

ISSN 0976-8165

The Criterion



The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Bi-Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access eJournal

October 2013 Vol. 4 Issue-V

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Postmodern Female Psyche with Reference to Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*

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Abstract:

The topic of the research paper will be “POSTMODERN FEMALE PSYCHE WITH REFERENCE TO ANITA DESAI'S ‘CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY’” in which analysis would be drawn in considering the conditions of women's subjugation and suppression in our society. It is a matter of utter disappointment that after Independence also, women could not enjoy any kind of rights such as right to property, right of freedom etc. Reference from Anita Desai's ‘Clear Light of Day’ will be there in the paper. The objective of the research paper is to study the feminist literature and to examine the displacement of women through humiliation and the ‘othering’ process within our society. The findings of the thesis will be delineating that women too can represent themselves in authentic way. It will counterpart the reversal of patriarchal thought of considering women as inferior. It can also be seen as the reformation and recreation of identity of women in our society.

Keywords: Feminine Psyche, Subjugation, Assertion, Emancipation.

The starting point of *The Second Sex* is the proposition that women can never be free so long as they think there is an objective idea of what it means to be a woman. There is no ‘feminine ideal’ just as much as there is no ‘masculine ideal’, yet the fact is that whereas men have managed to liberate themselves from such stereotypes, women are still slaves to the idea. In theory men and women are born equal; there is no ‘masculine’ essence or ‘feminine’ essence yet society's expectations are such that inevitably women find themselves unconsciously supporting the eternal feminine idea. As Simone said,

One is not born, but rather one becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as the feminine.

Anita Desai's women characters in her novels rebel against patriarchal community in order to explore their own potential or to live on their own terms, regardless of the consequences that such a rebellion may have on their lives. Self-chosen withdrawal, takes on the form of a weapon, for survival in a patriarchal community. Yet by portraying her emancipated woman as single, Desai does not necessarily negate the institution of marriage or support alienation from society because some of her women characters like Tara in *Clear Light of Day* do achieve fulfillment in their marriages. Instead through Bimla, Desai points to a kind of feminist emancipation that lies not limiting women to their traditional roles but in expanding and awakening them to several other possibilities. Bimla through her individual freedom exemplifies Simone De Beauvoir's description of an independent woman in her book “*The Second Sex*”

where she asserts that *“Once a woman ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependence crumbles; between her and the universe there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator”*.

Yet at the same time Bimla does not negate her desire to nurture others and is able to find a *“room of her own”* in the ‘home’ that she shares with her retarded brother Baba, by celebrating *“her (unbounded) nurturing feminine self...through acceptance and accommodation rather than withdrawal and rejection”*. In an interview, Desai says; *“I don’t think anybody’s exile from society can solve any problem. I think basically the problem is how to exist in society and yet maintain one’s individuality rather than suffering from the lack of society and a lack of belonging”*. In *Clear Light of Day*, Bimla is compelled to make certain choices which do not signify compromise within a sense of defeatism. It becomes a choice of responsibility where she plays a gender role of a matriarch who undertakes the responsibility of the family tradition and that of a helpless being, Baba, dependent on her for survival. Desai in this novel reveals how gender roles can defy the masculine and feminine paradigms of activity and passivity based on sex distinction. While the males of the household are rendered as irresponsible or selfish (Raja) and weak (Baba), Bimla emerges as the matriarch to resolve personal conflicts and undertake responsibilities.

There are two types of women hailing from the same family, the women who do not act but surrender so as to keep the tradition alive like Tara and the women who choose not to surrender but break the convention to face the situation and take up a new road where no one can dictate them like Bimla. Bimla’s only ambition is to be emotionally and economically independent and therefore she refuses to define herself through her husband and rejects the matrimonial chains. She asserts *“I can think of hundred things to do instead, I won’t marry...I shall earn my own living and look after Mira Masi and Baba and be independent.”* She concedes to carry the burden of responsibility and does all manly duties in the family and breaks the traditional norms and currents. She derides the feminine traits- weak will, dependence and shyness. She hates to be an insignificant victim or object for other’s use and pleasure. Desai said, *“Women in our society are still trained from infancy to entertain, to please and to serve men”*. Through role reversal and not through self-warping, she takes on the task of race upliftment. Her social quest guides her to reject male domination.

Reduction of male power is a method by the post-feminists women novelists to assert female power. Desai appears to hint indirectly that financial self-sufficiency and self-assurance can really help women in fighting against all kind of violence and oppression. Bimla, represents a new woman of post-modern times, single, independent, self-assured in spirit and mindset. She obtains everything in life without the help of masculine forces due to her self-confidence and as she said, *“She did not find it- she made it; she made it what she wanted”*. Bimla’s protest is not feminist protest for equality but a post-feminist claim to be acknowledged as an individual-capable of intelligence, feeling her true potential along with the struggle to fulfill her urges and needs; she carves a niche for herself in the man-made world.

