundreds of things to do instead. I won’t marry,’ she added, very firmly. ‘I won’t,’ repeated Bim, adding ‘I shall never leave Baba and Raja and Mira-masi’... I shall work -I shall do things,’ she went on, ‘I shall earn my own living and look after Mira-masi and Baba and - and be independent (Desai, 1980, p. 140) <sup>[2]</sup>.

Bim’s rejection of Dr. Biswas’s proposal to marry her is rooted in her strong sense of self. After assessing his personality, she recognizes his traditional beliefs about women. Despite being a doctor, Dr. Biswas often seems unsure and lacks conviction, causing Bim to ridicule him. However, he fails to understand the real reason for her refusal. She becomes angry when he assumes that her main aspiration is to conform to the conventional role of serving her family, as dictated by patriarchal societies. He tells her:

‘Now I understand why you do not wish to marry. You have dedicated your life to others to your sick brother and your aged aunt and your little brother who will be dependent on you all his life. You have sacrificed your own life for them’... Bim’s mouth fell open with astonishment ...She even hissed slightly in her rage and frustration at being so misunderstood, so totally misread, then gulp a little with laughter at such grotesque misunderstanding, and her tangled emotions twisted her face and shook the thought of Biswas out of her (Desai, 1980, p. 97) <sup>[2]</sup>.

Bim strongly opposes the idea of conforming to expected gender norms, rejecting the idea of being confined to the role of a domestic caretaker known as the “angel in the house.” In contrast to her sister Tara, who enjoys activities typically associated with women such as shopping and cooking, Bim shows little interest in these traditional feminine pursuits.

She attributes her success in obtaining a college degree to her own hard work, acknowledging that in a male-dominated society, women must pursue education without support from others. Despite her father’s lack of interest in teaching her about his business and showing favoritism towards Raja, Bim refuses to be sidelined. She achieves her goal of becoming a history professor at a women’s college through her own persistence, securing financial stability and freedom.

Similar to how Desai uses Raja to bridge the gap between Hindus and Muslims, Bim emerges as a powerful symbol of

resistance against patriarchal norms. She challenges the idea of female inferiority by asserting her independence and rejecting socially imposed expectations. Her decision not to marry is not merely personal but ideological; it reflects her refusal to be reduced to the “other” within a male-dominated framework or to conform to conventional gender roles that limit a woman’s identity and autonomy. As it is said,

“Desai delves into the intersection of gender and politics, moving beyond individual struggle and delving into a Desai delves into the intersection of gender and politics, moving beyond personal battles and delving into a critique of Indian patriotism. She contends that discussions about gender were noticeably absent in the fight for liberation and revitalization, emphasizing the importance of women asserting their role in a society undergoing significant transformations in both political and social spheres” (Talukdar and Biswas, 2023, p.17) <sup>[14]</sup>.

Bim’s anger towards her father’s neglect underscores the male-dominated structure of society, where females are frequently disregarded and undervalued. She views herself as a crusader, working to enlighten others and instill her modern beliefs. Bim not only shares her knowledge of history with her female students, but also encourages them to strive for a new, empowered version of womanhood that differs from the limitations she and Tara experienced in their past.

As Bim reaches womanhood, she defies the societal norms and customs that restrict women and pursues her desires with the same freedom she had as a child. This leads to her growing in confidence and independence, ultimately becoming an educated woman. Gupta argues that Bim’s unique sense of self stems from her parents’ absence in the household. Instead of being traditional parents who enforced gender roles, they spent their time playing cards or conducting business outside the home. As a result, Bim was able to think for herself and choose to be independent from a young age (1980, p.156).

Bim recognizes the traditional roles imposed on her, but she rejects them as her sole purpose in life. Unlike her aunt Mira and sister Tara, she is independent and does not depend on male figures to fulfill her needs. In line with Simone de Beauvoir’s idea, Bim represents a woman who challenges the notion of reliance and dismantles the foundations of a system that is built on it. Through her newfound self-sufficiency, she no longer needs a male intermediary to connect with the world (Gupta, 2007, p. 158) <sup>[5]</sup>.

Tara is faced with a difficult decision: to either conform and be submissive or to embrace practicality and rationality. Her husband, Bakul, has been influenced by Western ideas brought in by British colonizers and he tries to instill these qualities in Tara. He often praises Bim for her independence, rationality, and self-assurance, which Tara is very aware of. Tara greatly admires Bim’s courage and her ability to create a new path in India, something she struggles to do due to her own lack of confidence.

Tara ironically pretends to be practical and rational only to please Bakul, thus submitting in a different manner. She hides her true self due to feelings of shame, seeing it as lesser. Tara even sees her own cultural heritage as unsophisticated and less appealing compared to the Western

lifestyle that her two daughters have adopted while residing in America. As Desai remarks:

Now and then one (fruit) fell to the ground with a gentle thud. If she were younger – no, if she were certain that Bakul wouldn't notice – she would have hurried down the steps of the veranda and searched for an intact one. She wondered if her daughters would do the same... No, they probably wouldn't. Having grown up in embassies and well-travelled, fluent in multiple languages, they were too refined for such simple pleasures. She couldn't help but feel guilty for lacking this desirable quality herself... She had tricked Bakul into thinking she possessed it, that he had taught her how to attain it. But it was all just an illusion to deceive him. (Desai, 1980, pp. 11-12) <sup>[2]</sup>.

