



Female Socialization in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*: A Postcolonial Feminist Study

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ABSTRACT

By studying *Clear Light of Day* (1980), this research attempts to spotlight the position of Hindu women within the patriarchal society. It presents socialization as a pillar of patriarchal perpetuation. Desai proposes an alternative form of socialization, wherein females are bestowed with a limited degree of autonomy in the construction of their individualistic persona, as exemplified through the protagonist as a contemporary woman. Employing postcolonial feminist theory, this study shows the heterogeneity of women's experiences by scrutinizing Das' daughters. They are brought up within the same middle-class family but have different standpoints concerning their chosen role models, which shapes their future consciousness concerning women's position. Education plays a vital role in women's lives since it acts as a tool to obtain economic, cognitive, academic, social, and political objectives.

1. Introduction

Women are assigned a subordinate position within Hindu society, with socialization being a key factor perpetuating social hierarchy. The socialization process and its objectives are more complex than they initially appear. Hindu principles dictate dual standards to instruct both genders, aimed at maintaining social order through the segregation of females within a hierarchical system, ultimately contributing to gender inequality. This study centers on the socialization process within the Hindu middle-class family, examining various agents and mechanisms used to enforce distinct social roles for each gender, thus imposing women's inferiority.

It is imperative to expose the patriarchal ideology that governs women's conduct and molds it within and beyond the confines of the family. This research examines the socialization process and power dynamics in the family. It addresses how socialization marginalizes women and forces them into oppressive systems like marriage. It also explores the role of women in marital relationships and how they are treated. Furthermore, methods to promote women's empowerment within the family are explored. Understanding the process of socialization, its agents, and the mechanisms used to oppress women is important.

The mother is traditionally responsible for teaching established principles and preparing her daughter for family life. This includes instilling family, caste, and religious values. Pagnis and Verghese argue that "the family thus provides a background that determines much of the child's experiences. From birth onward, children receive clear gender-typed message about what boys and girls are supposed to do" (1994, p. 180). Rules in Hindu norms are based on Hindu religious texts. Consequently, women lack independence and are considered subordinate to men. According to Manu's laws, "in childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent" (Manu, Chapter Five, as cited in Bühler, 1886).

The issue of female education in Hindu society is a complex and multifaceted topic that has sparked many debates and discussions. Education is pivotal in determining women's social status. The different forms of education for both genders and their specific societal goals are examined in this research. The novel under scrutiny focuses on two middle-class families, one of which supports restricting education for females. In contrast, the second family, where the protagonist is born, ignores the education of daughters, thus maintaining patriarchal doctrine.

This research work raises several critical questions whose answers will be sought via the application of postcolonial feminist theory. The primary research questions are as follows: What is the role of socialization in imparting gender-specific roles? What mechanisms are utilized to segregate women in Hindu society? What is the role of education in women's empowerment? How does the promotion of female solidarity contribute to the enhancement of female consciousness? Such questions will be explored in the variety of the contexts the novel provides and discussed in the light of the theory forming the framework of the study.

2. Desai's New Trend in Socialization and Empowerment of Women

Desai, a woman descended from two divergent birth roots—Indian and German—has developed her own distinctive approach to socializing her female characters. She chooses the subtle manner in which the process of socialization takes place. Mishra et al. (2012) argue that socialization deprives women of numerous opportunities. Desai does not adhere to the customary methods of socialization adapted in Hindu society, where senior female members of the family are primarily responsible for teaching daughters. Das' daughters have a limited degree of autonomy in deciding how to engage with their surroundings due to their mother's early death. In Desai's view, the most effective means of constructing female identity is to



grant her the freedom to determine her own patterns of thought and behavior.

Das' daughters lack intentional socialization, which is in line with Hindu norms due to the mother's illness and the father's preoccupation. It does not imply that the children are completely exempt from the process. The advent of Mira-masi marks a pivotal moment for the children. As a widow from a lower social class, she does not possess the same level of power as an ayah or a female helpmate. She recognizes her inferior position in the family hierarchy. Mira-masi's tales serve as an indirect method of socializing young Tara, who is deprived of her parents' attention. The story Mira-masi tells revolves around the queen sending a parrot to her husband 'the king' to take a ruby from the king cobra. It teaches Tara to look for the easiest way, to achieve her objectives, and to rely on her future husband in the latter stages of life.

