

Feminine Sensibility in the Novel of Clear Light of Day By Anita Desai

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ABSTRACT : Anita Desai has characterized the scenario of women life beatifically in her novels which describe the standard and potentialities of women in a society and she has wonderfully depicted the lives of the women characters and how they strive for their autonomous existence in patriarchal society. The woman characters in the novel have less of the quality of being gently, spiritual beings full devoted to household chores and living as submissive little creatures obeying men's demand satisfactorily. The patriarchal attitude of a society towards women reflects on which feminism brings a drastic sensibility by her novel of Clear light of Day.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Anita Desai is an Indian novelist and the Emerita John.E.Burchard Professor of Humanities at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. As a writer she has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize three times; she received a Sahitya Academy Award in 1978 for her novel *Fire on the Mountain*, from the Sahitya Academy and she even won the British Guardian Prize for *The Village by the Sea*. Feminism differs in different periods and different places. Kamla Bhasin and Nighat said Khan observe that, 'feminism is based on historically and culturally concrete realities and levels of Consciousness, perceptions and actions. This means realities and levels of consciousness, perceptions and actions. This means feminism and meant one thing in the 17th century and it means something quite different in the 1980s. It can also be articulated differently in different parts of the world,' and the definition of feminism that can be applied in India is interpreted as 'an awareness of woman's oppression and exploitation in society, at work and within the family, and conscious action by women and men to change this situation.' In her novels, Desai has obviously exposed the subordination of women in society, and their struggle for self- determination already points towards women's conscious action to change the situation though there is no mention of any action taken by men to help women's though there is no mention of any action taken by men to help women's struggle for emancipation.

The first female character to be studied is Bim, the novel. When compared with other women characters in the novel, like Tara, the Misras girls or Aunt Mira, Bim subverts the traditional model of women. She is portrayed as assertive, firm, and insistent on ruling others rather than to be ruled. She aims at achieving autonomy and rejects the traditional role and destiny of becoming a wife. She appears to be the only one who can achieve a greater degree of individuality in her lived experiences. Throughout Bim's childhood and adulthood, her spatial movements are only confined to places in the house and its limited surroundings: out on the veranda: into her neighbor, Misras' house: to Lodi Gardens, and then to the college as a teacher. Unlike her brother, Raja, and her sister, Tara, who are both able to leave the country, she is the only person in the family who treats her home as the only domain for her survival, and the small neighborhood which she lives in as her territory for movement. The contrast between this apparent confinement and my earlier argument about her individuality will be explained through the study of her lived experiences in her childhood, adolescent and adulthood.

First, I will investigate how her spatial movement in her childhood and adolescence reflect her experiences and also see how history affects her childhood life. In the novel, there are several instances to show that him cannot accept the way women are marginalized in society, and in her childhood and teenage years, she has attempted to break away from all the restrictions that result in women being treated unequally. Her one clear spatial movement, though still within the house is made into men's domain, when she leads Tara into Raja's room. This transgression into men's space and changing into men's attire-putting on Raja's trousers- make her feel superior and confident. The wearing of frocks has made her feel that girls are inferior in status and negligible. What is signified here is that women's attire imposes a certain societal value and expectation on them. Dressing in frocks already limits their movement: a lot of physical activities need to be done with caution: furthermore,

it suggests that they have to behave like a lady, and take on feminine qualities which will prepare them to become good daughters, wives and mothers. Thus, Bim feels that her individuality is suppressed and as such value system is imposed on women from the outside, she is also oppressed by society through its expectations requiring a woman to take on feminine quality. Hence, the wearing of the trousers, which is the symbol of men's power, can be seen as Bim's attempt to raise her status in the family and ask for some kind of recognition normally only given to men.

The other spatial arena, which can show her power and a place that she can gain recognition, is her school. During her school days, Bim appears to recover all the vitality and energy away from home. She appears to inherit all the qualities that are only supposed to be male, for example, she is 'the patrol leader, later a girl Guide, then captain of the netball team, class prefect and the Head Girl Guide, then captain of the netball team, class prefect and the Head Girl.' She can achieve some of the success she wants outside the domestic sphere. Her intellectual strength shows that she is capable of competing with men in society: this intellectual strength enables her to get a job and be financially independent. The other reason that she works hard at school is to escape from the sufferings that she sees in other members in her family. The house is filled with disappointment and anxiety over her retarded brother and the hopeless suffering of her mother. All the sufferings that she experiences at home are suppressed and rarely mentioned or discussed among the children. Only her escape to school can help her attain a measure of self-determination and independence.

