



## Research Article

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Partition Shadows in *Clear Light of day*: Reflection of ConflictDr. Prakash Chandra Biswas<sup>1</sup>, Md. Jobaar Talukder<sup>2\*</sup>, Md. Asif Karim<sup>3</sup>, Kh. Jarin Tasnim<sup>4</sup><sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, Department of English, Islamic University, Kushtia- 7003, Bangladesh<sup>2,3,4</sup>Research Scholar, Department of English, Islamic University, Kushtia- 7003, Bangladesh

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the intricate portrayal of familial and religious conflict in Anita Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day* within the context of Partition fiction. By focusing on sibling relationships, particularly the dynamic between Raja, Bimla, and Tara, the narrative reflects broader socio-political tensions between Hindus and Muslims during the Partition of India. The study delves into how Desai uses indirect methods to depict the Partition's aftermath, highlighting the psychological trauma and cultural fragmentation experienced by Indian families. The analysis also explores the impact of British colonial policies, such as the "divide and rule" strategy, and their contribution to the enduring mistrust between communities. Additionally, the paper discusses the transformation of female characters, particularly Bim, who embodies the "new woman" challenging traditional gender roles and societal expectations. By examining these elements, the paper underscores the novel's representation of personal and collective struggles during a pivotal historical period.

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

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## INTRODUCTION

The partition of India in 1947 remains one of the most traumatic events in South Asian history, leaving a lasting impact on the region's social, cultural, and familial landscapes. Literature from this period, often termed "Partition fiction," provides profound insights into the human experiences and societal upheavals that accompanied this historic divide. Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*, while categorized within this genre, distinguishes itself by its nuanced portrayal of the partition's aftermath rather than its direct depiction of violent events. Desai's novel delves into the lives of the Das family, whose internal conflicts mirror the broader tensions between Hindus and Muslims, as well as between India and Pakistan. The story unfolds through a layered narrative structure, revealing the profound psychological and emotional impacts of the partition on the characters. The sibling relationships, especially the strained bond between Raja and his sisters Bimla and Tara, symbolize the fragmented identities and cultural dissonance that arose in the wake of partition. Raja's fascination with Islamic culture and Urdu literature, despite his Hindu background, highlights the cultural interweaving that existed before the British-implemented policy of "divide and rule" exacerbated communal divisions. The novel also underscores the psychological trauma experienced by the survivors, a recurring theme in Desai's work. This trauma manifests in their unconscious actions and decisions, reflecting Freud's concept of the re-enactment of traumatic experiences. Raja's departure to Pakistan, his strained relationship with Bim, and Bim's subsequent evolution into an independent woman encapsulate the personal and societal transformations triggered by partition.

Moreover, *Clear Light of Day* examines the role of women in post-partition India, with Bim emerging as a strong, independent character who defies traditional gender roles. This portrayal challenges the conventional expectations of women in a patriarchal society, positioning Bim as a "new woman" who rejects the notion of subservience and embraces a self-reliant identity. In essence, Desai's *Clear Light of Day* offers a localized yet profound reflection on the partition's enduring impact on Indian families. Through its intricate character dynamics and exploration of cultural tensions, the novel provides a poignant commentary on the complexities of identity, trauma, and resilience in the face of historical upheaval. This research paper aims to analyze these themes in depth, drawing connections between the Das family's experiences and the broader socio-political context of partition, while also examining the evolving roles of women in this transformative period.

## METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employs a qualitative literary analysis framework to explore the representation of conflict and its aftermath in Anita Desai's novel. The study involves a meticulous close reading of the text to identify key themes related to the partition of India, such as cultural dissonance, psychological trauma, and the shifting roles of women. Historical and socio-political contexts will be integrated through secondary sources, including historical accounts of the partition, critical essays on Desai's work, and theoretical frameworks like Freud's concept of trauma and re-enactment. Additionally, feminist literary criticism will be utilized to analyze the portrayal of

