

## Representing the Unrepresentable in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*

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### Abstract

This article looks closely at Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* from the critical perspective of trauma studies with a particular focus on the representational crisis posed by individual and collective catastrophic events. It positions the novel within the category of partition fiction so as to enable a contextual reading—one that takes the literary-historical milieu as well as the evolution of the genre into consideration. Such positioning makes comparison and cross-referencing between texts possible. Any traumatic event causes a mnemonic gap in the individual victim's consciousness and a politically motivated suppression of memory on the level of the collective. This problematizes its representation in the realistic mode, and partition novelists, especially from the 1980s and onwards, have resorted to indirect means to represent this massive disruption of social cohesion in the subcontinental history. Anita Desai, for example, uses the motifs of sibling rivalry and fragility of social relationships to imply the antagonism between India and Pakistan as well as Hindus and Muslims. *Clear Light of Day* gives its audience a localized view of history in the sense that it illustrates the profound consequences of the Partition on the members of the Das family. This article has attempted to explore how this localized view through indirect means of representation may yield insights into the intersecting points of public and private traumas and their recovery.

Keywords: Trauma Studies, partition fiction, indirect representation

In the 90s of the previous century, Yale University witnessed a boom of research and archival projects dealing with humankind's encounter with massive catastrophes—man-made and environmental, individual and collective—by theorists such as Geoffrey Hartman, Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman. This resulted in the emergence of trauma theory, which draws heavily on Freudian psychoanalysis and the insights of Holocaust studies. Among the many consequences of trauma, particularly highlighted were the cognitive and linguistic breakdowns. To put it more simply, any massive traumatic event like the Partition of British India or 9/11 is so overwhelming that it eludes human understanding as well as linguistic rendition. This has significant consequences to fictional representation of atrocity as trauma inherently resists representation. In addition, a detailed and 'faithful' description of violence runs the risk of becoming a prurient spectacle, often evident in the treatment of rapes in South Asian movies—a tendency summed up by anthropologist E. Valentine Daniel (1996): "Accounts of violence . . . are vulnerable to taking on a prurient form" (p. 4). It is of crucial significance, therefore, to discover the means by which description of violence arouses empathy rather than interest.

The challenge for an oral historian or a fiction writer consists in the mode of representation that may unwittingly slip into pornographic depiction of traumatic events. However, there is a basic difference between an oral testimony of trauma and its fictive rendition. Bearing witness to atrocity involves transformation of the mnemonic fracture of trauma into narrative memory and its complex narrativization in language, a medium inadequate for conveying the horror of overwhelming limit experiences. Bearing witness, therefore, goes through at least two levels of distortion: firstly, the gap in memory trauma leaves needs to be filled in with a surrogate conception of the event; and secondly, when the surrogate invention is expressed in language, it being an elaborate social system of code as a communicative medium, the traumatic event is

translated and codified in terms of the socially validated reality. Therefore, oral narratives of trauma tend to be tainted with some degree of distortion. This poses a crucial challenge to attempts of legal resolution of atrocities or efforts of documentation of trauma in the form of oral histories. Recent enthusiasm in archiving traumatic histories takes these facts into account, so that users of the archives can be made aware of their limitations.

Literary representations of trauma, especially in fictions, have been considered rather successful in depicting, interpreting and analyzing limit experiences than official, traditional or subaltern historiography. Tarun K. Saint (2010) calls fictional representations of the Partition of Indian subcontinent in 1947 'fictive testimony' (p. 47) while the term Priya Kumar (1999) uses is 'testimonial fiction' (p. 201). Fiction bears witness to partition trauma in that the medium has the resources to portray real characters in real situations and the way a massive socio-political upheaval affects the society as a collective entity as well as individuals living within it. Unlike any other linguistic exercise, literature, especially fiction, is able to accommodate mnemonic, cognitive and linguistic breakdowns. This often enables fiction to represent events and their mnemonic and linguistic repercussions as fragmentary. The fractures fiction can contain parallels the fractures in the traumatized psyche, thereby communicating a sense of how it is to encounter a bewilderingly violent event.