Another place that she and Tara visit is Lodi Garden but they are not allowed to walk freely there or risk punishment. When they cannot bear the artificiality of the Misra girls' speech to their suitors. They walk to a tomb. The Misra girls are typical Indian women who stay at home and have all the feminine qualities: they represent traditional values in their acceptance of women's inferior status which Bim despises. Yet, in walking away from the Misra sisters and expressing their difference from the Misra sisters, Bim and Tara met disastrous consequences. A boy flung a pebble at a beehive and Bim, who cannot escape, is stung by the bees. This scene is quite symbolic as it represents how the only female character, who goes against the rules of patriarchal society by seeking equal status with men using nature as a weapon against her wrongdoings.' This is another instance where Bim can be said to be suffering from oppressions from men who punish her for her search for independence.

Though Bim appears to be quite assertive, her role can also be quite contradictory because she takes up the woman's job of looking after the household and other domestic responsibilities. In fact, she is portrayed as quite like motherly-figure. Interestingly, the time when Bim is said to take up household duties coincides with the period of time of the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. The partition, which is a momentous historical event, is interwoven into the smaller events that happen in the Das family. What happens outside in the nation runs parallel in some respects to events that happen in the family. 'When the Indian nationalist was struggling to generate the narrative of united Indian nation, Bimala's life was dramatically overtaken by incidents beyond her control. With the death of the parents, her brother Raja's tuberculosis, and the widowed aunt Mira-masi's gradual retreat into alcoholism, Bim by default had to take over the reins of the Das household.'⁶¹ Instead of a closely bonded family, each individual suffers his or her own misfortunes: the family threatens to fall apart, and Bim is left to hold the family together. In other words, the family is threatened with partition, and Bim has to perform the role of the unifier or integrator. Thus the narrative of an individual family resonates with the large pressures and counter-pressures of Indian nation at large.

However, Bim's dream of having a united family is shattered during the partition war in 1947, and the metanarrative of the nation is linked to the mini-narrative of the family in other way. The partition war in 1947 has led to escape of many Muslim families from India including the family of Hyder Ali, who is so much admired by Raja, and whom Raja looked up to as the perfect role model. In turn, Hyder Ali has been fond of Raja as a child. With the departure of Hyder Ali from India, Raja, attracted by Hyder Ali's sophisticated life, also leaves his old house and heads to Hyderabad. The war that results in the separation of two nation states runs parallel to the separation of Bim from Raja. Bim's sisterly love towards Raja and her act of taking up the duties of looking after her family members imply that family and the house they live in mean a lot to her. Her acts of self-determination and looking after the family exert contrary pressures and make her an ambiguous character. This ambiguity also suggests that no matter how independent a woman wants to be in Indian society, she can never leave aside or separate herself completely from the traditional duties expected of her. However, we can also argue that instead of having her father or brother take charge of the family, Bim has taken over their position to head the family by using her intelligence, ability and sense of responsibility, and such qualities are lacking in the males like Raja.

In her adulthood, after Raja and Tara have left her and she remains in the house with only Baba, her half-witted, brother to accompany her; she suffers more from suppression than oppression. This is the result of the distance her brother and sister keep away from her. As they have left India and abandoned her alone in the old house, she can have no one to talk to or to share her sufferings of being isolated with the arrival of Tara; she finally has a chance to release her anger by being mean and sarcastic to Tara. On one occasion, for example, Bim teases Tara for not wanting to return to life as it used to be, would you? All that dullness, boredom, waiting. Would you care to live that over again? This comment can also reflect Bim's thought of not having any changes or meaningful existence in her life. She has found her past life and her present filled with boredom and tediousness. She is envious of her sister escaping while she remains in the house healing the wounds she has suffered in her childhood by looking after the family and unable to accept that she has become inferior to Tara and Raja.