female characters and their evolving roles in post-partition society. This interdisciplinary approach, combining literary criticism, historical context, and psychoanalytic theory, aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how Desai's narrative reflects the enduring shadows of partition conflict on individual identities and familial 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 7th manual for the citation and references of the works and quotations used in this paper.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Desai's *Clear Light of Day* is categorized within the Partition fiction (Osman, 2015, p. 15). Partition fiction, a genre intertwined with the tumultuous events of Partition, captivates numerous Indian and Pakistani writers who delve into the harrowing narratives preceding this historic divide, showcasing its detrimental effects on the people. While these novels are deeply influenced by the Partition, they often don't center directly on its chaotic events. For instance, Desai's work touches upon significant incidents like Gandhi's assassination but steers clear of vividly depicting the violent clashes between Muslims and Hindus, political turmoil, or British intervention during that period. Instead, her focus lies on exploring the aftermath of Partition within Indian families. Khan Touseef Osman observes a shift in Partition literature since the 1980s, where authors utilize indirect methods to portray the social upheaval preceding the divide. In Desai's *Clear Light of Day*, sibling conflicts symbolize broader tensions between Hindus and Muslims, as well as India and Pakistan, vividly portraying the profound impact of Partition on familial bonds. As it is said, "*Clear Light of Day* gives its audience a localized view of history in the sense that it illustrates the profound consequences of the Partition on the members of the Das family" (Osman, 2015, p.15).

The core of the novel centers on Raja's fraternal bond with his sisters Bimla and Tara, as well as their relationship with their affluent Muslim neighbor and landlord, Hyder Ali. The narrative unfolds with Tara's return to her childhood home, where Bimla and their younger brother Baba have resided for years. Meanwhile, Raja resides in Pakistan, busily preparing for his daughter's wedding. The novel employs a layered narrative structure, functioning as "a memory within a memory," guiding readers through India during the Partition era as remembered by Tara and Bimla from their childhood to adulthood. The narrator seamlessly transitions between past and present, offering insights into the dynamics of sibling relationships amidst the backdrop of British departure from India.

Returning to the Das family home in Old Delhi evokes memories of Tara's childhood, both pre- and post-1947. Tara's reunion with Bimla prompts them both to reminisce about the bygone days of their family.

The story commences with the reunion of the two sisters in their ancestral home in Delhi, where tensions immediately arise due to their contrasting personalities. Tara is depicted as reserved, shy, and lacking in confidence compared to her bold and self-assured sister, Bim. Despite this, Tara presents herself with a more modern appearance. The primary source of conflict revolves around Bim's resentment towards Raja for abandoning his family and aspirations of becoming a renowned poet to settle in Pakistan. As adults, Bim takes on the responsibility of caring for their family members, including their mentally ill brother, Baba, and their aunt Mira before her passing. Additionally, she tends to Raja during his illness, while Raja himself admires their Muslim neighbor, Hyder Ali, eventually marrying his daughter, Benazir, and relocating to Hyderabad after inheriting Ali's property. As Hashmi says,

*In both sisters' lives, unhappiness and boredom in their house are distinct memories, relieved only by the presence of kind and affectionate (though perhaps not always the best) neighbors; though Tara's life changed with her marriage and stay abroad. Their brother Raja's life was different from theirs even in Delhi, but it changed radically after he left. (1983, p. 56).*

*Clear Light of Day* exposes the deep-seated religious biases between Muslims and Hindus that persisted in Indian society for decades leading up to the Partition. This animosity among different caste and religious groups was exacerbated by the British policy of "divide and rule." (Gairola, 2017, p. 124).

In the work "The British Art of Colonialism in India: Subjugation and Division," Aziz Rahman argues that British colonialists employed various strategies to effectively govern India. They capitalized on the diverse nature of Indian society, particularly utilizing the tactic of "divide and rule" to maintain control with ease. By instigating conflict between Indian castes and religious factions, the British aimed to exploit Indian lands. They deliberately fomented discord between Muslims and Hindus through legislative maneuvers, alternating between enacting and revoking laws that favored or disadvantaged each group, while also employing propaganda to stoke civil unrest. The British were apprehensive about the prospect of Muslim-Hindu unity, and when such alliances emerged, as seen in support for the Mughal prince against British rule, the colonizers favored Hindus by enhancing their educational opportunities and marginalizing Muslims. Additionally, they manipulated economic policies to sow animosity between the two groups, particularly exploiting Muslim opposition to British rule (Rahman et al., 2018, p. 4).