Desai writes, "Tara was always expecting to find treasure, to her fortune, discover herself a princess" (1980, p.102). Tara wants to attain everything without any personal effort. Through careful observation of Mira-masi's passive demeanor and the negligent behavior of her parents, who prioritize playing cards over their parental duties and exemplify a lack of the fundamental traits of parenthood, Tara internalizes and complies with societal expectations, ultimately surrendering to her subordinate status as a female.

Tara's incapacity to confront the harsh realities of life compels her to seek the path of least resistance in resolving her family's tribulations, in stark contrast to Bim's unwavering determination to confront life in its entirety to make the best out of the worst. Besides, Bim can be perceived as an ideal representation of a contemporary woman who relies solely on her own capabilities. Within the novel, she exemplifies female solidarity and endeavors to stimulate feminine awareness. Her noble aspiration to awaken the consciousness of women within the purview of her family and her occupation as an instructor are undoubtedly commendable. Through the utilization of talk therapy, Bim fulfills the crucial position of a psychotherapist

by providing assistance to Tara. Tara's existence is characterized by indecisiveness and a frail disposition; she is constantly hesitant and fearful. Her alienation has progressed to the point where she finds it difficult to respond to even the most elementary inquiries, despite being aware of the correct answers. By means of Bim's talk therapy, Tara is empowered to articulate her profound emotions and intimate sentiments concerning her marriage.

For the first time, Tara finally feels safe enough to reveal the true reason for marrying Bakul after years of silence. Desai puts it this way, "I only feel it. The thoughts – the words – came later. Have only come now" (1980, p.157). This newfound sense of clarity and understanding engenders a sense of mutual understanding between the two siblings, who had previously been estranged by a wide chasm of misunderstanding since their girlhood. El Saadawi (2015) posits that the potential for a transformation in gender relations lies in the solidarity among women. Tara experiences a sense of internal strength and undeniable satisfaction by giving voice to her authentic emotions and sentiments.

2.1 Male Kin and Female Socialization

The lack of parental involvement in the socialization of their offspring provides the girls with the freedom to engage in activities that align with their personal preferences. As a result, Bim decides to accompany her brother, Raja, who is in the same age group and serves as a role model whom she greatly admires. In contrast to Tara, Bim and Raja tend to spend the majority of their time in each other's company. Raja often brings literary works depicting adventures during boyhood and shares them with his siblings. He introduces Bim into the world of literature. The process of reading has enabled Bim to develop a greater understanding of her own preferences in her desired branch of knowledge. Consequently, she finds that the books brought to her by Raja do not suit her particular taste, which in turn motivates her to seek out more books from her family's bookshelf. Ultimately, this experience helps Bim to both refine her skills and develop a



taste for history, which eventually culminates in her earning a degree in that field.

Raja emerges as a pivotal figure in Bim's socialization process as he, along with his friend, Hamid, facilitates her participation in sports, a gender-specific pursuit typically associated with the male gender. Bim's engagement in sports leads her to a realization of her position in society, a realization that contributes to her empowerment. She embodies a contemplative and reflective persona who chooses to pursue a lifestyle that is distinctively her own, free from the harmful influences of a male-dominated society that perpetuates misogyny, a society that subjugates women by forcing them to internalize their own inferiority and subservience. The Hindu society provides women with limited opportunities to act as autonomous individuals and to experience life on their own terms.

The process of socialization is initiated during childhood; however, for females, it is an ongoing procedure that persists throughout their lives. It involves not only parents but also domestic helpers, ayahs, and eventually husbands. As a fragile woman vulnerable to exploitation, Tara, with no objection, receives training from her spouse to assume the role of a proactive partner. Dube (1988) says that girls are socialized to believe that they should submit to their husbands' wishes. As a consequence of marriage, a woman is turned into a man's territory. A wife's existence is subsequently circumscribed by the husband's intent to designate his territory through dominance, distinct from other males. Bakul attempts to form his wife's personality as per his notion and blames her for not strictly submitting to his constructed way of life "I thought I have taught you a different life, a different way of living" (Desai, 1980, p. 17).

