

**ISSN** INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

**IJELLH**

**International Journal of English Language,  
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



**Volume 7, Issue 5, May 2019**

[www.ijellh.com](http://www.ijellh.com)

Kasish

Designation: Research Scholar

Banaras Hindu University

India

moninayak7@gmail.com

### Family and Community: Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* in Context

#### Abstract

The paper purports to analyse the family and community in Indian society through the reading of the novel *Clear Light of Day* by Anita Desai. The narrative is complex as it has multidimensional perspectives but in this paper an individual's relation to his/her immediate surroundings is going to be scrutinized. Every person is deeply affected by the influence of society, kinship, relatives and community in which the person lives as family is an abode of warmth and encouragement. The influence does not remain for a short period of time but prolongs in the future lives of the upcoming generation. In such surroundings, the birth of conflicts arises out of the diverse choices of each member in the family which ultimately leads to the separation and divergent behaviour of each individual. This novel is in fact the manifestation of such conflicts and their resolution. The novels of Anita Desai deal with the complexities of modern Indian society and delve deep into the psyche of characters where she finds and traces conflict between self and society and to strike balance, characters end in withdrawal, suicide, confinement or nervous breakdown. In the present novel, characters establish a sense of balance and destroy ambiguities. Moreover, it can be remarkably read as: a) siblings relationship within a family, b) role of community in shaping one's behaviour, c) the Indian essence of family in the text.

**Keywords:** Family, Indian Essence, Community, Society, Kinship.

## **Introduction**

*Clear Light of Day* is about the complex relationships amongst family members and community living in Old Delhi, India. The children of Das family are Bim, Tara, Raja and Baba. The children are orphaned when their mother dies from sickness and their father dies in an accident. They rely now on Aunt Mira who is a widow and comes to their family to take care of them. Raja has interest in Urdu language which attracts the attention of their Muslim landlord, Hyder Ali Saheb and consequently Raja pursues his love for poetry in Hyder's library. On the other hand, Tara spends a lot of her time with neighbours, the Misras sisters. There, she meets Bakul, Indian ambassador to the US and falls in love with him and marries him and leaves the city.

## **TARA AND BIM: DOPPLEGANGER PORTRAYAL**

In the beginning of the novel, Tara is seen at her sister's place as she visits her once in three years. Both the sisters reflect about their childhood days and also old jealousies between them spring up eventually. Tara was quiet, less confident and fraught with delicate feelings while Bim was stronger, passionate and much abler in her school with enthusiastic actions. They talk about the wedding of Raja's elder daughter which is going to take place in Hyderabad. Bim has forsaken her presence in the ceremony as she holds a bitter attitude towards Raja that he had left behind Bim and Baba, their retarded brother to suffer in the house; the house which witnessed memories of their childhood and Raja's ambition of being a poet which he had vowed earlier. Both the sisters come to know that they love each other more than before and their bond is strong as ever. Radha Chakravarty observes Bim and Tara as the one is 'other' of another and inseparable from each other. Tara embraces motherhood, as she is a mother of two daughters, the circumstances fall upon Bim which forces her to adopt pseudo

motherhood, mothering Aunt Mira, Baba and nurturing the memories and taking the charge of the reminiscences where their siblings can hold upon.

### **BIM ADOPTS FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY IN THE ABSENCE OF ELDER MEMBER**

In the due course of time, Bim herself does not marry to take care of her brother, alcoholic Aunt Mira and perpetuates her stern desire to become an independent woman. She emerges as a stronger woman, time has moulded her into a more matured woman as she starts to take recourse in small happiness of her life; she mingles with her students and teaches them. For her, there are other things to be prioritised than marriage as in contrast to Tara. Tara wonders about the pathetic situation of Bim that how can she survive in a shabby house, taking care of her brother and teaching history to the young girls in a college? As “Tara was always expecting to find treasure, to make her fortune, discover herself a princess (Desai 157)”. Before her marriage, Tara regularly visits to Misras sisters, their neighbour, a refusal and escape from sorrowful life. A sudden meeting with rich and fortunate Bakul with whom she can wander across world, did not cease her from marital alliance because of procurement of desires and wealth, a seclusion from her boring present life in Delhi.