Again, unlike journalistic writings or academic histories, the individual does not get reduced to a tiny part of the statistical data about the murdered or the dislocated in fiction. Fictional representation, therefore, allows to display the human dimension of massive traumatic events without running the risk of presenting a faceless mass. The referentiality of fiction to the real event is obviously indirect because even though fiction might draw on real events, it does not have the obligation to correspond to the objective truth. It is referential to the extent that it can produce a reality that might well be the reality of the event being represented.

A scholarly reading of fictions written on the Partition of British India may reveal novel dimensions if the insights of trauma studies into the conflicting demands of an ethical representation of catastrophe are taken into account. Ever since Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* came out in 1956, the Partition has been one of the major preoccupations of South Asian novelists although this enthusiasm reached its peak not until the 1980s. In the literary history of Indian (or South Asian) English literature, the 1980s marks a crucial bend, which suddenly brought it to the mainstream of world literatures in English with the publication of Salman Rushdie's Booker winning novel *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie's novel incidentally also falls into the category of partition fiction. Indeed, most partition fiction writers wrote some of their most celebrated works in the 1980s- Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* (1989), Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines* (1988), Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980), and, not to mention, Salman Rusdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980).

Writing in the 1980s, Anita Desai, Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh could afford to depart from the realistic mode of writing that Khushwant Singh had to use in *Train to Pakistan*, and adopt postmodernist tools: for Desai non-linear narrative and a localized view of history, for Rushdie magical realism, and for Ghosh broken narrative and temporal shifts. However, Bapsi Sidhwa stuck to the traditional realistic mode in *Ice-Candy-Man* though a lot of dream sequences in the novel imply that she was not altogether impervious to postmodernist influences after all. Postmodernist mode enabled the novelists to be better equipped for oblique representation of partition trauma as they were free from the obligation of linear narrative that corresponded to the objective world. In Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*, the Partition only forms the background to the story, so there is no question of direct representation. Far from the actual flames of New Delhi, the Das family's life in Old Delhi changes entirely during 1947-1948; it falls asunder—some of the members dying and others going their separate ways. Almost forty years on, however, the house

does not change a bit as if time has obsessively been stuck in 'that summer' of 1947. Despite its apparent absence, the Partition, therefore, has its ubiquitous presence in the novel in the form of the old house or as the severance of ties between siblings. The present research will point out the various aspects of indirect representation with reference to *The Clear Light of Day* and the idea of indirect referentiality of traumatic events at the core of trauma studies will, therefore, be demonstrated through the analysis of the novel.

Kamila Shamsie (2013) in her introduction to Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* regretted that the book "has not quite been accorded its deserved place as one of the leading 'Partition novels'..." (p. ix). This, she believes, "may have something to do with its sidelong view: glancing allusions and attention to tiny details which echo and reverberate, rather than directness" (p. ix). At a superficial level, it could indeed appear that the novel is about a family, especially the growth of four siblings, a significant part of whose life merely coincides with the Partition. A profounder look, however, will reveal that the novel deals with history's intrusion into a family's existence. It gives a localized view of the effects of a larger historical phenomenon, i.e., the Partition. Readers will not find the terrifying depictions of partition violence, such as trainload of corpses, sacks full of women's severed breasts, beheading of men, women drowning themselves in the well to save their honor, or people's terrible experiences of migration on foot leaving behind what they knew as 'home' all their life. This mode of representation is in contrast with the gruesome scenes of violence, as visualized in the fictions like Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* or in the oral narratives collected and compiled by Urvashi Butalia in *The Other Side of Silence* (1998). The indirect representation of the Partition long prevented the analysis of the novel as a partition fiction, although recent works of critics like Rituparna Roy, Priyamvada Gopal et al. have firmly established it in the category of partition fiction. Roy (2010) writes that, in *Clear Light of Day*, Anita Desai

...moves away from the private universe of solitary, alienated characters [as in her earlier novels] to portray an individual [Bimla], who, though highly introverted herself, has perforce to negotiate with the outside world and public events. And this she is obliged to do because of the intrusion of the events of the Partition in her life. The Partition is indeed integrally related to the plot of the novel, and no matter how unnoticed this particular aspect of the novel has been, it is indubitably true that it is possible to read Anita Desai's fourth novel as one related to the Partition. (p. 82)

