

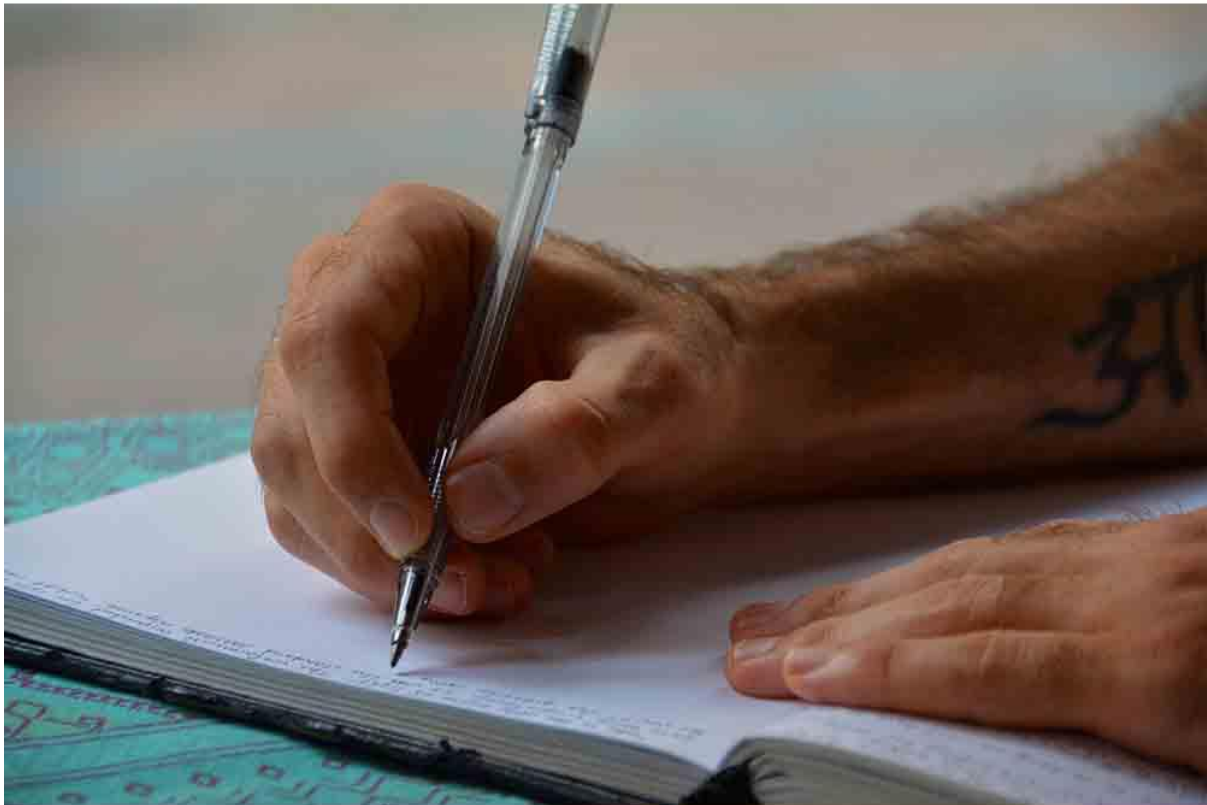
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Family and Community: Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* in Context

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 at present individual's relation to their immediate surroundings is going to be scrutinized. Any person has deep impact of their society, kinship with their relatives and community in which they live in as family is an abode of warmth and encouragement. The impact does not remain for a few times but prolongs in the future lives. In such surroundings, the birth of conflicts is out of the diverse choice of each member in the family which ultimately leads to their separation and divergent behaviour. The novel is in fact the manifestation of resolution of conflicts. The novels of Anita Desai deal with the complexities of modern Indian society and delve deep into the psyche of characters where she finds conflict between self and society and to strike balance, characters end in withdrawal, suicide, confinement or nervous breakdown but 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, choice, kinship.

Introduction

Clear Light of Day is about the complex relationships amongst family members and community living in Old Delhi, India. The Das family's children 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 attentiveness of their Muslim landlord, Hyder Ali Saheb and so 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: Doppelganger Portrayal

In the beginning of the novel, Tara is seen in her sister's place as she visits her once in three years. Old jealousies between the two sisters spring up as they reflect on their earlier childhood lives, Tara, quiet, less confident and fraught with delicate feelings; Bim, stronger, abler in her school with enthusiastic actions. They talk about about Raja's elder daughter wedding which is going to take place in Hyderabad. Bim has forsaken her presence in the ceremony as she holds a bitter outlook about Raja that he has left behind Bim and Baba, their retarded brother to suffer in the house, the house which witnessed memories of their childhood, and his ambition of being a poet, as he has earlier vowed. Both the sisters come to know that they love each other more than before and their bond is strong. Radha Chakravarty observes Bim and Tara as the one are 'other' of another and inseparable from each other. Tara embraces motherhood, as she is a mother of two daughters, the circumstances fall upon Bim for her adoption of pseudo motherhood, mothering Aunt Mira, Baba and nurturing the memories and 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 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.

Clear Light of Day, Desai offers women who, in striving for independence, attain autonomy through assertion of some stereotypically 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 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 of the wheel of affairs or a father and is by and large a male. 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 have power over make her as the first member for 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 individual’s personality and wrecked homes undeniably has its worse effect on an individual. While Bim and Tara 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 diverse ways on others. 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 the entire time dependent on her husband and others to compose 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. 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 provide. 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, something kept on her by force and could anticipate about children.

Differences In Nature And Choice Of The Siblings

Among every 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 a 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 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 own conflicts and carry out responsibilities.

Need To Escape Due To Lack Of Warmth And Understanding

The Das siblings are relentlessly trying to run away 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 his family’s wishes; Tara first seeks attention from Aunt Mira and starts to spend more time with the Misra sisters, eventually

marrying Bakul and departure old Delhi. Baba also tries to escape his immediate surroundings, although in a more unconscious mode, by all the time 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. However, she is constantly wound 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. 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 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. 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 leaving for the wedding, Bim tells Tara that, while she and Baba are not approaching to the wedding because they do not depart 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. Through all these incidents Desai suggests that 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 attain peace.

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