

**IMAGERY AS A CHARACTER DELINEATION TECHNIQUE FOR THE ANALYSIS OF LOSS OF IDENTITY IN DESAI'S "CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY"**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Desai is famous for creating an intense atmosphere in her novels. Being an Indian Feminist writer, her novels deeply reflect the social and cultural background of Indian society. She, being a literary writer, has mastered in delineating various techniques in her novels that distinguish her from her contemporary female writers in literary world. As an eminent figure in the world of Literature, she has employed similes and metaphors in order to find out loss of identity issues in postcolonial era. This paper aims to draw attention of the readers to the hidden underpinnings in her novels.*

**KEYWORDS:** Colonialism, Identity Crisis, Imagination, Postcolonial

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Post-colonialism is an interdisciplinary movement that endeavors to reform the panorama of those colonized countries. While its point of exodus was to examine the lost identities and languages else it turned out to be a rich and multilateral interdisciplinary area under which one can investigate into many concepts and issues with new approaches and views. The traces of colonialism can still be observed in the postcolonial period, for colonialism opened a big wound in the psychology, culture and identity of the once colonized people. The meeting and mixing of completely different cultures in the colonial period led to a great identity crisis and fragmentation in the postcolonial age during which culture is seen as a battleground where postcolonial indigenous and colonizer identities all the time to fight each other. Thus, the major themes in the works written in the postcolonial period have been the fragmentation and identity crisis experienced by the once colonized peoples and the important impacts of colonialism on the indigenous.

Desai is one of the world famous and India's best modern contemporary female novelist, short story writer and screen writer. She has enriched Indian fictional world with her significant literary outputs. She is, originally an Indian citizen, migrated to America. She can be considered to be an emigrant writer of an Indian origin. She has written for both adults and children. She has won Winifred Holy Prize from the Royal Society for *Fire on the Mountain* [1997] and the Guardian Prize for children. Her novels are based on the texture of a rich and splendid medley of images which is functional rather than decorative. Her images are literal, metaphorical and frequently symbolic. *Clear Light of Day* was first published in 1980. The novel deals with the aftermath of what happened in India during the partition in 1947, when British India became independent and was divided into Pakistan and India. Through families

of varying types of cultural heritage the novel shows us some of the consequences the partition had for the nation as well as its impact on a personal level.

In *Clear Light of Day* Desai portrays her characters through a range of symbols and figures. The characters of the novel have to find a way to come to terms with themselves on a personal level, and India needs to find its own path in order to move on. The proposed work will analyze the exploration of character, emotions and their inner desires through imagery.

## **METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This research is qualitative and descriptive. Descriptive research always bases its research on human personal experience. The main characteristic of this research is to assist the readers to work more authentically and constructively.

Cudden demonstrates the term imagery in his book the Penguin Dictionary, as representation of thoughts and objects. “The term image and imagery have many connotations and meanings. Imagery as a general term converses the use of language to represent objects, actions, feelings thoughts, ideas and state of mind” (p.134). Imagery is the very vast term. It is in fact the mental images that approach the writers’ mind, senses and concepts. Golding expresses the term in his own words as, “Images are pictures that can be in the form of simple similes, metaphors, which allow us to better imagine and incidents or scene by drawing on our experience” (Golding, 1954, p.70).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Like criticism on other contemporary writers, there is so much written on Desai has well. She has been appreciated for her extraordinary use of words, symbols and images. Various critiques have explored her style so deeply and sincerely. Shamsi, a Pakistani novelist, highlights Desai’s use of imagery in her novel ‘*Clear Light of Day*’. Her portrayal of imagery and symbolism marked her as a distinguished female writer in the English Literary world. According to her, “The koels began to call before daylight. Their voices rang out from the dark trees like an arrangement of bells, calling and echoing each other’s’ calls, mocking and enticing each other into ever high and shriller calls” (Shamsi, year, p.).

Rao is a writer and teacher of literature and “one of Indian’s leading gay-rights activists. He works as a professor and head of English Department at the University of Pune. He is of the view, “Each novel of Mrs. Desai is a masterpiece of technical skill. In *Clear Light of Day* Desai portrays her characters through various uses of symbols and images, and the language is often very poetic. Her protagonists ‘associate their emotions and feelings with the buds of flower, petals, birds, animals and insects around them” (Reference).

Sharma expresses his words for her in a very positive manner. For him, her writings present a new world of new experiences and times. “Desai is a writer who does not believe in weaving the plots of her novel merely on a figment of imagination. As one delves in the world of Desai, one feels that though a work of fiction, her creations are grounded in lived experiences that humans often come across”.