She succeeds in defeating the patriarchal forces by refusing to accept the chain of matrimony, by taking up the masculine role of breadwinner of the family and finally by achieving autonomy and self-identity that transcends gender politics. Bimla achieves her femininity self not in fission but in association; not in negation but in affirmation. Her quest, positively affiliation to others, goes beyond her introvert self. Bimla, becomes a marker of

modern India, she teaches in a college and has even refused marriage. Bimla's heroic acceptance of the family and motherhood becomes central to the novel. In a way, she embodies Anita Desai's vision of the new Indian woman. Unlike most Indian girls, she opts out of marriage for a life of chosen spinsterhood to pursue a career and a way of life which she accepts gracefully despite its limitations. She refuses to play the conventional role of a sex-object and of a submissive wife and becomes, in a sense, a truly liberated woman. Her life stands in sharp contrast to the ordinary, mundane life of Tara. Her childhood dream of becoming a heroine comes true. She faithfully follows her ideal and by deciding to sacrifice the happiness of a married life, she gladly pays the heavy price required for accomplishing it. Bimla is a finely etched figure, standing way ahead of the other women in the fictional world of Anita Desai. She is a being with positive responses to life. She is the novelist's study of the intelligent woman's psyche, the woman who is aware of her potentialities and sense of direction. She is a hapless quester who fails in her quest to conquer the world. But in the process, she conquers herself and achieves inner equilibrium. Thus Bimla's conquest of self becomes the leitmotif of the novel. Bimla has a complex and multidimensional personality. Physically she is described as robust and healthy and having a good amount of vigour and stamina. She is, to quote the novelist, "...a born organizer. She was a patriot leader of the blue birds...later of the girl guides, then captain of the net-ball team, class perfect. Even-gloriously, in her final year at school-Head Girl".

Through the character of Bimla, Anita Desai sends a message to all women-not to be cowed down by the problems of life but to be stoic and develop the qualities of assertion and self-respect. The title of the novel "*Clear Light of Day*" indicates the light of emancipation among women who are ardently urged to sweep away the darkness of ignorance. The free will and the lack of training in meekness enable Bimla to pursue her ambitions. It is her extreme sense of responsibility for the family and for Baba which makes her feel strong and in control of herself. She does not lose her courage with the burden of responsibility. She appears to show that a woman can look after the family such better than any man. In spite of all the odds Bimla gets success in building up her ambition, is triumphant in being independent, and it is Tara and Bakul who realizes this: "*Bimla has found everything she wanted in life. It seemed so incredible that she hadn't to go anywhere to find it, that she had stayed on in the old house, taught in the old college, and yet it had given her everything she wanted*". Bimla appears to be a new woman who is independent and liberated and yet there is no mark of arrogance or superiority in her. Bimla is very clear about her aspirations, urges and expectations. Thus, this leads to the very concept of 'new woman'. The new woman that has been explored reveals that Bimla is not the ideal of best woman. She is new in the dimension of time by being a rebel against the general current of the patriarchal society, and in exploring her true potential, along with the struggle to fulfill her urges and needs.

Desai's entire fiction traces the changing image of women in the face of existential dilemmas. Her female protagonists assert their right to exist not as shadows of their male counterparts but as independent human beings with a will of their own. There is a clear tone of resentment and a pressing demand for freedom from traditional fetters which have been imposed on them and their gender. Shantha Krishnaswamy has rightly pointed out that:

Anita Desai's novels constitute together the documentation, through fiction, of radical female resistance against a patriarchally defined concept of normality. She finds the links between female duality, myth and psychosis intriguing; each heroine is seen as searching

for, finding and absorbing or annihilating the double who represents the socially impermissible aspects of her femininity.

Anita Desai depicts the Indian woman as a fighter, a victim, a heroine and ultimately a winner because of her indomitable spirit and attitude of compromise. She has portrayed both kinds of women—those who are symbols of growth and change; those who are powerful means of withdrawal, regression, decay, death and destruction. A woman is a giver of life, a means of moving forward and perpetuating the human race, at the same time the cruel onslaughts of fate lead her despondency and withdrawal.

Simone De Beauvoir stated that for a being to define itself, it must also define something in opposition to itself. “[A]t the moment when man asserts himself as subject and free being, the idea of the Other arises.” For every subject, there must be an object. This reciprocal relation is a primary tenet of existentialist thought, and it points to the fundamental problem with the male monopoly on subjectivity. This idea is uneven and imbalanced when applied to the relation between men and women. Throughout human history, man has occupied the role of the self, the subject, the absolute, the free being. He sees woman as the object, the deviation, the inessential. But as male is considered as one sex then woman is another sex complete in her essence and hence is not dependent on her male counterparts.

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