Bakul's approach towards Tara's quest to discover her own identity is inadequate, as he fails to provide her with the necessary guidance to overcome her weaknesses. Instead, he opts to exert his own ideas on her. Moreover, he neglects to empathetically inquire into the reasons behind Tara's pessimistic attitude, choosing instead to assign blame. Tara finds satisfaction in the guidance provided and faithfully follows the prescribed

regimen as a loyal and morally upright wife. For El Saadawi (2015), femininity has been associated with attributes such as fragility and submission. As Tara returns to her natal family, she ceases to adhere to the predetermined schedule of activities outlined by her spouse.

2.2 Mechanisms of Female Segregation

Males have the privilege to wander and spend a significant portion of their time outside their accommodations, while women are confined to the domestic realm. Particularly, the younger generation of women undertakes activities within the boundaries of their homes, therefore being subjected to discrimination and underprivileged of their rights to be dynamic agents in the public domain. Even in instances where women are compelled to venture into the public realm, it is deemed precarious for them to do so unaccompanied. Accordingly, Tara resorts to cycling to school with Misra's daughters as a precautionary measure to ensure her personal safety.

For Desai, the phenomenon of gender-specific clothing is a contributing factor to the perpetuation of female segregation within Hindu patriarchal society. The wearing of trousers by Raja and frocks by Bim and Tara is a manifestation of this phenomenon. The conventional attire worn by the girls poses a hindrance to their ability to move freely. The lack of pockets in their attire is a result of their limited financial autonomy. This lack of financial independence restricts their ability to possess authority in the expenditure of money as they desire and thus makes them dependent on their father for their financial expenses.

Bim is aware of her position as a female in a male-dominated structure who is obligated to comply with female dress codes. Mishra et al argue that "socialization process forces girls to remain suppressed and to feel themselves to be inferior and subservient under male power" (2012, p. 49). Bim is a bold individual who derives pleasure from wearing her brother's trousers. It is Bim who convinces Tara to wear her brother's dress too. Although Tara follows Bim, she is still afraid to be recognized in male dress. The girls' experience with Raja's clothing incites a questioning of the gender-

biased dress regulations that result in female subordination. Desai spells out, “they pranced about the room in their trousers, feeling grotesquely changed by them, not only in appearance but in their movements, their abilities” (1980, p. 132). The trousers’ pockets, serving as an emblem of financial autonomy, astound Bim and Tara and give them a feeling of professional competence and self-confidence. El Saadawi (2015) states that economic entitlements have the potential to transform the position of women and establish parity with their male counterparts.

The dichotomy between the public and private spheres persists into Bim’s later years, dependent on the temporal and political contexts in which women find themselves. It is often the case that women are not expected to venture out into the dusk, particularly during times of national unrest that engender clashes between divergent religious groups. In such instances, women are expected to be chaperoned by men. For example, when Bim expresses her desire to return home alone, Dr. Biswas, a man who has received a foreign education, insists on accompanying her due to concerns about dusk and the national unrest that subject women to harassment. Desai articulates it this way, “you don’t know what you are saying. It is not safe, these days, after dark, for a woman, alone. ‘Of course, it is safe, she said scornfully.’ Anyway, quite safe for a woman like me” (1980, p. 92). Bim, a brave young woman who is able to move around without male escorting, decides to go home alone. Thus, she declines offers of male protection in favor of preserving her autonomous status. It is important to note that Bim is not a person who is reliant on male protection but rather one who is self-sufficient and provides male with protection as exemplified by her younger brother.