Larry is an American Journalist who was a South American bureau chief for The New York Times. He now writes about cultural topics. He stated that In *Clear Light of Day* there is very little “plot”, and useful references in terms of genre would be to Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner or Marcel Proust, as Desai explores the effects of history on individual characters, the interaction between past and present, and the workings of memory.

The crumbling, all but abandoned manor house as symbol of a social order in distress: the English may have invented that notion, but their former colonial subjects in India have also proved adept at employing it as a literary device. In the three novellas that make up “The Artist of Disappearance,” Anita Desai uses it twice, in differing circumstances and locations, but to the same convincing and plaintive effect. (Rohter, 2012)

### Analysis

Desai’s female characters are different in their nature and approach towards life. They have clashes in their relationships because of ups and downs in their families. Some of the female characters in Desai’s novel *Clear light of Day* keep themselves busy in their own life and some are deprived of the true colours of life. If especially, talk about female characters, they get the attention of the readers because they belong to middle class society and are innocent in their nature.

In *Clear Light of Day*, Desai has wonderfully portrayed the lives of woman and how they have struggled for their independent existence. She has used various images in this novel to portray the inner self of every character like the character of Tara, the elder sister of Bim, who belongs to Das family. They are sisters but actually opposite to one another. The narrator highlights Bim and Tara’s past experiences and co-ordinate it with their present. In the novel, women characters like Tara moves from one area of cruelty to another, and some characters like Bim have to make adjustment to their own value. “Tara in her elegant pale blue nylon nightgown and elegant slippers and Bim in a curious shapeless hand-made garment, Tara could see she had fashioned out of an old cotton sari by sewing it up at both sides”(Desai, 1980, p.10).

Desai presents the polarities of personalities through images of sound and silence. The despair and isolation of Bim is projected through the image of mosquito. Tara and Bakul and behind them the Misras, and somewhere in the distance, Raja and Benazir, only to torment her and mosquito- like sip her blood----- now when they were fall, they rose in swarms, humming away, turning their backs upon her.(Desai,1980,p.33-50). Like Snail, Bakul's life moves slowly and without any gradual change in her circumstances. Desai explores the depth of Tara’s character through the use of insect imagery. Snail moves like a tortoise. It works slowly and hardly shows any vigilance in activities. Snail takes a lot of time in reaching to its destination, in the same way Tara takes a long time in reaching to her desire life.

The image of sun that instead of providing inspiration and zeal for existence to Tara, shuts her out from the generals of life and isolates her. She drops the window and remains isolated from its ghostly sight.

Bim the eldest daughter, in the family – is the main female protagonist in the novel. The evaluation of Bim with other women character in the novel, like Tara or Aunt Mira, represents a subversion of the traditional model of women. She is portrayed as assertive, firm and insistent on ruling others rather than to be ruled.

With the death of her parents and her brother Raja's tuberculosis, and the widowed aunt Miramasi's continuing retreat into alcoholism, Bim formally take over the charge of the Das household. Instead of the closely bonded family, each individual suffers his or her own misfortunes; the family threatens to fall apart, and Bim has to perform the role of the unifier or integrator. Thus, the narrative of an individual family resounds with the larger pressure and counter-pressures of Indian nation at large. However, Bim's dream having united family is shattered during the partition war in 1947, and the meta-narrative of the nation is linked to the mini-narrative of the family in another way 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 member 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 because of the patterns of duality. This dualistic pattern also suggests that no matter how independent a woman wants to be in Indian society, she can ever leave aside or separate herself completely from the traditional duties expected of her. In her adulthood, after Raja and Tara have left her, she remains in the house with only Baba, her half-witted, brother to accompany her.

She suffers more suppression than oppression. This is the result of the distance her brother and sister keep from her as it constitutes the paradox which disturbs her the most. As they have left 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 in the very first section of the novel, she finally has a chance to release her anger by being mean and sarcastic to Tara. On one occasion Bim teases Tara for not wanting to return to the life they used to have in the past and says,

This comment reflects Bim's thought of not having any change or meaningful existence. Bim is notable to escape physically from the old house, she can still pass the existential test by attaining some spiritual enlightenment. 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.