The indirect representation of the Partition has actually something to do with Desai's perception of the world and her understanding of the responsibility of the author. She seems to believe that the process of writing involves tearing away layers after layers of illusion in order to get to the truth:

Writing is to me a process of discovering the truth—the truth that is nine-tenths of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath the one-tenth visible portion we call Reality. Writing is my way of plunging to the depths and exploring this underlying truth.... (cited in Roy, 2010, p. 80)

Therefore, she is more interested as a novelist to remove the veneer of 'reality' and find the 'truth' underneath than faithfully depict 'reality.' Through the representation of lives and times of Raja, Bimla, Tara and Baba, Desai demonstrates the impact of the Partition in (inter)personal terms rather than succumbing to the hegemonic narratives of the grand political event of the Independence and its sacrifices. In fact, she makes her protagonist Bim speak mockingly of the high-sounding myths of Indian independence when Bakul asks for Tara's hand, "I don't think you need to ask anyone—except Tara. Modern times. Modern India. Independent India" (Desai, 2013, p. 123).

Talking about Desai's remarkable novel *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), Tarun K. Saint (2010) comments on a general aspect of her style, "The oblique treatment of the chilling facts about genocide as well as... apparently random, manifestations of violence is characteristic of Desai's style" (p. 192). This style of 'oblique treatment' acquires very subtle mode of representation in *Clear Light of Day*. Indeed, not a single description of mob confrontation or communal violence can be found in the novel. The only visible sign of violence is the seemingly everlasting fire in the horizon seen from the rooftop of Das family house throughout the summer of 1947. Desai (2013) implies the psychological impact of the spectacle on Bim:

The city was in flames that summer. Every night fires lit up the horizon beyond the city walls so that the sky was luridly tinted with festive flames of orange and pink, and now and then a column of white smoke would rise and stand solid as an obelisk in the dark. Bim, pacing up and down on the rooftop, would imagine she could hear the sound of shots and of cries and screams, but they lived so far outside the city, out in the Civil Lines where the gardens and bungalows were quiet and sheltered behind their hedges, that it was really rather improbable and she told herself she only imagined it. (p. 67)

The 'sound of shots and of cries and screams' Bim hears are auditory hallucinations triggered by the sight of flames licking up the sky. This way, the public atrocity, though taking place far away, impinges on her psyche and is likely to have an impact on her post-Partition psychological construction and growth as well. In Bim and Tara's conversations about the Partition and the family circumstances of the time, it is always referred to as 'that summer' as if just by indefinitely uttering it, memories come rushing back, suggesting its significance in their collective remembrance, which, Ho (2006) believes, inspires "an elegiac conjuration of lost realities..." (p. 38).

In *Clear Light of Day*, the Partition is actually as much of an idea as it is a cataclysmic historical event that took place at a particular time. Desai never focuses on the violence of the event, but rather on the tensions it causes between Raja and Bimla. '[S]ibling rivalry,' as Suvir Kaul (2011) puts it, is an unavoidable metaphor for the antagonism between two newly born nations (p. 8). Desai, however, turns the metaphor into a literal severance of ties between siblings that play out on the family level pointing to what the subcontinent went through on the national-political level. Afflicted with tuberculosis throughout the summer of 1947, Raja squirms in his bed for not being able to be of any help to his mentor Hyder Ali's family, who are in danger because of the growing communal animosity between Hindus and Muslims. His mental agony is aggravated once he learns that the Muslim family has left their house secretly without even informing him. In such times as the Partition, there is sufficient reason for Raja to be concerned about their neighbors (who are also their landowners), all the more because he is presumably attracted to Benazir, Hyder Ali's daughter. He is only relieved when Hyder Ali manages to send him a letter, one that informs of their safe stay in Hyderabad and conveys Benazir's regards. Bim nurses Raja tirelessly back to health, but as soon as he recovers, he grows impatient to go to Hyderabad to help Hyder Ali with the business instead of looking after the remaining members of the family—Bim and Baba, their parents and Aunt Mira having already died with Tara married to Bakul. Eventually, Raja deserts them one day even after promising Bim that he would look after her and Baba. Much later, when Hyder Ali dies, Raja now married to Benazir, inherits all his father-in-law's properties, including the house rented to Bim and Baba. Immediately after that, Raja writes an offensively condescending letter to Bim, letting her know that she can stay in that house as long as she wants at the same rent the family always paid. Raja's turning into a landlord from the beloved brother of the sister to whom he owes his life pushes their relationship beyond the point of reconciliation. Much of the novel deals with Bim's residual anger for Raja and Tara's effort to mitigate it. Their long antagonism is paralleled with the tension between Hindus and Muslims during the freedom