3. Educational Institutions Further Marginalize Women

Through educational institutions, a Hindu male-dominated society employs diverse societal agents to marginalize females who are not limited to the domestic realm by their parents. Schools and universities are managed



through a similar sexist mindset that sustains gender-based seclusion via the instilment of skills that are determined to females, the implementation of segregated schooling, and designing buildings in a manner that isolates female students from the larger society. In the novel, it is widely observed that girls attend gender-segregated schools if they are fortunate enough to have the opportunity to receive a formal education. Such institutions represent a manifestation of gender discrimination. Consequently, educational establishments serve as a supplementary mechanism for enforcing the patriarchal ideology of female domesticity. Pagnis and Verghese state that “the major agent of secondary socialization is school” (1994, p. 180). Thus, gender-segregated schools are complementary to the familial system in imparting gender-specific roles.

Das’ daughters study at a missionary gender-segregated school. The establishment, enclosed by high walls, imparts upon its female pupils the notion of traditional female roles, which includes instruction on needle work. It is a skill commonly linked to the household responsibilities typically assigned to women. Thus, girls are forced back to their socialization process, in which a school is an agent in handing down appropriate female social roles. Tara has difficulty learning knitting and is blamed for her lack of concentration. The desires of Tara are constrained by her educators, who compel her to participate in an activity that she detests, leading to her oppression.

The continuation of gender discrimination policy has extended to the college level, as evidenced by Tara’s expression of her disapproval towards such a form of education, which serves as a contributing factor to her decision to withdraw from her degree program. In her view, the college environment is no different from that of a school, given its isolation from the external world, enforced by the presence of high walls. Desai criticizes the policy of female-segregated schooling and writes, “I could have stood college—not Indraprasth college, just down the road no further. And the high walls, and the gate and the hedges—it would have been like school all over again. I could not have borne that - I had to escape” (1980, p. 156). Tara seeks a

transformative experience in her life, yet the academic sphere fails to offer her such an opportunity. Consequently, as a woman constrained by the peculiar circumstances of her household and the pursuit of education within such institutions, she elects to marry Bakul as a means of escape from her boring life.

3.1 Diverse Objectives of Female Education

Education has been a topic of great debate within the Hindu community, particularly with regards to the female gender. Desai elucidates certain developments in the field of women's education, which are widely regarded as indicative of notable progress in women's social status. However, such advancements are not accorded the same level of importance as male education within familial contexts. Typically, the majority of Hindus limit female education to primary schooling. Thus, the pursuit of education is often considered a secondary concern for females, as their primary objective is believed to be marriage. Sudha (2000) indicates that marriage is portrayed as the main goal in the socialization of girls. In a sexist Hindu society, there are multiple objectives with respect to the promotion of female education.

Desai says that the father has a crucial obligation as a progenitor to provide proper guidance and education to his offspring. She puts it this way: "I don't understand the insurance business. Father never bothered to teach me. For all father cared, I could have grown up illiterate and—and cooked for my living, or swept. So, I had to teach myself history, and teach myself to teach" (1980, p. 155). In this regard, Bim expresses her disapproval towards her father for his inability to fulfill his responsibilities as a caregiver and for his disregard for his daughter's life experiences. It is noteworthy that, in a Hindu male-dominated society, even men who have received university education like Mr. Das continue to abide by traditional gender roles and often neglect the education of girls. This approach to female education leads to the persistence of the dichotomy between the private and public spheres, which results in discrimination against the females.

Some Hindu parents make a conscious decision regarding their daughter's education, believing that a restricted education is sufficient for girls. The prioritization of marriage over education is evident in the case of Misra's daughters. Sultana says, "girls have to cope with lack of educational opportunities because their parents think education is primarily necessary for the male children" (2012, p. 12). Upon completion of their secondary schooling, Misra's daughters adhered to their mother's desire for marriage instead of pursuing a university degree, as opposed to Misra's sons, who seek university degrees. Mishra et al. (2021) highlight that early on parents are supposed to prepare their daughters for marriage. Similarly, Tara shares the belief that marriage and motherhood hold greater significance than attending university. Conversely, Bim places a higher value on education than on marriage. Desai believes that education affords women self-sufficiency, and there are numerous other opportunities available to females beyond marriage. Bim, who has achieved a sense of self-sufficiency, has chosen to pursue a career as a teacher, which she finds immensely gratifying.