The profound influence of the "divide and rule" strategy is evident in Hyder Ali's clerk's detestation of Raja's Hindu presence in Hyder Ali's library and aunt Mira's rejection of Raja's decision to accompany their

Muslim neighbor. Raja's frequent visits to Hyder Ali annoy the old man, who works as a guard or clerk in Hyder Ali's library. He appears uncomfortable and exhibits a clear dislike for Raja's presence in the library. Desai unveils the old man's prejudiced thoughts towards Hindu people as he observes Raja's presence in the library. Desai says:

*He presented himself at the Hyder Ali's next day, was shown in by a suspicious servant, waved into the library by a preoccupied Hyder Ali in his office room, and let loose amongst the books and the manuscripts that were to him as the treasure of Haroun al Raschid. He would sit there for hours, daily, turning over the more valuable of Hyder Ali's manuscripts under the watchful eye of an old clerk... who glared, slit-eyed, through his wire-rimmed spectacles at this son of the heathen allowed by some dangerous whim of the rich landlords to touch holy manuscripts he should not have come near. (Desai, 1980, p. 48)*

Raja's habit of visiting Hyder Ali's home every day worries his aunt Mira as well. Desai describes Aunt Mira's behavior, stating, "Aunt Mira seemed as perturbed as the old clerk by this strange friendship" (48). As a Hindu, Aunt Mira appears not to trust their Muslim neighbor. This reflects the prevailing mentality among Hindus at that time, especially since this period is marked by conflict between Hindus and Muslims. This conflict leads to mutual distrust between the two groups. Desai herself refers to Raja and Hyder Ali's friendship as a "strange friendship," primarily because it is rare for members of both groups to be friends during this period. This is why Aunt Mira thinks it is dangerous for Raja to associate with Muslims, even if they are neighbors. When Raja starts attending Hyder Ali's gatherings, Aunt Mira disapproves. 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)*

Hyder Ali, who symbolizes noble Muslims, is portrayed as a generous and kind-hearted character. He is depicted as a charitable, decent man who treats Raja with kindness, disregarding any religious differences. Conversely, Raja is primarily focused on acquiring literary knowledge and remains indifferent to the ongoing religious conflicts. He distances himself from the harsh realities around him and immerses himself in the serene world of Urdu and English literature. This explains his preference for the Urdu language over Hindi.

Raja always feels a strong connection to Hyder Ali's family, frequently attending their evening parties and gatherings to discuss poetry with Hyder Ali. Hyder Ali, in turn, treats Raja like the son he never had. Over time, Raja begins to feel like a part of Hyder Ali's family and starts heeding his advice. As a young boy, Raja is captivated by Hyder Ali's nobility and elegance, "Hyder Ali Sahib used to think of himself as some kind of prince... And Raja loved that" (Desai, p. 25). Recognizing Raja's interest in poetry, Hyder Ali warmly welcomes him to his evening gatherings, where poetry is recited. Raja becomes a regular attendee at these gatherings, where various Islamic topics are discussed, fostering his interest in Islamic culture. As it is said, Raja's passion for the Islamic culture can be seen as Desai's memories of the pre-partition India where the different cultures could co-exist peacefully (Sannrud, 2008, p. 21).

It is important to note that Raja's interest in the Urdu language and Islamic studies is influenced by his awareness, as a Hindu, of the historical significance of Urdu. Desai explains that Urdu was considered an elegant language, having been used during the Mughal rule. Even after the Mughal Empire's decline, Urdu retained its esteemed status. Before the Partition, it was not unusual or dangerous for a Hindu to study the language of Muslims. Students had the option to choose between Hindi and Urdu, as Desai notes, "before the Partition ... students had a choice between Hindi and Urdu" (1980, p. 47). This indicates that Hindus and Muslims once respected each other and coexisted harmoniously until the British employed a "divide and rule" strategy, which incited conflict and mutual disrespect. Due to the religious tensions, Raja's options become limited. His father, recognizing the dire situation in India during this period, opposes Raja's decision.