Elena Stoican explores Tara's early years, focusing on her distaste for school. While Bim thrives in the academic setting, Tara finds it unappealing. She prefers the comfort and security of her home, perceiving it as a small and safe haven. In contrast, school symbolizes a vast and intimidating space to Tara, where she feels threatened and ridiculed by various individuals. As described by Desai, "Tara saw school as a terrifying place, a curse, a collection of powerful and cruel forces that endangered and mocked her sensitivity" (Desai, 1980, p.123) <sup>[2]</sup>. Furthermore, the relationships she forms with loud and uncouth classmates are unpleasant for Tara. Stoican also observes that Tara is consistently excluded from school events and is treated as an outsider among her peers (Stoican, 2019, pp.48-49) <sup>[13]</sup>.

Tara's lack of interest in school is a reflection of her preference for conforming to traditional gender roles, seeking comfort and security within the walls of her household. This inclination towards domesticity is reinforced by her yearning for "maternal protection" and avoidance of any interaction with the outside world, as demonstrated by her desire to hide under Aunt Mira's quilt. Her detachment from her peers causes them to view her as haughty and arrogant. Additionally, Tara's unwillingness to participate in charity work at the hospital further highlights her vulnerability and aversion towards engaging in social activities beyond the confines of her home. Her contempt for the gloomy atmosphere of the hospital exposes her inability to confront life's challenges, leading her to seek solace in isolation. Ultimately, Tara's decision to marry Bakul is motivated by her desire to escape from familial responsibilities, showcasing her lack of bravery in facing life's obstacles instead opting for avoidance. As Desai says:

The kind of atmosphere that used to fill it when father and mother were alive, they were always either sick, playing cards, or at the club, and as a result, they were often away and left us out and behind. As Mira-masi became more peculiar and Raja fell ill, it almost felt like the house itself was sick. It seemed that illness was being passed down from one generation to the next. The only solution was to distance ourselves and escape from it all.

Tara's dependence on Bakul stems from her desire for someone to accept her vulnerabilities and offer protection,

aligning with the traditional belief of women seeking authority figures to rely on. She holds her parents responsible for their absence and welcomes marriage as it provides her with the masculine authority represented by Bakul, showcasing her departure from being a "modern woman." Feeling excluded from her siblings' world, Tara feels like an outsider and lacks the confidence she could have gained through inclusion. Desai comments on the contrasting childhood experiences of Bim and Tara, highlighting Bim's self-assurance in contrast to Tara's lack thereof. While Bim receives attention and validation from Raja and others, Tara's perception of Bakul before marriage is shaped by his attention towards her as she longs for recognition amidst neglect from her family. Gupta agrees with this, attributing Tara's decision to get married to her longing for attention within the household.

In spite of Tara's traditional way of thinking, Gupta asserts that she also exhibits "radical responses to societal norms." Although Tara typically adheres to her husband, she recognizes her unquestioning obedience and occasionally questions it (158), a trait uncommon for traditional women. She reaches the realization that she dislikes being controlled by Bakul every time he orders her to accompany him to one of his relatives. Deliberately, she refuses to comply with Bakul's demands, feeling that she can no longer blindly follow him and lose herself or her individuality. As Desai (1980) <sup>[2]</sup> writes, "She believed she had followed him enough; it had been a tremendous struggle, constantly going against her true nature, and it had drained her of all her strength. Now, she could only inevitably collapse" (p. 18).

Tara exhibits an awareness of the concept of the "new woman," but frequently conforms to traditional gender norms. She is caught between these two roles, unlike her aunt Mira who fully embraces traditional femininity. Despite this, Tara's behavior often adheres to traditional expectations. In the end, Bim's gesture of reaching out to Raja through Tara offers a glimmer of hope for their family to reconcile. This act symbolizes forgiveness and an invitation for unity, going beyond religious and national differences, similar to a Hindu in India welcoming a Muslim in Pakistan to come together as individuals from the same homeland.

## Conclusion

The novel *Clear Light of Day* delves into various cultural themes, such as religion, women's roles, literature, language, and national identity. However, at its core lies the significant impact of Partition, which echoes throughout the narrative. Despite surviving the physical turmoil of Partition, the Das family carries deep emotional wounds. Bim struggles with the aftermath of being separated from her siblings, Raja and Tara, for years due to the divisions caused by Partition. Raja's strong connection with Haider Ali's family and subsequent relocation to Pakistan highlights the painful ruptures within families caused by Partition. Similarly, Tara and her husband's move to the West further emphasizes how this event dispersed and disrupted the family unit. Through the lens of the Das family, the novel poignantly depicts how Partition had a profound but indirect negative effect on Indian families, ultimately impacting their resilience and unity.

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