



## GENDER AND FEMINIST DISCOURSE IN ANITA DESAI'S *CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY*

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### ABSTRACT

Anita Desai describes women's potential and standard in society beautifully in her novels. The author has depicted the lives of the female characters and the struggle they have in a patriarchal society beautifully. Anita Desai's fictional world and views on female empowerment. Throughout her novels, Desai depicts the psychological plight of female characters, demonstrating how Indian feminism differs from western feminism. Furthermore, she authentically portrays women's deplorable status in Indian patriarchies. Despite the topic of gender oppression, family relationships, and identity search, there are no heroic characters in her novel. The protagonists are passive and heroic. They are so believable, they feel real. *Clear Light of Day* is a narrative about familial love and loyalty, coping and forgiveness. It tells the story of a family coping with mental illness, political turmoil, and civil war in contemporary India. Despite their lack of gentle spirituality, the women in *Clear Light of Day* obey men's demands satisfactorily because their lives are so submissive. Women's rights reflect feminism's contribution to society.

**Keywords:** Gender, Feminine identity, Anita Desai, female characters.

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## INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai is an Indian novelist and Emerita John. E. At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he is the Burchard Professor of Humanities. For her novel *Fire on the Mountain*, she won a Sahitya Academy Award in 1978. The Booker Prize has been shortlisted three times for her work. As a result of her book, *The Village by the Sea*, she was even awarded the British Guardian Prize. A writer can never be dissociated from his/her time reality. It's inevitable that the socio-cultural-political milieu will find artistic interventions in a writer's texts that reflect the behavioral ethics of that time and place beyond its immediate context. When one considers feminist representations in any writer's text, one questions feminism, its validity and necessity in a given situation. Prior to analyzing Anita Desai's gender/feminist concerns in her novel, it is important to glance through the present day's annals. It is essential to glance through the history of the feminist movement in India and its relevance.

This refers to realities and levels of consciousness, perceptions and actions. This means feminism meant one thing in the 17th century and something quite opposite in the 1980s. Feminism can also be articulated differently in different parts of the world. In India, feminists are defined as "an awareness of women's oppression and exploitation in society, at work, and within the family, and conscious action to change this situation". Women in society are subordinated in Desai's novels, and their struggles for self-determination already point to the women's conscious action to change things, but there are no mentions of any actions taken by men to assist women's struggle for emancipation, nor is there any mention of any actions taken by men to assist women. The first female character to be studied is Bim, in the novel. When compared with other women characters in the novel, like Tara, the Mishra's girls or Aunt Mira, Bim subverts the traditional women model. She is portrayed as assertive, firm, and insistent on ruling others rather than being ruled. She aims to be independent and rejects the traditional role and destiny of wife. She appears to be the only one who can achieve greater individuality in her lived experiences. For the entirety of Bim's childhood and adulthood, she has only been able to move within the house and its immediate surroundings: out on the veranda, into her neighbor's house, to Lodi Gardens, and then to the college. She is the only family member who does not have the option of leaving the country, unlike her brother Raja and sister Tara, who can do so. She considers her home her only domain for survival, and her neighborhood her territory for movement and expression. The contrast between

this apparent confinement and my earlier argument about her individuality will be explained through the study of her lived experiences in childhood, adolescent and adulthood.

## GENDER OPPRESSION AND FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

India, a country where women are routinely trafficked, female fetuses are killed, five-year-olds are raped, and women do not have medical facilities to give birth to their children in peace, where girls are burned as dowry, is a country where women are treated unfairly, treated inferiorly, and manipulated mentally and physically because of patriarchal societal structures. In such a scenario, one wonders at western feminism's potency. The human rights movement and gender discourse are inextricably linked due to how people alike in the country treat women perversely and sadistically in order to make them subservient. According to Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*, the story revolves around the different roles of two sisters in the household, siblings also from the upper middle class in the Indian community, resulting in one woman's departure from home and the remaining of the other in the native country and household environment.

Woman's social and psychological development implies 'dependent, submissive and non-adult' behavior patterns, according to hidden gender norms. Thus, the so-called positive images of the 'good woman' are negative in nature. 'Speech is knowledge' and knowledge is power. Man's supremacy in the political and economic power-game is orchestrated by keeping women quiet or ignorant. Woman's indoctrination with the idea of adulthood as the emergence of female sexuality as a 'danger than a power' and 'male sexuality as a power' altered the meaning of growing up. Because of their ignorance and non-adult attitude, women suffered under powerful male dominated institutions. At the expense of self-ownership, women's sensibilities who were marginally aware of the need for political power continued to enjoy security / male dominance. This paper will scrutinize a woman's struggle for power as a basic demand of her sensibilities.