In *Clear Light of Day*, Desai offers women who, in striving for independence, attain autonomy through assertion of some stereotypical womanly feature of persona. In so doing, Desai frees herself from those persistent explorations of boundaries of feminine sensibility which had become her governing approach in her earlier fiction. With *Clear Light of Day*, a strong, individualized woman character achieves transcendence over internal division and social limitations through celebration of her nurturing feminine self, through approval and accommodation rather than abandonment and refutation.

## INDIAN JOINT FAMILY SYSTEM AND ITS VALUES

In the Indian joint family system, it is usually the eldest member of the family unit who is in charge of holding the dwelling together. The hierarchical power structure often has a grandfather or father at the top of wheel of affairs and is usually a male member. Desai here reverses the gender paradigms. Being a patriarch or a matriarch is a matter of psychic eminence. Bim is gendered as being 'eldest' in her family. Her matriarchal values of warmth as well as her patriarchal values of having power over others make her the first member of the family bearing the weight of family history and responsibility.

The adolescent period of Das siblings shaped their present lives. Family plays a vital role in the growth and development of an individual's personality and wrecked homes undeniably has its worse effect on an individual. While Bim and Raja as the eldest siblings were striving, ambitious and confident about themselves, Tara and Baba were the slightest esteemed and grew up to be reliant on others in diverse ways. The children were scarcely cared for in their household, and so they relentlessly looked for affection from each other. Their experiences in adolescence were responsible for their future selves, including their oft-tense relations with each other. Raja, who was selfish and arrogant, becomes a wealthy, ostentatious man who is still trying to be the hero he idolized, Hyder Ali. Tara is entirely dependent on her husband and others to make decisions for her. Bim witnesses the deprivation of her widowed aunt in her house, the restrictions of marriage, and she decides to survive a life of autonomy and freedom. Aunt Mira, who becomes a substitute mother to them, entertains the children with stories while Bim, Tara and Raja enjoy sleeping in the garden. She provides a means to happiness, something their parents never provided. She becomes the defensive member for the children. Bim and Raja rapidly decline her defending influence but Tara lingers on. She was assured about Tara that her desire to become a mother will be accomplished. Aunt Mira has undergone various phases of her life where she has not

seen any women emancipated or “heroine”. So, she becomes mother to the Das’ children for which she was forced or she forcibly took the guardianship.

### **DIFFERENCES IN NATURE AND CHOICE OF THE SIBLINGS**

Among all characters, Bim, Aunt Mira and Baba only stays at Das home and do not refuse to go along with the sluggish atmosphere, considering it to be the paradise to stay while Tara and Raja seeks denial by marriage, becoming sophisticated, wealthy and adventurous. Raja moves to Hyderabad to follow his hero, Hyder Ali Khan Saheb, Tara marries out of anxiety to leave her dysfunctional family, and Bim and Baba stay behind in the house full of ghosts of their early days. It is also important that their parting is not an artefact of some heinous circumstances, but rather due to their choices. Their “partition” is self-inflicted. The novel is set during the India-Pakistan Partition of 1947, although the lead characters are not directly involved in the affair, the partition affects their lives in consequent years.

In the novel, Bim is constrained to make choices which do not suggest negotiation with a sense of dejection. It becomes a choice of responsibility, where she plays the gender role of a matriarch who undertakes the liability of the family tradition and that of an unaided sibling, Baba, dependent on her for his survival. Desai in this novel reveals how gender roles can resist the masculine and feminine paradigms of activity and passivity based on sex distinction as the male members of the household are rendered as negligent or self-centred (Raja) or weak (Baba). Bim emerges as the matriarch/patriarch to resolve her own conflicts and carry out the responsibilities within the family.