movement, the Partition and even after the creation of two separate countries along religious lines. Saint (2010) has offered an insightful interpretation of Raja's irresponsible conduct:

...Raja's perception of the death of old Delhi culture [with the advent of the Partition, of course] and his own struggle to retain a connection with remnants of this culture leads to an over-identification with the victim community, damaging his bond with Bim. Though the targets of organised violence in Delhi are Muslims, he is beset by trauma as witness to this violence, and thus unknowingly repeats the moment of separation in the breakdown of his relationship with his sister. (p. 200)

What is apparent here is that the traumatic re-enactment of Raja is a direct consequence of the Partition, and the antagonistic relationship between India and Pakistan as well as Hindus and Muslims is reflected in the severance of ties between him and Bim.

With Desai's insistent motif of sibling rivalry, she implicitly hints at the communal antagonism that is often aptly referred to as 'fratricidal violence.' The Mishra girls, abandoned by their husbands, work tirelessly in their dance school "still prancing through their Radha-Krishna dances and impersonating lovelorn maidens" in a cruel irony of fate, while their brothers sit in the lawn all day sipping whisky bought with their sisters' earnings (Desai, 2013, p. 51). Mulk even accuses them of being too much of penny-pinchers for not entertaining his music guru and accompaniments properly. Besides sibling relationships, other relationships are shown to be very fragile as well in the novel, liable to break down under the slightest pressure of disagreement regarding lifestyles. The Mishra boys' wives refuse to stay with them in Old Delhi for long because they are drawn to the New Delhi glamor, and the Mishra girls are abandoned for their lack of sophistication presumably required in New Delhi high society. It appears almost that there is an invisible partition between the two parts of Delhi as there is between the people who are supposed to be bound together whether by contracts, if not love, or by blood.

Again, as Niaz Zaman (1999) points out, Desai uses images of illness and madness for an indirect representation of the Partition (p. 220). Raja's illness, Baba's retardation, Aunt Mira's spiral descent into alcohol induced madness and the heat of the summer—all create an unsavory environment in the Das family house. But what connection, if any, do they have with the Partition? The present research would argue that these familial afflictions have their roots in the violent political chaos as well. Raja's convalescence is delayed by his frequent fretting about the Hyder Alis, which causes his temperature to rise and results in tiredness and sweating even though Doctor Bishwas says that it is a very mild case of tuberculosis. And the flames Aunt Mira hallucinates as leaping to consume her precipitating her descent into alcoholism might well be induced by the fire seen in the horizon (Desai 2013, p. 118). This is very likely because when she cuts her hand with a splintered glass and Doctor Biswas treats it with extreme gentleness and compassion, Aunt Mira's face beams and "Bim realised with a pang that she had not seen such a happy look on the old lady's face since before the troubles of last summer began" (Desai, 2013, p. 135). Kamila Shamsie (2013) also believes that her "alcoholism in '47 can be seen as a reaction to the madness of the world outside..." (p. ix). Aunt Mira's addiction and insanity at least inhibit Baba's growth because he has been showing signs of remarkable improvement only after her arrival. All this illness and insanity gradually transforms the Das house into an unhealthy abode where "unease was in the air like a swarm of germs, an incipient disease" (Desai, 2013, p. 95).