Anita Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day* is more womanist than feminist in its portrayal of a moderate power struggle through altered 'identity' and 'gender' roles. Woman's desire to imitate man's role is embedded in her unconscious. This is because she feels that man is privileged and power is concentrated in patriarchy. The novel reveals the human tensions between two sisters, Bim and Tara, and two brothers, Raja and Baba. With Baba the imbecile brother and Mira Masi the alcoholic aunt

left behind, Bim the eldest is left to handle the family responsibilities. Tara married Bakul and fled from this life; Raja too, selfishly married a Muslim girl and migrated to Hyderabad (Sindh) to live an opulent life. The action begins with Tara's annual visit to her parents' house, which immediately sets up a power struggle between the sisters. The action begins with Tara's annual visit to her parental house and immediately, the power-related confrontation between the sisters becomes evident. Tara is made to feel like an impotent woman: Bakul, her husband, has to drink milkless tea but there is enough milk for Bim's pet cat. Bim's authority in the household through her marital status and motherhood is determined by a patriarchal power structure.

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The opening pages of the novel reveal clearly that Bim is the most powerful character in the novel. In the game of power, Tara could not excel as she was always 'weak-willed' and never strong enough to 'face challenges'. In her childhood, Bim led her, and now she follows her husband and children. The psychology of the weak developed in her not because of patriarchal control but because of her inherent weakness. Tara, never a serious contender donned the mantle of gender identity meekly as a woman, younger sister and wife. Initially, she was an unconscious victim; but now she resents her position as a doormat. Sexually she is more attractive but she also knows that despite his appearance, Bim has exerted significant power on the opposite sex. The reason for her popularity and

power was her confidence and steadfast life mission. In her younger days, she repeatedly said, "I won't get married." I shall earn my own living and look after Mira Madi and Baba and be independent." After Raja's desertion she accepted the feminine gender role of the family guardian and the bread-winner.

Anita Desai ensures to project Bim's progress through different episodes. The symbolic gesture of pruning Tara's curls or wearing Raja's trousers signifies resistance to women's traditional roles; Bim seeks freedom from the limiting gender identity. Sexual politics deprive her of power and she opposes it by opting for a behavior pattern that is taboo for women. The fact that she smokes, of course, does not confer any power over her, but it signifies her independence. She opts to earn her own living and leads the life of a spinster, but her 'singleness' is not to be questioned. She grows up in the true sense. This bildungsroman portrays her as the archetype of Shakti and knowledge. Bim, in the novel controls the power game; none can really challenge, challenge, dwarf or suffocate her. Desai weaves Bim's intellectual, economic and spiritual rebellion into the narrative structure but avoids erotic longing, in a woman. Desai suggests that woman's power need not reside in sexuality. The same thematic pattern follows all her novels. The images of women radically altered by modern feminist writers illustrate exploitation carried out not by males but by females. In fact, power-madness has trapped females in modern society, an urban society where men stand on the periphery and women battle for power and supremacy. Throughout the novel, power-hungry female characters devise schemes to control and dominate their so-called friends [4]. It is the story of six girls who attend Santa Maria High School, leading predictable mundane lives of domesticity and imagined bliss. They have drifted into their respective worlds of marriages and divorces through predictable roles. As one of the girls now living in London, Swati has been asked to write a 'bold and meaty' serial about urban women. She plans a meeting with her friends from school at Reema's place. Others like Aparama, Surekha, Rashmi and Noor, despite their dislike for Swati decide to join the party because since their school days Swati always had 'some kind of power over' others.