Bim opts for singlehood, established an identity for herself as a teacher; manages her household activities as well as looks after her retarded brother Baba, the seclusion into home and hearts, the caressing of husband, the nurturing of children are all beyond Bim's imagination. The above analysis of the central character of the narrative, i.e., Bim (in relation to the other major characters of the novel) certainly highlights the inter-play of duality of illusion and reality and the same finds its trace on the perspective of the major characters of the novel. The major characters of the narrative may be tagged as the representing the conflicting voices which counter-point and cross counter-point each other resulting in the creation of the dualistic pattern of existence which poses a great challenge with respect to achieving a negotiated a sense of being in the universe. Voice is presented in the novel as an inescapably intertextual device that foregrounds the composition of subjectivity. The dynamics of lack and desire certainly force the characters to search for the gratification of their desires although the quoted search result in another search although the main protagonist of the novel is able to negotiate this dualistic matrix at the end of the novel. The spatial journey ends at the point which may be referred as the 'initial' point- the point of the primary self. The quest of life and peace, for selfhood is a fundamental human need; the search is the goal of life. This kind of realization can be seen in the evolution of Bim towards the end of narrative wherein all the dualistic opposition collapses

and an existential synthesis takes place. The classical raga of the old master produces the moment of illumination of Bim after which the 'transcendence' happens as she feels,

Her own house and its particular history linked and contained her as well as her whole family with all their separate histories and experiences-not binding them within some dead and airless cell but giving them the soil in which to send down their roots, and food to make them grow and spread, reach out to new experiences and new lives, but always drawing from the same soil. That soil contained all time, past and future, in it (Desai, 1980, p.182).

This is how Bim is able to see the 'clear light of day' wherein the contradiction is harmonized out of which a rejuvenated self emerges celebrating existence. We may believe that Bim who had sacrificed her ambition to be "dutiful" is a tragic figure in that she does not comprehend her own children, are all beyond Bim's imagination. This lack of comprehension of her potential and the sacrifices she has made; may also be seen as an inability to reach at '*Clear light of day*'. Bim's relationship with the male character 'Raja' also holds an important factor. Though Raja is her only male companion in her childhood and adolescence, she still shows her individuality by not conforming to all her brother's way of thinking. Raja is a man of senses and emotion and in this manner a carrier of confrontation signifying the dualistic patterning of the narrative. One instance is when Raja brings her romantic fiction but she feels that she wants 'something different facts, history, chronology'. Though she is accused by Raja of not having any imagination, the counter-point is very subtle conveying strong dualistic weaving. She challenges Raja's assumption 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 herself—determination by choosing what she likes, and defies her brother's conventional male perspective on her though at first she accepts, but such acceptance later turns to rejection when Raja abandons her and leaves the house.

Bim is eventually thrown out from the Raja's domain of recognition. Her encounter with Bakul and Dr. Biswas shows her individualism.

Her reason for the return to her domestic home is to seek a sense of continuity. However, the way she expresses this desire sounds forced, as if what she says represents what Bakul wants rather than her own thoughts. This shows that after marriage she has 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 return 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 experiences are suppressed and no one ever pays attention to her. She confesses that her marriage to Bakul is a means to escape from all the frustrations she experienced and saw in the old house as a child. After getting married, it seems that she can physically escape from this existential decay 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 represent 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 treated her like an object to mould her 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 knows that her sister is not contented



with her life. She realized that what she used to think of Bim as a child is no longer true. Bim is no longer competent and capable of managing the house. She even blames her for having no taste of her own, no likings that made her wish to sweep the old house is of all its rubbish and place in it things of her own choice'. 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 the arrival of Raja and Tara.

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 the qualities she lacks, like decision making and firmness. Therefore in her husband's domain, she feels constrained tired and powerless. 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.

Tara really has no heroes and she lacks the idealistic mind of set shared by Raj and Bim which derives them to catch the heroic models. Much more down to earth unimpressed by lofty goals, as a child she wants simply to grow up to be a mother. As aunt Mira assumes Tara, "There, there, you 'll see you grow up to be exactly what you want to be , and I very much doubt if Bim and Raja will be what they say they will be". The passage continues, "The consoled Tara entirely and turned out to be true as well" (Desai, 1980,p.112).

## CONCLUSION

After completing this paper, I concluded that Desai has a great capability to show imagery in her novel *Clear Light of day*. She uses symbolism in a very fine way and she personifies each character very beautifully. Desai has very beautifully shown the three stages of life, childhood, adulthood, and old age. Her imagery is always in character which suits the lone plight of her characters. Her novels are based on the texture of a rich and splendid medley of images which is functional rather than decorative. Her images are literal, metaphorical and frequently symbolic.

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