The oppression that Bim encounters comes partly from the colonizer, that is, the British, and the changes they brought to Indian society; The British built New Delhi and moved every thing out. Here we are left rocking on the backwaters, getting duller and greyer, I suppose.' This clearly illustrates that not only have her family members abandoned her, historical changes have indirectly influenced their lives. The building of New Delhi by the British during the colonial period had left those living in the old city, like Bim, on the periphery of social change. Without the possibility of any personal escape, and disconnected from social change, they are left decaying in old Delhi. Time appears to have completely stopped in the past.

Though Bim is not able to escape physically from the old house, she can still 'pass through the tunnel' by attaining some form of spiritual enlightenment. At the Misras' house, when she has listened to the songs of Mulk, and heard the difference between the old man's voice (sharp, cracked with the bitterness of experience) and the young man's voice (like a child's sweet and clear), she remembers the line in T.S. Eliot's *Four Quarts*; 'Time the destroyer is time the preserver.' As time goes on, she knows the family bond has been destroyed and the family members are all apart, yet the memories are still embedded in the old house. She has finally received the mental liberation from all the constraint and frustrations she has experienced in the past. Though she is not able to undergo physical transgression, which not even the male characters are able to see, has helped her to go beyond men's space of existence. Coming to terms with her present situation may mean to some as her final defeat-that she has to accept a reality that places women in an inferior status, and there is no way out for women to achieve complete self-determination or liberation. This also reflects the value system in India culture that places emphasis on compromise rather than conflict to solve problems and this may be seen by western women as a denial of autonomy and freedom.. This can also be said to be a typical characteristics of Indian feminism. In an interview with Lalita pundit, Anita Desai claims that the feminist movement in India is very different from the western movement. The Indian women is always working towards an adjustment, a compromise....I think India feminism is more practical than theoretical.' we may believe that Bim 'who had scarified her ambitions and abilities to be "dutiful" is a tragic figure in that she does not comprehend her own wasted potential . This lack of Comprehension of her potential and sacrifices she has made may also be seen as an inability to reach the 'clear light of day.' However, it can equally be argued that Bim's ability to active a cretin kind of independence both intellectually and economically can an intermediary stage in women's fight for their rights and independence.

I will now investigate Bim's relationship with the men in the novel. Though raja is her only male companion in her childhood and adolescence, she still shows her individuality by not conforming top all her. Brother's way of thinking. One instance is when Raja brings her romantic fictions: she feels that she wants 'something different-facts, history. Chronology.'⁶⁸ Though She is accused by raja of not having any imagination; she has her own perspective on the world. She thinks knowledge is much more important that romantic fiction is the appropriate reading matter for women, or is what young women like to read. Once again, Bim is able to show her self-determination by choosing what she likes, and defies her brother's conventional by choosing what she likes and defies her brother's conventional male perspective on her. Besides, her companionship with the male shows her attempt to trespass into the men's world. Though at first she is accepted, such acceptance later turns to rejection when raja abandons her and leaves the house. Bim is eventually through out from the men's domain of recognition. Her encounter with Bakhul and Dr Biswas also shows her individualism. When they are at the Misras, and Bakhul cannot be the 'chairman' of the meeting. Thus, Bim is able to show her power against male dominance by not remaining silent or submissive in front of men like her sister. This shows that she is capable of behaving unconventionally.

Her short encounter with Dr. Biswas who is interested in her and wants to marry her also shows that Bim is not the same as other ordinary women in India. Her refusal to marry Dr. Biswas shows that she has her own freedom in marriage. However,

Dr. Biswas sees Bim's refusal to marry him as a result of her family responsibility and that assumption shocks Bim. Dr. Biswas's view of Bim as a self-sacrificing woman arises mostly from traditional values: Nevertheless, Desai has actually used Bim as a means to mock and reject earlier discourses that portray Bim as a means to mock and reject earlier discourses that portray women as self-sacrificing heroines arousing sympathy in others. 'The rejection of marriage and love on the part of a young woman for the sake of providing for her family is a perennial theme in Bengali literature...By making Bim "reject" Dr. Biswas because she considers him a wife and not because she is burdened by department family members, Desai parodies the sacrificial heroin popularized by the stalwarts of Bengali fiction and cinema.' This is consistent with her earlier rejection of romantic fiction and those patriarchal assumptions that make Raja offer her the romantic fiction.