### **NEED TO ESCAPE DUE TO LACK OF WARMTH AND UNDERSTANDING**

Jenni Valjento says in the essay that:

“The paralysis which marks the familial structure in *Clear Light of Day* stems from the parents’ clinging to their comfortable, empty lifestyle in the last days of colonial era. The self-absorbed father is caught in a futile imitation of the colonial glory, even dying by falling at full speed from the open door of his chauffeured car, and remains incapable of the kind of patriarchal authority that could bring structure and security to the family. The sickly and spoiled mother is a sad caricature of the traditional Indian wife and mother: totally detached from her children, she lives for bridge and evenings at the club”.(Valjento 187)

This substantiates the fact that every person in the family is self-centred and way in search for their own reliance and stand for their own ideals. The Das siblings are relentlessly trying to run away from their immediate surroundings. This need is fuelled by the lack of consideration and warmth they acquire from their parents. Raja starts inclining towards Islamic culture in opposition to the wishes of his family; Tara first seeks attention from Aunt Mira and starts to spend more time with the Misra sisters, eventually marrying Bakul and departing old Delhi. Baba also tries to escape his immediate surroundings, although in a more unconscious mode, by engaging himself playing the same music on a loop. These three characters are propelled by the need to suppress unpleasant memories of their childhood. Bim appears to be the only individual who doesn’t want to escape her family and the memories of the childhood. However, she is constantly wounded by her siblings and needs to escape, this time, ironically into the past.

### **RECONCILIATION AND RESOLUTION IS THE ONLY MEANS OF PEACE**

There are resentful feelings between Bim and Raja, the two of whom used to be very close and Bim recalls a letter and shows Tara in which Raja tells Bim that, in the repercussion of

Hyder Ali's death, he will charge the similar rent as their parents were charged. Bim finds his attitude offensive and egotistical; she keeps the letter as a symbol of memory and refuses to go to Hyderabad for the wedding. Tara tries to make Bim pardon Raja but she won't grow weaker by seeking help from Raja. The financial problems of house have made Bim more and more restless and disturbed; she is exasperated and snaps at Baba who doesn't react. Tara and Bakul endeavour to persuade her to seek Raja's help out or at least the help of Bakul but she does not relent. The sultry night before the wedding, Bim realizes that she has been taking her irritation out on Baba and that is undesirable to her and Baba. She begins to reflect intensely about her siblings and how firmly their lives are interwoven. After looking through some of Raja's old poems and looking at an extract from an Indian saga, she finds that she can pardon Raja after all. She is triumphed over by a sense of reconciliation and harmony. The next day, when Tara, Bakul and their daughters are leaving for the wedding, Bim tells Tara that, while she and Baba are not going to the wedding because they do not want to leave the house any longer, she would adore if Raja came back now and brought the whole family. Bim realizes that families, regardless of their disagreement and disputes, ultimately come together.

## **CONCLUSION**

Anita Desai in her novels throws light on the importance of Indian family and its joint system. In India, familial relations are always prioritised and those who are bereft of it are mostly lonely and unresponsive. Through the narrative Desai suggests that family comprises of different members with completely dissimilar temperament and interests. Family is an abode where one should not be differentiated on the basis of any kind of superiority and each member should support one another in the adverse situations with love and care. So, family is one of the few satisfying belongings in times of threat and compulsion, and even though it is not ideal, right and perfect, it is worth investing in. It is the family that makes one what it is

and so one should forgive those whom they adore and feel affection for in order to bring harmony among the family members of the family which ultimately paves the way for long-lasting peace within the family.

.

## Works Cited

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. London, Vintage, 2011.

Chakravarty, Radha. *Feminism and Contemporary Women Writers: Rethinking Subjectivity*. New Delhi, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2008.

Desai, Anita. *Clear Light of Day*. Haryana, Penguin Random House, 2007.

Sengupta, Jayita. *Refractions of Desire: Feminist Perspectives in the novels of Toni Morrison, Michele Roberts and Anita Desai*. New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2006.

Chakraverty, Neeru. *Quest for Self-Fulfilment in the novels of Anita Desai*. Delhi, AuthorsPress, 2003.

Valjento, Jenni. "Staying, Leaving, Returning: The Interconnectedness of Female Identities in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*." *Critical Responses to Anita Desai*, edited by Shubha Tiwari, vol. 1, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2004. Pp.184-194.