Rituparna Roy observes the father's advice: "This passage in the novel alerts us to the fact of how the spectra of the Partition was affecting one and all on the subcontinent in 1947" (2010, p. 84). Regarding Raja, he seems taken aback by his father's opposition, highlighting how disconnected he is from social realities. This detachment makes it difficult for him to grasp his father's concerns, leading him to question, "Who will do that to me?" (Desai, 1980, p. 52). His father understands the repercussions of Raja's decision, knowing that neither Hindus nor Muslims will trust him. He explains that both groups will view him with suspicion: "... Muslims for trying to join them,... And Hindus for deserting them" (1980, p. 52).

Raja and Bim were once very close, but their relationship deteriorates after Raja decides to move to Hyderabad following a letter from Hyder Ali, who has relocated to Pakistan. Raja's plan to join Hyder Ali in Pakistan to assist with his business deeply offends Bim, especially since she had cared for him during his illness. The tension between the siblings escalates further after



Hyder Ali's death. Raja writes to Bim, stating she can continue living in the family house if she pays the same rent the family had always paid. Bim finds this letter insulting, which fuels her anger. The growing animosity between Raja and Bim mirrors the broader conflict between Muslims and Hindus, as well as between India and Pakistan.

The catastrophic events of the Partition caused immense physical destruction and loss of life among Indians as "...she is the first introducing deep psychological probing of her characters" (Biswas and Talukder, 2024, p. 549). However, Desai primarily highlights the psychological trauma experienced by the survivors during and after these violent events. This trauma profoundly impacts their psyche, leading to unconscious behaviors where they repeatedly engage in actions reminiscent of those that originally caused their trauma. Tarun Saint says referring to Freud's explanation of the influence of the trauma:

*The traumatic experience repeats itself through the unknowing acts of the survivors, sometimes against their will. Trauma...is a wound afflicted not only upon the body but also on the mind... the wound on the mind is often experienced too soon, too unexpectedly to be known, and is thus not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again repeatedly in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor. Trauma is thus not merely located in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in its unassimilated nature and the way in which it was precisely not known in the first instance returns to haunt the survivor later on (2010, p. 199).*

Saint connects Freud's concept of trauma to Raja's decision to leave his siblings. The violent events of the Partition linger in Raja's subconscious, compelling him to unconsciously recreate similar situations. While he is not physically harmed, the memories of the Partition profoundly affect his psyche, leading him to act in ways that attempt to piece together the remnants of their shattered culture. Although the primary victims of the Partition are the Muslim community, Raja is also affected by the severe incidents in India. This trauma drives him to sever ties with Bim, who responds by doing the same, mirroring the mutual separation between Muslims and Hindus.

Building on Saint's observations, Raja is deeply fascinated by Islamic Indian culture. On the surface, he leaves for Pakistan because he admires Hyder Ali, but symbolically, Hyder Ali represents the Islamic culture that is on the verge of disappearing in India due to the Partition. As a Hindu who values Islamic culture as an integral part of Indian heritage, Raja does not want to lose his connection to it. Desai emphasizes the significance of the Urdu language: "Urdu had been the

court language in the days of the Muslims and Moghul rulers and had persisted as the language of the learned and the cultured" (Desai, 1980, p. 47).

Desai illustrates how colleges during the Partition period became hubs for political discussions and plotting against perceived enemies. She also portrays the plight of Hindus like Raja who support Muslims. Fanatical Hindus are willing to fight even fellow Hindus who either remain neutral or support Muslims. Raja discovers that his Hindu friends in college oppose the partition of India and the creation of a separate country for Muslims. Nevertheless, he naively expresses his sympathy for Muslims openly. His Hindu friends, expecting him to be a staunch supporter of their cause, try to recruit him into their anti-Muslim organization. Instead, they find him sympathizing with their Muslim adversaries, leading them to distrust him and conspire against him because of his unusual interest in Islamic culture, seeing him as a dangerous enemy. Desai comments:

*Raja, whose home and family gave him an exceptionally closed and sheltered background, was slow to realize this. The boys had taken him to teashops and given him cigarettes..., he had gone to cinema shows with them, sung songs with them as they cycled back at night. Now they were strangely and abruptly altered. When he spoke to them of Pakistan as something he quite accepted, they... called him a traitor. (1980, p. 57)*