The second character to be discussed is Tara. She appears to have escaped from the sufferings and oppressive atmosphere in her childhood house after her marriage and residence in a foreign land but I will argue in the following paragraphs that the changes she thinks she has accomplished are just delusions.

Part one of the novel describes the memory she has after returning to her childhood home. Her reason for the return to her domestic home is to seek cultural continuity. Tara seeks continuity from her frequent trips home and achieves a sense of permanence.' However, as the narrator shows, the way she expresses this desire sounds forced, as if what she says represents what Bim wants rather than her own thoughts. This shows that after marriage, she has lost much of her self-identity and determination and is like an object molded by her husband. Her spatial movement, like all her travels, is not individualistic but accompanied by her husband: even her escape from her domestic home is only the result of her marriage. Hence we cannot say that she has attained liberation at all from such physical movement away from her domestic home to her marital home in America. Her reliance on her husband shows her lack of self-determination. In Tara's case, ironically, physical movement is not described as a sign of women's liberation from their subordinate position to men or from the domestic sphere. Though Tara seems mobile and Bim immobilized in their childhood home, in fact, Bim attains greater self-determination by being mistress of her own house, and as an unmarried woman, gains better control over her own life.

As a child in the childhood house, Tara feels it is filled with boredom and dullness for her, the house is a place of ignorance, death and hopelessness. She is ignored by her parents who spend time with each other reading poetry and having their own expeditions outside. All the sufferings that she experiences are suppressed and no one in the house ever pays any attention to her. She later confesses that her marriage to Bim is a means to escape as a child. Finally after marrying, it seems that she can physically escape from the tunnel and see the 'Clear Light of day.' But still we can see that mentally she cannot free herself from all the past memories like seeing her father injecting her mother and thinking he is murdering her, or feeling guilty about leaving Bim when her sister is in need of help. Besides, the escape from her childhood house to her marital home abroad only represents her movement from one type of oppression to another. In her childhood house, she is ignored by her siblings: in her husband's domain, he treats her like an object to be molded at his will. There is really no true escape for her.

As an adult, coming back to India has matured her mentally and she seems able to see things objectively. She is able to study Bim more carefully and know that her sister is not contented with her life. She realizes that what she thinks of Bim when she is a child is no longer true. Bim is no longer competent and capable of managing the house. She even blames Bim for having no taste of her own choice.⁷³ This interior monologue shows that Tara is disappointed to see the old house remaining motionless while she appears to have changed so much herself. Her physical movement seems to arouse in her a new perspective of seeing things. However, she has not realized that her perspective of seeing the old house and judging Bim is just superficial. The old house has certainly changed with the death of Mira-masi and leaving of Raja and Tara herself. Tara also reveals her shortcomings as a woman subordinated by patriarchy: as she is trained by her husband to become an organized person, she cannot tolerate the disorganized and messy way that Bim has managed the house.

Through her stay in the house in Delhi, we know about her relationship with her husband. Most of the time, we can see her husband is not able to understand her. He wants Tara to live a life according to his own will and wants to instill in her the qualities that she lacks, like 'decisions, firmness, resolve'; however, he has paid no attention to her emotions and needs. Therefore, in her husband's domain, she feels constrained, tired and powerless. The reason why women are portrayed as often irrational and powerless. The reason why women are portrayed as often irrational and powerless has been examined by the feminist critic, Gillian Rose. Rose claims that identity is formed through relations of power. 'Who I am depends on me establishing in what ways I am different from or similar to someone else.' And she further states that certain identities are constituted as both more powerful and more valuable than others. Thus males usually think of themselves as superior and rational while women are considered as irrational and emotional.