Bim, the appointed representative of the novelist's point of view, advocates for female education, a concept that constitutes a multifaceted journey encompassing cognitive advancement, promotion of self-confidence, professional accomplishment, financial independence, and ultimately individual liberation. Moghadam argues that the significance of female employment is not any less than that of her education for the changing nature of women's self-esteem and the evolving patriarchal gender relations in society (1999). Bim strives to attain superiority among her colleagues and is successful in achieving the highest marks at school and receiving commendations from the principal.

3.2 Women and Higher Education

Bim perceives the attainment of a secondary education as insufficient to provide her with a sense of satisfaction and plans to seek a degree in history, a discipline traditionally dominated by men. She assumes the duty of self-education due to her parents' neglect of their offspring as undesirable



entities. She is very successful at school and always assumes the role of a leader in whatever actions she takes. She decides the field of her own education without the interference of anyone. Thus, Bim's pursuit of knowledge is a perpetual realm that persists even into her middle age, as Desai elucidates, "and yet packets of books kept arriving—expensive volumes of history and art" (1980, p. 148). Consequently, Bim carries on her self-education and allocates funds towards her intellectual development despite her deteriorating financial circumstances. She possesses an independent cognitive faculty, one that has been forged through her own efforts rather than being shaped by external forces. Her level of professionalism is exemplary, as she continuously seeks to enhance her knowledge in the realm of history, demonstrating excellence in her role as an accomplished educator who assigns a part of her vacations to promote her female students' knowledge.

Throughout the summer vacation, Bim's endeavors to empower her students continue. As a devoted professor, she not only imparts knowledge and critical skills to her students but also instills the importance of time management. She invites them to her personal abode, where she provides them with a history section and a reading list, thereby encouraging them to utilize their free time judiciously and refrain from aimlessly strolling through malls. By encouraging her female students to read certain books, Bim seeks to enhance their cognitive abilities through a love of reading rather than imparting the gender-specific roles imposed by society. Carby states, "education held possibilities for the empowerment of women, who could then shape the course of a future society which would exercise sensitivity and sympathy toward all who were poor and oppressed" (2003, p. 226). This phenomenon highlights the exceptional ability of women to relate to and empathize with each other across apparently diverse cultural and economic contexts and stresses the importance of fostering and nurturing such bonds in the pursuit of greater gender equality and empowerment.

Desai depicts Bim as an ideal model of "female solidarity", a highly efficacious instrument that can be employed to aid women in gaining a

profound understanding of their social standing within a system that is predominantly controlled by males. Bim takes the obligation of educating and training her students to change into a new type of woman, distinct from her generation, much like she did when she was their age. This, in turn, contributes to the promotion of gender equality. Thus, her multifaceted efforts to promote gender equality can be seen as a manifestation of her unflinching commitment to the cause of women's empowerment. Kabeer writes, "the project of women's empowerment depends on collective solidarity in the public arena as well as individual assertiveness in the private" (1999, p. 49). Hence, Bim's style of teaching does not simply involve giving them historical knowledge but rather inspiring them to become self-empowered.

Bim advocates for the pursuit of education and the attainment of degrees among young women prior to their marriage. Her perspective on education extends beyond basic literacy skills and emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive education, which leads to the enhancement of self-esteem through obtaining a degree. This belief stems from her conviction that education opens up a wide range of opportunities for women that would otherwise be unavailable to those who are illiterate. Therefore, Bim suggests that education should be prioritized over marriage. She has resolved not to enter into matrimony, for she understands that there are innumerable other prospects as well as her desire to lead an autonomous life.

4. Conclusion

Implicit socialization has positive or negative effects on women, depending on their environment. The enforcement of gender-specific attire, limitations on movement, and behavior constrains women and serves as a means of socializing them. Tara is influenced by Mira-masi and her mother, who adhere to patriarchal ideology. Observing other females' behavior teaches Tara the conventional female role, leading her to internalize her inferiority. In contrast, Bim recognizes female inferiority and strives to improve her situation. She



decides to accompany her brother, who trains various activities denied to women. She establishes her own identity and gains autonomy in various aspects of life.