Raja's character serves as a manifestation of Anita Desai's own beliefs and perspectives. He not only embodies the notion of peaceful coexistence among Hindus, but also reflects Desai's aspiration for a harmonious home that embraces individuals from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. Raja, much like Desai and the iconic national figure Gandhi, shares certain beliefs and traits that form the essence of the novel. Desai's upbringing, attending a Christian and English school near her home where she was introduced to Urdu and the Islamic heritage of India, deeply influenced her perception of the country. She observed firsthand the harmonious blending of Hindu and Muslim cultures, remarking that India, for the most part, was a place where cultures merged rather than clashed. Raja, although Hindu, embraces Islamic culture as an integral part of India's rich history. In this sense, he symbolizes the peaceful coexistence of cultures that Desai celebrates, echoing the sentiments of Gandhi, who championed similar ideals.

Gandhi's name may only appear briefly in the novel, but its presence carries significant symbolic weight. Gandhi envisioned an India where all races and classes coexist harmoniously. He advocated for unity between Hindu and Muslim communities, stressing the

importance of creating an atmosphere of harmony to facilitate their coexistence. As Kripalani says,

“For Gandhiji the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity was no less important than that of the removal of untouchability. He held and often said that if this problem was not satisfactorily solved, rivers of blood would flow in India. He also held that Hindu-Muslim unity was vital to our struggle for our freedom”. (1970, p. 388)

Both Gandhi and Desai expressed optimism regarding the peaceful amalgamation of India's diverse cultures and were evidently opposed to the partitioning of the country. Raja serves as the bridge that connects the divided cultures and embodies the essence of Gandhi and Desai's message. He is linked to Islamic culture through his relationship with Hyder Ali and to Hindu culture through his sister Tara, who maintains contact with him.

The Partition not only divides the Das family but also shapes each member's identity, leading to significant transformations and tensions within the family. This transformation is a direct result of the Partition's impact and the influence of British culture. As a result, the family members drift apart, leading to increased tension between them. Raja is not the sole individual affected by the Partition; Bim, who was once close to him and shared a love for poetry, undergoes a notable change over the years following Raja's departure for Pakistan. She now derides Raja's poetry in front of Tara, illustrating how her heart has hardened towards her brother due to his absence and the passage of time. The conversation between Tara and Bim reveals 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)*

Raja's departure paves the way to Bim to have a leading independent character which is unfamiliar in the Indian society. The Indian women's mentality was also influenced and changed because the British colonizers imposed their cultural principles on the Indian society. Ramesh Kumar Gupta states that women today reject the concept of “Angel in the house” and revolt against the traditional image of the woman. The “new woman” is aware of the social belief which is women have a lower position in the family (2007, p. 152). Therefore, this new woman decides to fight the old traditions and turn against the restricted norms and currents. Thus, Meera Bai defines the concept of the “New Woman,”

*The word New Woman has come to signify the awakening of woman into a new realization of her place and position in 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).*

Anita Desai's female characters are not just revolutionary; they possess remarkable strength to confront the repercussions of their choices. Desai herself expresses her interest in characters who deviate from the norm and resist the prevailing trends, stating, “I'm interested in characters who are not average but retreated or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against... the general current” (Gupta, 2007, p. 153). Bim stands out as an extraordinary woman among the female characters in the novel. She exhibits leadership qualities and an independent spirit, firmly believing in her individuality and ability to navigate life without being reliant on a man. Neeru Tandon suggests that Bim's independence and self-reliance attract admiration from men like Dr. Biswas and Bakul (Tara's husband). Despite this admiration, Bim declines Dr. Biswas's proposal of marriage to safeguard her autonomy (1980, pp. 49-50).