#### **IN THE LIGHT OF DAY, THE PERSPECTIVE OF A WOMAN**

There is no way to avoid the conclusion that Desai is a post-colonialist, as she focuses on women who are either directly or indirectly victims of the conflict between conventional feminism and

Western modernism inherited from colonialism, which is the legacy of colonialism. Her protagonists must conquer their femaleness and non-whiteness, as well as their double otherness. Rather than relying on marriage and family life for fulfillment, they evaluate themselves against two sets of conventions: the moderate ones of their environments and the internal ones for finding satisfaction elsewhere. Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* explains in detail the characteristics of postcolonial literature's identification construction: "In the postcolonial text the problem of identity returns as a persistent questioning of the frame, the space of representation, where image-missing person, invisible eye, Oriental stereotype – is confronted with its difference, it's Others". Anita Desai's book *Clear Light of Day* examines some of the various roles of two sisters in the household, siblings, also upper-middle-class in the Indian community, which leads to the departure of one woman and the remaining of the other in the native country and household world. Bimla (Bim Das), the protagonist, is a single elder sister who must guard her siblings and be the protector of the decaying house in Delhi instead of her deceased parents during partition. Since her elderly brother Raja leaves the family to find employment, she must abandon her private interests and aspirations. This is to provide for an autistic brother and an abusive aunt. Her younger sister, Tara, marries a diplomat and flees the family home's suffocating paralysis for America and Europe. A fictitious maternity raises Bim's personality, and Anita Desai outlines her efforts to broaden it. She as she struggles to reconcile her efforts with a household and culture that frequently stifles them. This book concludes with the heartbreaking efforts of two sisters to illustrate how family and home have influenced their views of themselves and each other.

Bimla Das is an example of self-sacrifice and renunciation. She personifies forgiveness and tolerance. Bimla, which means 'untouched', is an excellent explanation of how Bim lives her life. As well as predicting the future, it can also be used as a tool for planning. She refuses to let others dictate how she lives her life, and never marries. Bim challenges the conventional female image. She is depicted as dogmatic, constant, and determined about ruling others rather than allowing herself to be ruled. She yearns to be independent and opposes the conventional wife's position and fate.

She is the only one in her life who can reach a higher level of individuality. Her house is her primary jurisdiction for life, and her neighborhood is her territory for movement. Anita Desai portrays Bimla Das as a delicate and sensitive character.

When Raja abandons them, she experiences a shock that causes her to lose equilibrium. She's irritable, impatient, grumpy, and whiny already. She leaves for several days to look after, love, serve and suffer for her brothers and sisters. She becomes bitter because of it. When she's home, she mutters and gestures. Tara recognizes excessive worry.

*Clear Light of Day* is a moving, melancholy tale concerning love between siblings and the challenges of growing up in a broken household. It depicts the long-term consequences of a traumatic upbringing and abuse, which are mirrored in the protagonists' psychological problems. It's also a story about women's decisions and shortcomings in a conservative and old-fashioned Indian culture. Desai discusses the fates of women who defied established patterns through sisters Bim and Tara. They are on opposite sides of the woman concept; they reflect defiance and approval, respectively. The plot opens with a description of reconciliation between the girls and then transports the reader back in time to their youth. Their conversations and recollections have caused this transition, which has resulted in their home's evident timelessness. Despite their passion for one another, the sisters' meetings have been awkward and emotional for both of them. Their life decisions, which are so opposed, seem to judge each other. Even though they are blood relatives, they both perceive a spiritual divide that is insurmountable. They refer to the past for explanations due to the distance they maintain from each other. Bim and Tara are confident that their friendship has fallen apart. Their parents' egoism and self-obsession make their home a prime model of dysfunction. Their parents are nothing more than a display of life, two shapes known as a mother and a father in the eyes of their infants. Although they derive most of their criticism and orders to remain silent from their mother, they only receive their father's absence.

### Conclusion

According to the analysis, Anita Desai is clearly concerned with the alignment of power that fragments women through physical, political, economic, and social control. Each of these writers has recommended different strategies, though the result is the same. Her novels show gender and feminist concerns in middle class Indian society with some authenticity. Through formal education, economic self-sufficiency and a change of gender identity and gender role, Offered liberates herself, while Bim is bound to tradition; the six friends disdain male power by defying traditional female norms. Even though their progress is not very smooth, they triumph ultimately through many tactical retreats in these feminist or womanist

novels. As man's powerful status has been destabilized, he is losing out in the game of power as he cannot dwarf, maim, victimize and threaten women. That **historical fiction** novels focus on the realization of power-control and self-awareness. Through the embedded code of social imagination, Desai explores patriarchal oppression through a 'desirable' image of the woman 'the Sati-Savitri-parampara'. Women are physically and sexually too repressed to find their subjectivity. Anita Desai's novels examine how power structures that seek to emancipate women produce and restrict the category of women as feminism's subject.

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