Education reinforces traditional female domesticity through its teaching methods and physical infrastructure. Regardless of advancements in women's education, it still upholds gender norms that oppress women, and it is complementary to the process of socialization. Bim is empowered through basic literacy opportunities despite disparities in opportunities and gender-focused education, enabling her to take responsibility for self-education in later stages and thus form her own identity. Higher education plays a crucial role in empowering women by providing opportunities for cognitive progress, professional employment, and economic independence that illiterate women do not have access to. Bim's economic entitlement, acquired via her education and career, elevates her social standing and promotes self-sufficiency.

Female solidarity is considered a driving force behind the unification of women from various social classes, raising awareness among females about their inferior status, and empowering them. Bim, through her talk therapy, awakens female consciousness in her sister Tara. As a female educator, Bim enriches the intellectual, gender, and general status of her female students by being a positive role model and teacher.



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به كۆمهلايه تى كرنى رهگهزى مئ له پۆمانى ئه نيتا دايسى له پووناكى روونى روژ: خویندنه وه يه كى فيمنستى دواى كۆلۆنيا ليزم

پوخته

ئهم تويزينه وه يه هه وليكه بۆ ليكۆلينه وه له ريگاي پۆمانى (پووناكى روونى روژ) (1980) بۆ تيشك خستنه سهر پيگه ئى هيندۆسى له كۆمه لگه يه كى پياوسالاردا، كه تيبدا پرۆسه ي به كۆمه لايه تيكرن وه كوكله كه ي دريژه پيدانى پياوسالارى وينا دهكات. دايسى شيوازيكى جيگره وه ي به كۆمه لايه تيكرن پيشنيار دهكات، كه تيبدا رهگهزى مئ سهر به خوييه كى سنووردارى پيداوه له بنياتنانى كه سايه تى خود له ريگه ي كاره كته رى سهره كيه وه وهك ئىيكي سهرده ميبانه (مۆديرنه). ئهم تويزينه وه يه ئه زموونى ناچونيه كى نافره ت پيشانده دات، ئه مه ش له ريگاي ئه زموونى كچه كانى داس له چوه رچيوه ي تيورى پۆست كۆلۆنيا ل فيمينيزم. كچه كانى داس له خيزانيكى چينه ناوه راست گه و ره كراون به لام تيروانينى جياوازيان هه يه سه باره ت به هه لباردنى نموونه ي بالا كه كارده كاته سهر بنياتنانى هۆشيارى داها توويان سه باره ت به پيگه ي ئن. خویندن رۆليكى زيندوو ده گيريت له ژيانى ئن چونكه وهك ئامرازيك كار دهكات بۆ به ديھناني ئامانجى ئابوورى و هزرى و ئه كاديمى ه كۆمه لايه تى و سياسى.

التنشئة الاجتماعية للانثى في الرواية أنيتا دايسى ضوء واضح للنهار: الدراسة نسوية ما بعد الاستعمار

المخلص

الغرض من هذا البحث هو دراسة الرواية (ضوء واضح النهار) (1980) من أجل فهم الدور المرأة الهندوسية في مجتمع يهيمن عليه النظام الأبوي. توضح الروائية دايسى ان التنشئة الاجتماعية تلعب دورا رئيسيا في الحفاظ على سلطة الرجال وتقترح نموذجًا بديلاً لهذه العملية. تصور الرواية الحرية المحدودة الممنوحة للمرأة في تشكيل شخصيتها، حيث تمثل بطله الرواية امرأة حضارية. يهدف هذا البحث إلى إظهار تنوع تجارب حياة المرأة بواسطة دراسة تجارب بنات داس، وذلك باستخدام إطار (بوست كولونيل فيمينيزم). مع ان البنات تربو في عائلة من الطبقة المتوسطة، إلا أن لهن وجهات نظر مختلفة حول اختيار نموذج يحتذى به، مما يؤثر على تكوين الوعي بوضع المرأة. التعليم له دور حي في حياة المرأة لأنها لها دور في تحقيق الأهداف الاقتصادية والفكرية والأكاديمية والاجتماعية والسياسية.