If one looks closely at the picnic episode of their adolescence, in which Bim and Tara accompany the Mishra boys and girls and the girls' possible suitors, one can find yet another parallel with the Partition violence. The swarm of bees that attacks Bim resembles rioting mobs, and Tara's running away instead of trying to save her sister leaves her guilty for life. She is like a



witness to the partition violence, one who turns her face away from a traumatic event and carries the burden of guilt all her life. Tara's trauma is evident when Bakul states that she has always had a fear about bees that are most likely to trigger her memory of that event in her adolescence (Desai, 2013, p. 228). However, neither Bim nor Bakul pay her any attention, eliminating all the possibilities of coming to terms with her trauma. Desai has indeed a remarkable understanding of the recovery of trauma. She writes, "She [Tara] wanted to ask for forgiveness and understanding, not simply forgetfulness and incomprehension" (Desai, 2013, p. 229). This, as any trauma specialist would agree, is a major step in coming to terms with trauma, and, with this statement, Desai conveys an insightful message to the still-warring communities and countries. By showing the trauma of a personal guilt and the way of negotiating with it, she, in fact, demonstrates how collective/cultural traumas such as the Partition and its after-effects are to come to terms with.

Communal tension during the partition had a linguistic dimension as well, one that eventually led to the relegation of Urdu to an inferior status and official privileging of Hindi. Urdu used to be the official language of Delhi and a much appreciated linguistic medium of creative writing. However, during the upheaval of the freedom movement in the 40s and strengthening of identity along communal lines, Urdu was seen to contain the Muslim tradition while Hindus identified their culture with Hindi. Raja always has a great regard for Urdu, which is further goaded by his unlimited access to Hyder Ali's library and later by his association with elite Muslim politicians and poets. Full of contempt for Hindi, he composes Urdu poetry, following the rich poetic tradition of Urdu. His sisters, however, cannot read Raja's poetry, for after the Partition, students could no longer choose between Urdu and Hindi in the schools of North India (Desai, 2013, p. 72). The respective superiority and inferiority assigned to Hindi and Urdu as a consequence of the Partition demonstrates how it upsets the cultural fabric of Delhi. Raja's admiration of Urdu and his awe of the *mushairas* at Hyder Alis' prompt him to pursue Islamic Studies at Jamia Millia Islamia, a university predominantly attended by Muslim students. Yet, his father tears up his admission form due to his objection to letting Raja go to Jamia, which results in a regular confrontation between the father and the son. Raja holds his ground until one evening his father explains the reason for his objection:

I'm talking about the political situation. Don't you know anything about it? Don't you know what a struggle is going on for Pakistan? How the Muslims are pressing the British to divide the country and give them half? There is going to be trouble, Raja - there are going to be riots and slaughter.... If you, a Hindu boy, are caught in Jamia Millia, the centre of Islamic studies—as you call it you will be torn to bits, you will be burnt alive. (Desai, 2013, p. 79)

Raja, brought up within the confines of a parochial and uneventful Old Delhi society, though aware, to some extent, of the political situation, fails to understand its bearing on the plans of his personal life. The intersection of larger politico-historical events and people's personal lives still eluding him, he wonders naively whether anybody is going to pose a threat to his life if he studies at Jamia Millia. His father makes it plain to him: "Who will do that to you? Muslims, for trying to join them when they don't want you and don't trust you, and Hindus, for deserting them and going over to the enemy. Hindus and Muslims alike will be out for your blood. It isn't safe, Raja, it isn't safe, son" (Desai, 2013, p. 79). Raja relents finally and grudgingly admits himself into Hindu College to study, ironically enough, English literature on the eve of the departure of the British from the subcontinent only to discover that it is a hotbed for Hindu fanatic politics. Imagining him as an easy recruit for the cause of an undivided India, the political cadres approach him and find out that Raja has already accepted Pakistan as an idea because of his association with the Muslim elites at the evening parties in Hyder Ali's house. Consequently, he is branded as a

'traitor' (Desai, 2013, p. 87) and reported to the police as a 'Pakistan [*sic*] spy' (Desai, 2013, p. 90). Indeed Raja's getting involved in the political turmoil was very likely, especially because of his romantic ideas of being a Byronic hero, were it not for his contraction of tuberculosis. Even though Raja (or any other character in *Clear Light of Day*, for that matter) never has any political affiliations, nor does he identify himself with any particular ideology, politics intrudes into his life—so much so that he has to make alterations in his plans of educational specialization. This is how, Desai illustrates the role of politics and history in an individual's life, and she does so not by inviting her readers to witness gory scenes of fratricidal killings, but by showing the socio-cultural, familial and personal implications of the Partition.