This perspective has resulted women like Tara being made valueless in the society. When she is asked to go to her uncle's house, she refuses: this shows that she has some degree of self-determination. She felt she had followed him enough, it had been such an enormous strain always pushing against her grain, now she could only collapse.' The house has also aroused in her the strength to refuse her husband's demand. Though she feels anguished and impatient at the sight of old habits and things still kept in the house, the place reminds her of the pleasure that she is no longer able to have under her husband's control. It is a place of nostalgia for her: 'if she had been sure Bakul would not look out and see –she would have run down the veranda steps and searched for one (i.e. a guava) that was whole.' Although Tara remembers the childhood pleasure of eating a guava, her long subjection to her husband makes it difficult for her to renew this pleasure. She suffers much of the oppression from her husband who sets demands that she should act the sophisticated wife and hostess all the time, so much so that even the simple childhood pleasure of eating a guava cannot be enjoyed openly. Her husband may not be actually watching her but she never feels herself away from his surveillance. Her own desires must be suppressed as she acts out her husband's idea of good wife. She cannot retain her individual identity. Besides, no matter how her husband treats her, she still remains true to him. This can be an example that illustrates the oppression of women resulting from Hinduism. She remains subservient towards her husband in her mumbled and muttered refusals to go with him to his uncle. She is more or less inarticulate in her response to her husband's will trying but not entirely able to act out the role of the docile silent wife. 'Silence is a symbol of oppression, a characteristic of the subaltern condition. On the contrary, speech signifies self-expression and liberation.' the later characteristic of self-expression is only evident in Bim.

We can see that both sisters have undergone different experiences in the Childhood, adolescent and adulthood. Both have undergone in the childhood, adolescent and adulthood house and such experiences of past arte always with them. The depiction of the historical events as they interact with the individual lives of the family also raises questions and doubts about the independence of Bim and Tara. It is interesting to note that even though the two sisters are not under any parental control in the family, which will obviously obstruct their freedom, they are still unable to attain their freedom and free themselves from the society's expectation of women- that is to be good wives or sisters looking after the household duties. We can be suggested here is that the patriarchal system is still so strong even after the independence of India that women are not allowed to transgress into the public sphere. This echoes Ray's observation that 'if during strategically included within the immediate nationalist platform, after independence the difference between the genders was effectively deployed to shore up patriarchal power and to establish the firmness of national purpose.' Besides the women's relationships with the men in the novel, like Bim's affection towards Raja and Tara's dependence upon her husband, show that however independent women Characters seems to be, they all need male support for survival. Therefore, we cannot say that remaining single means one is 'modern, or having he states, 'staying within marriage or walking out of it or staying single does not by itself help us to decide who is modern and who is not. What matters is what a woman makes her life and how far she is able to go towards selfhood and decide things for herself.'

What Bim has experienced in her life can be like history repeating itself. Just as Nanda Kaul is haunted by her past memories of her marital home in Carignano, Bim is also reminded of her past memories in the old house in Delhi. 'In Desai, the house becomes a motif in the structure of the novel. It is a focal point to which the characters' thoughts are inextricably bound-Carignano in *Fire on the Mountain*, the old crumbling mansion in *Clear Light of Day*....Delhi or Kasauli thus represent a nostalgic longing for days gone by even if in some cases the past way of life is rejected.' Nanda Kaul lives in Carignano, which is a place that has a history of spinsters and widows living in it, and Nanda Kaul has become the successor of the life of aunt Mir who remains inseparable from the house. Aunt Mira, as a widow, is abandoned by her husband's family and lives with Bim's family. There she is suffocated by the children's needs which need to be looked after and all the house hold duties she effect of and a channel to escape from all the torments she has to suffer in the house. After her aunt's madness and death. Bim is left as the successor to look after the household on her own. The theme of loneliness and isolation is being carried from Desai's earlier novel. *Fire on the Mountain*, but instead of ending on a note of fatality *Clear Light of Day* ends in affirmation. With Bim reconciling to the change that she had hitherto violently rejected.'

Though at the end of the novel. We know Bim able to understand her present condition and accept it, we still do not know how she is going to live her life. Will she choose the path her aunt has chosen or will her life in the old house improve with her better understanding of the situation she is in? Will the later novel, *Fasting and Feasting*, also show the sufferings that women characters go through in the household domains and do their experiences repeat what has happened before to other women characters in *Fire on the Mountain* and *Clear light of Day* All these questions will be tackled in the following chapter.

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