In her childhood, Bim displays a keen interest in the “man's world” by venturing into Raja's room, exploring his possessions, and even trying on his clothes. Her act of donning male attire serves as a foreshadowing of her future as an independent woman who challenges traditional gender norms. It also reflects her awareness of her status as a “new woman” within her family, where she is often treated as inferior to Raja. When she holds up Raja's trousers against her waist, she proudly remarks to Tara that she appears almost as tall as he does, signaling her belief in gender equality and challenging male dominance. However, Tara dismisses Bim's assertion, insisting that the trousers are far too long for her, symbolizing society's rejection of women's aspirations for equality. Both girls are intrigued by the idea of wearing male clothing, which highlights their consciousness of their inferior position. The trousers serve as symbols of masculinity and superiority, prompting Tara and Bim to seek a new, more empowered identity through their adoption.

*Suddenly they saw why they were so different from their brother, so inferior and negligible in comparison: it was because they did not wear trousers. Now they thrust their hands into their pockets and felt even more superior- what a sense of possession, of confidence it gave one to have pockets, to shove ones' fists into them, as if in simply owning pockets one owned riches, owned independence. (Desai, 1980, p. 132)*

Bim is an epitome of the Indian woman in whom the British principles are implanted. As a little girl, Bim enjoys the role of a leader in her school. She works on asserting her independent identity which is considered a hybrid identity (Stoican, 2019, p. 47):

*At school Bim became a different person - active, involved, purposeful. A born organiser, she was patrol leader of the Bluebirds when still a small pig-tailed junior, later of the Girl Guides, then captain of the netball team, class prefect, even - gloriously, in her final year at school - Head Girl...To Bim, School and its teachers and lessons were a challenge to her natural intelligence and mental curiosity that she was glad to meet. (Desai, 1980, pp. 122-123)*

Bim embraces her role as an influential figure in society and rejects the notion of being treated as an outsider. She actively seeks to participate in social activities and strives to effect change within her community. In contrast, Tara demonstrates a lack of ambition and strength of character. She harbors a disdain for school, preferring isolation and eschewing participation in any form of activity—a trait that frustrates Bim. When Tara expresses reluctance to serve the sick in the hospital, Bim admonishes her for her perceived weakness and underscores the aspirations of the “new woman,” who seeks to break free from isolation and domestic confinement, aspiring instead to make a meaningful contribution to society. This rejection of traditional female roles highlights Bim’s determination to challenge societal norms and assert her independence. As Bim says:

*Too fine a lady to step into the hospital ward? The smells upset you, do they? The sights keep you awake at night, do they? Oh, you poor little thing, you’d better get a bit tougher, hadn’t you-auntie’s baby? Otherwise, what good will you ever 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)*

According to Hindu tradition, women are expected to prioritize serving their husbands and children. Additionally, they are often perceived as vulnerable beings who require male protection and are deemed incapable of leading independent lives. Tara embodies aspects of this traditional Hindu woman, reliant on male protection. In contrast, Bim rejects this stereotype and chooses to challenge it.

The contrast between the two sisters becomes evident early on. While Tara expresses a desire to become a mother, Bim mocks her and shares Raja’s ambition of becoming a hero in the future. Bim faces a constant struggle to break free from what she sees as the confining constraints of her gender role. Bim struggles to

abolish “her imprisoning female condition,” (Stoican, 2019, p. 47). She endeavors to assert her own beliefs in a society that often denies the individuality of Indian women, a challenge made more difficult by the lack of support from those around her, including the women in her life. Bim’s insistence on education and independence, values that may not align with traditional expectations for women, fuels her frustration. This frustration is evident when she protests against the early marriages of the Misra girls, emphasizing the importance 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)*

Bim’s refusal of Dr. Biswas’s marriage proposal is directly linked to her strong sense of individuality. Upon evaluating his character, she discerns his deeply traditional views regarding women. Despite his profession as a doctor, Dr. Biswas consistently appears hesitant and lacks confidence, prompting Bim to mock him. However, Dr. Biswas fails to grasp the true reason for Bim’s rejection. She becomes angered when he assumes that her primary goal is to conform to the traditional role of serving her family, as expected of women in 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)*

Bim adamantly rejects the notion of conforming to traditional gender roles, refusing to be relegated to the role of the “angel in the house” whose sole purpose is to tend to domestic duties. Unlike her sister Tara, who embraces feminine pursuits like shopping and cooking, Bim displays little interest in traditionally female activities.