If the Partition is a seminal moment in South Asian history, its reverberation in people's life through time is almost as significant. What Saint (2010) terms as '[p]artition's [a]fter life' is to be understood in terms of its ubiquitous consequence in the private and public lives of the people of the region (p. 23). The fractures and fissures of the Indian subcontinent still resonate in the subsequent divisions (the independence of Bangladesh, for example) and various secessionist movements, frequent communal riots and degradation of minority communities. Trauma gets re-enacted in individual lives as well; the victim, victimizer, victim-turned-victimizer and witness—all bear the burden of horrifying memories that resurrect themselves every now and then. Even those who have not been apparently affected by partition violence, have had to readjust their lives to the new socio-cultural formations necessitated by the massive tear in the social fabric caused by the Partition. Bim seems to be completely aware of this when she tells Tara,

Isn't it strange how life won't flow, like a river, but moves in jumps, as if it were held back by locks that are opened now and then to let it jump forwards in a kind of flood? There are these long still stretches—nothing happens—each day is exactly like the other plodding, uneventful—and then suddenly there is a crash—mighty deeds take place—momentous events—even if one doesn't know it at the time—and then life subsides again into the backwaters till the next push, the next flood? That summer was certainly one of them—the summer of '47—. (Desai, 2013, p. 64)

After the Partition changed the world as they knew it till 1947, there seems to have come, in the Das family house, again a time when nothing changes. Desai (2013) treats the house itself as a character in *Clear Light of Day* that has a 'spirit' (p. 31)—one that is in a 'petrified state' stuck in the time of 1947 (p. 18). The house is an embodiment of the Partition, as it were, for since the drastic alterations of the Das family in the years 1947-48, time has come to a halt, and the petrified house represents temporal immobility. Reflecting on how she finds the house always in a petrified state at every return from abroad, Tara tells Bim, "How everything goes on and on here, and never changes.... and it is all exactly the same, whenever we come home" (Desai, 2013, p. 6). Even Baba's repeated record-playing of the music of 40s, like traumatic re-enactment, obsessively holds time back to the Partition. The house is also a site for an eternal presence of the past—the dead and the absent coexisting with the living. Looking at the card table, for instance, Tara reflects, "Here in the house it was not just the empty, hopeless atmosphere of childhood, but the very spirits of her parents that brooded on here they still sat, crouched about the little green baize folding table..." (p. 33). Raja, though absent, is always present in the remembrances, which are not always pleasant, of Bim, who keeps his letter in which he declared his decision of letting Bim and Baba stay in the house as long as they want to at the same rent as a reminder of his fraternal betrayal. His poems—both in Urdu and in Bim's translation—are also preserved as a reminder of his poetic aspirations as well as derivativeness. The pets, though long dead, have now been replaced—Begum's son Badshah now emits insistent barks when Bim, Tara and Bakul are late for dinner and Aunt Mira's jet black cat's place has been taken by a similar one whom Bim indulges with saucers of milk. So,

time has stopped in the Das house just like Baba's record at one point gets stuck in the old, rusted pin of the gramophone. Commenting on the stillness of time, Bim asks Tara, "[I]f we still had Mira Masi with us, wouldn't that complete the picture? This faded old picture in its petrified frame?" (Desai, 2013, p. 7) Only Bim does not realize that she herself has replaced Aunt Mira, completing the petrified frame of the old house. It perhaps dawns on her like a surprise when she good-humoredly claims her prerogative to influence Tara's daughters and Tara replies, "You can have all the time you want with them, ...and influence them as much as you like. In our family, aunts have that prerogative. Like Mira Masi had" (Desai 2013, p. 262). The insistent presence of the past as symbolized by the house, Priyamvada Gopal (2009) would agree, is a significant aspect of trauma and Desai communicates it with subtle detailing, since direct statement of the fact falls into the realm of unrepresentability (p. 154-155).