She attributes her college degree solely to her own efforts, recognizing that in a patriarchal society, women must educate themselves without encouragement from others. Despite her father's neglect in educating her about his business, favoring Raja instead, Bim refuses to be marginalized. She becomes a history professor at a women's college through her own determination, securing her livelihood and independence.

Similar to how Desai uses Raja to bridge the gap between Hindus and Muslims, Bim serves as a symbol for breaking down gender barriers and challenging the notion of female inferiority. Her refusal to marry stems from her desire to avoid being treated as the "other" and perpetuating traditional gender roles. As it is said,

"Desai's exploration of gender and politics goes beyond individual struggles; it extends into a critique of Indian nationalism. She argues that gender issues were notably absent from the political discourse of liberation and rejuvenation highlighting the need for women to assert their place in a society undergoing significant political and social changes" (Talukdar and Biswas, 2023, p. 17)

Bim's frustration with her father's neglect highlights the patriarchal nature of society, where women are often overlooked and underestimated. She sees herself as a missionary, striving to enlighten others and instill her progressive beliefs. Bim not only imparts historical knowledge to her female students but also teaches them to aspire to a new, empowered form of womanhood, different from the constraints she and Tara faced in their youth.

*When Bim becomes a full-grown woman, she breaks all the traditions and the social norms which restrict women and she does all what she wanted to do when she was a little girl. She grows more confident, independent and becomes an educated woman. Gupta believes that the direct reason behind Bim's individuality is that Bim's parents barely existed in the house. They spent most of the time outside the house playing cards or doing business so they were not that kind of parents who used to instruct their girls and to teach their traditional role. She says that Bim had (as a little girl) the free will to choose her way of thinking and she chose to be independent (1980, p.156).*

Bim acknowledges the traditional expectations placed on her, yet she refuses to accept them as her ultimate life goal. Unlike her aunt Mira and sister Tara, she is self-sufficient and does not rely on "masculine forces" to meet her needs. Bim embodies the woman described by Simone de Beauvoir, who, once she breaks free from dependency, undermines the very foundation of a system built on her reliance. With this newfound

independence, she no longer requires a male intermediary between herself and the universe (Gupta, 2007, p. 158).

Tara finds herself torn between two options: either to conform and be submissive or to embrace practicality and rationality. Her husband, Bakul, influenced by Western ideas introduced by British colonizers, strives to instill in Tara a sense of practicality, rationality, and confidence. Bakul consistently admires Bim for her independence, rationality, and self-assurance, a fact that Tara is keenly aware of. Tara, in turn, greatly admires Bim's bravery and her ability to carve out a new way of life in India, a feat that Tara struggles to emulate due to her own lack of confidence.

Ironically, Tara feigns practicality and rationality solely to appease Bakul, thus engaging in a different form of submission. She conceals her true nature out of shame, believing it to be inferior. Tara even views her own cultural background as rustic and less desirable compared to the Western culture that her two daughters have embraced while living in America. As Desai remarks:

*Now and then one (fruits) fell to the ground with a soft thud ... If she had been younger- no, if she had been sure Bakul would not look out and see- she would have run down the veranda steps and searched for one that was whole ... She wondered if her girls would do it... No. they would not. Much travelled, brought up in embassies, fluent in several languages, they were far too sophisticated for such rustic pleasures, she... felt guilty over her own lack of that desirable quality... She had fooled Bakul into believing that she had acquired it, that he had shown her how to acquire it. But it was all just dust thrown into his eyes. (Desai, 1980, pp. 11-12)*

Elena Stoican delves into Tara's childhood, highlighting her aversion to school. Unlike Bim, who embraces the school environment, Tara finds it disagreeable. She prefers the comfort of home, which she perceives as a small, safe space. To Tara, school represents a vast and intimidating place, where she feels threatened and mocked by various forces. As Desai describes it, "school to Tara was a terror, a blight, a gathering of large, loud, malicious forces that threatened and mocked her fragility" (Desai, 1980, p. 123). Additionally, the friendships formed with boisterous and crude classmates, described as "loud, vulgar, vigorous young girls in the class, so full of unpleasant secrets and revelations," are unpleasant to Tara (Desai, 1980, p. 123). Stoican notes that Tara is consistently excluded from school gatherings and is treated as an outsider within the school community (Stoican, 2019, pp. 48-49).