In the last part of the novel, time at the Das house is again allowed to progress as the siblings' relationships are set to acquire new formations after a long torpor. Tara's visit has been an emotionally charged one for both the sisters and has made Bim reconsider her longstanding antagonism towards Raja. The culmination of her emotional crisis is precipitated by a letter from Mr. Sharma, a partner of their father's business that they have inherited, insisting on attending a meeting. Bim is positively annoyed because she does not understand the business very well, let alone Baba. She decides to sell off their share, so that she does not have to deal with it any longer though Tara suggests that all people concerned, including Raja, should be consulted first. On one particular day before Tara's family departs for Hyderabad, Bim's irritation with every little thing, such as the jingling of a bunch of keys at Tara's waist and her not eating a hot curry at lunch or the sight of a smashed pigeon's egg, keep mounting up until Baba's loud music takes her to the boiling point. She unleashes all her anger on the innocent Baba telling him about her decision regarding the business. If that part of the income is gone, she continues, she might not be able to afford his expenses and Baba might have to leave for Hyderabad to stay with Raja's family. Bim regrets her cruel and illogical onslaught on her mentally challenged brother immediately and feels like the Ancient Mariner of Coleridge's *Rime*:

It was Baba's silence and reserve and otherworldliness that she had wanted to break open and ransack and rob, like the hunter who, moved by the white bird's grace as it hovers in the air above him, raises his crossbow and shoots to claim it for his own— his treasure, his loot—and brings it hurtling down to his feet—no white spirit or symbol of grace but only a dead albatross, a cold package of death. (Desai, 2013, p. 250)

Bim's rash act comparable to that of the Ancient Mariner's arouses a feeling of guilt in her, leading to introspection. Finally, she comes to the realization that everyone—including she and Raja—makes rash mistakes, yet with enough love and affection, forgiveness is the only way to redeem relationships: "Somehow she would have to forgive Raja that unforgivable letter. Somehow she would have to wrest forgiveness from Baba for herself. These were great rents torn in the net that the knife of love had made. Stains of blood that the arrow of love had left" (Desai, 2013, p. 252). If *Clear Light of Day* has any message for enthusiasts of trauma studies, it is that the past has to be confronted and negotiated with, introspection has to be made and apology needs to be granted. This later realization of Bim demonstrates on the level of the family how communal and national violent pasts should be approached and dealt with in order to forestall their repetition. Sitting on the lawn of Mishra house and listening to Mulk's guru's performance, Bim remembers a line from T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*: "Time the destroyer is time the preserver" (Desai, 2013, p. 277). Time indeed can bring cataclysm in the relationships between siblings and among communities, but it is also time that has the capacity to heal traumatic pasts, which cannot be forgotten but only forgiven.



The inherent unrepresentability of trauma poses a great challenge for creative artists, since art, in such cases, strives to represent what is fundamentally unrepresentable. As a postmodernist text, *Clear Light of Day* has the advantage of not sticking to the realist representation of events. In contrast to *Midnight's Children*, for example, *Clear Light of Day* has a much more somber tone and Desai's represents a localized view of the Partition in her novel. Even though the political upheaval of the time is most often relegated to the periphery of the narrative, it affects the life of the Das family profoundly. The only apparent sign of the partition violence in the novel is the flames in the horizon seen from the rooftop, but its psychological effect on the members of the family is enormous. Aunt Mira's spiral descent into alcoholism and insanity, Raja's delayed recuperation, and Tara's virtual escape from the sickness of the environment of the house could all be attributed, albeit indirectly, to the Partition. Bim and Raja's eventual severance of ties replicates the breaking down of the subcontinent into two countries along religious lines. The brilliance of the novel lies in the fact that Desai implies some very insightful ways of recovery from the individual and collective traumas. By admitting and apologizing for the actions of the past, as Desai shows with Tara's example, one can hope to move on from the pernicious pull of the past. Bim herself realizes the vulnerability of human beings to making mistakes and the importance of forgiveness towards the end of *Clear Light of Day*. Though these are individual instances of coming to terms with trauma, their implications for the traumatized collective are equally viable. Desai, by invoking Iqbal at the very end of the novel, stresses the cultural commonalities between antagonistic communities, which can bridge gaps despite the differences. By the localized and familial views of the historical upheaval, *Clear Light of Day*, in effect, indirectly represents the partition trauma, its aftermath, and ways of recovery.

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