Tara's disinterest in school reflects her inclination towards her traditional role, finding solace and protection within the confines of her home. This preference for domesticity is underscored by her desire for "motherly protection" and the wish to avoid engaging with the outside world, as exemplified by her longing to hide under Aunt Mira's quilt. Her isolation from her classmates leads them to perceive her as snobbish and conceited. Tara's reluctance to participate in feeding the poor at the hospital further highlights her weakness and aversion to engaging with social activities beyond her home. Her disdain for the hospital's dismal atmosphere reveals her inability to confront life's hardships, prompting her to seek refuge in isolation. Ultimately, Tara's decision to marry Bakul is driven by her desire to evade responsibility for her family members, showcasing her lack of courage to confront life's challenges, opting instead to escape from them. As Desai says:

*The kind of atmosphere that used to fill it when father and mother were alive, always ill or playing cards or at the club, always away, always leaving us out, leaving us behind- and then Mira-masi becoming so-so strange, and Raja so ill- till it seemed that the house was ill, illness passing from one generation to the other so...the only thing to do was to get away from it, escape.... (Desai, 1980, p. 156)*

Tara's reliance on Bakul stems from her need for someone to embrace her weaknesses and provide protection, aligning with the traditional notion of women seeking authority figures to depend on. She blames her parents for their absence and welcomes marriage as it offers her the masculine authority embodied in Bakul, highlighting her departure from being a "new woman." Excluded from her siblings' world, Tara feels like an outsider, lacking the confidence she might have gained through inclusion. Desai remarks on the divergent childhood experiences of Bim and Tara, noting how Bim's confidence contrasts with Tara's lack thereof. While Bim receives attention and validation from Raja and others, Tara's impression of Bakul before marriage is influenced by his attention to her, as she yearns for recognition amidst familial neglect. Gupta concurs, attributing Tara's marriage decision to her longing for attention in the household.

Despite Tara's traditional way of thinking, Gupta believes that Tara also reacts "in radical ways to the set of conventional constructs." Despite Tara's continuous obedience to her husband, she is aware of her blind obedience and sometimes questions it (158), a characteristic not found in the traditional woman. She comes to a realization that she does not like to be controlled by Bakul each time. She intentionally refuses to obey Bakul when he commands her to join him going to one of his cousins. She feels that she cannot continue following him blindly forgetting herself or her identity, "She felt she had followed him enough, it has been such

an enormous strain, always pushing against her grain, it had drained her of too much strength, now she could only collapse inevitably collapse," (Desai, 1980, p. 18).

Tara exhibits an awareness of the concept of the "new woman," yet often behaves in accordance with traditional gender roles. Positioned between these two identities, she differs from her aunt Mira, who embraces her role as a traditional woman. However, Tara's actions often align with traditional expectations. Towards the end, Bim's gesture of reaching out to Raja through Tara suggests a glimmer of hope for the family to reunite. Symbolically, Bim's act of forgiveness symbolizes an invitation for unity, transcending religious and national divides, akin to extending a welcome from a Hindu in India to a Muslim in Pakistan to come together as individuals belonging to the same home.

## CONCLUSION

*Clear Light of Day* serves as a multifaceted exploration of cultural themes intertwining religion, women's roles, literature, language, and national identity. At its core lies the profound impact of Partition, a theme reverberating throughout the narrative. While the Das family physically survives the tumult of Partition, they bear deep psychological scars. Bim, in particular, grapples with the emotional fallout of being separated from her siblings, Raja and Tara, for years due to Partition-induced divisions. Raja's close bond with Haider Ali's family, leading to his departure for Pakistan, underscores the wrenching familial ruptures caused by Partition. Similarly, Tara and her husband's migration to the West further underscores the dispersion of the family unit. Through the lens of the Das family, the novel poignantly reflects the broader repercussions of Partition on Indian families, elucidating the indirect yet profound negative impact on their survival and cohesion.

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