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Research Article

The Poetics of Stillness: Reimagining Temporal Stagnation in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*

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Abstract

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The paper aims to analyze the novel through memory, trauma, partition, and familial friction. The aesthetic of stasis has rarely been discussed. This paper discusses how Desai uses the concept of temporal stagnation as a compound narrative and emotional device, in which the characters bargain over histories that are not yet finished. Through its emphasis on the silent beats of the Das family, the paper examines stillness as a form of psychological resistance, especially the central character, whose refusal to abandon the dilapidated house makes immobility an act of agency. The study places Desai's narrative in the context of wider discourses of suspended histories and affective landscapes following phenomenological and postcolonial theoretical perspectives. The study reveals that the concept of stillness is a poetic trick as well as a structural element used to create identity, memory, and relationships among characters. Lastly, the paper reframes the time of stasis as a creative territory that can host emotional healing, ethical reflection, and self-identity.

Keywords: Immobility; Sequential inactivity; Phenomenology; Memory; Poignant resistance, Silence, Temporality

1. Introduction

Clear Light of Day is a major work in the context of modern Indian English fiction because of its ability to explore the world of memory, home, and the intricacies of family attachments. The novel takes place in the aftermath of partition in Delhi, and the narrative pace is slow, lacking any dramatic build-ups, unfolding instead in quiet contemplation and in reminiscence. The trauma of partition, gender roles, and childhood memories have been explored in previous discussions of the novel, but the silence that pervades the narrative has received less scrutiny. The "stasis" of time in the novel is not just a description but a means of telling and a philosophy that demonstrates how characters are handling their unaddressed emotional issues.

The quietness of *Clear Light of Day* is very much linked to the spatial and psychological dimensions of the characters. Das house, with its quiet rooms, the neglected garden, and the memories it holds, is a microcosm of suspended time. It is a burden, as well as a strength, to Bim, who is the emotional heart of the novel. Her refusal to leave the family house, to care for her autistic brother Baba, to bear the remnants of a shared history makes immobility a kind of rebellion, a refusal to abandon family duty or family history. Tara's movement and the aspiration of Raja to be Hyder Ali, on the other hand, create a dynamic opposition between the characters who want to move and those who want to stay motionless.

The most striking thing about Desai is that she has transformed the banal, dusty archives, the forgotten gramophones, and tedious routines into something filled with emotions and deep textures. Silence is turned into a poetic structure in which Desai explores the weak ties of memory, the silent sufferings of the past, and the chance of reconciliation. In this respect, the temporal stagnation is not only one of the symptoms of loss or trauma, but rather a tool of emotional survival and ethical contemplation. Thus, the Das house, “unchanged, unrenewed, unexamined” (Desai, 1980, p. 27), becomes an incarnation of deferred time. This paper thus examines the poetics of stillness in *Clear Light of Day* and how temporal stagnation is recast as an aesthetic and philosophical value in the novel. Reading stillness in the context of phenomenology, postcolonial temporality, and narrative theory, the paper aims to shed light on how Desai creates a world where silence is vocal, immobility meaningful, and suspended time is where emotional mending can be affected.

2. Literature Review

Studies on *Clear Light of Day* have so far focused on topics like memory, Partition trauma, the role of women, and family relationships. Although these readings are valuable, they usually fail to recognize the aesthetic of stillness in the novel, as well as the complex interaction of the novel with time, space, and emotional life. This review identifies the key threads of current criticism and reflects on the research gap that this study will fill.

Desai's fiction has a kind of quiet inwardness that made her stand out among other postcolonial authors (Mukherjee, 1994). Though insightful, this observation is general and does not specifically speak about how quietness becomes a temporal or narrative structure. Sharma (2001) and Indira (1993) have examined how the novel dealt with memory and interfamily strains. Their works demonstrate that Desai employs memory to form character identity, especially in the relationship between Bim and Tara. Nevertheless, stillness is frequently discussed as the background of memory, as the space and emotional context upon which memory is projected. Sharma (2001) observes the atmosphere of nostalgia in the novel but halts short of analyzing how this

atmosphere is produced at a material level of stagnant time and silent domestic space.

Feminist critics have discussed how Bim and Tara are gendered to act in certain ways. Jain (1998) states that Desai's women are torn between selfhood and family obligations, whereas Pandurang (2010) associates Bim's emotional burden with patriarchal systems. The readings add to the perspectives of gendered responsibility but seldom relate the silence of Bim to a larger poetics of immobility or to philosophic accounts of time. Literary texts tend to document trauma not in the form of explicit violence but in the form of minor disturbances in normal life (Butalia, 1998; Pandey, 2001). The Partition haunts the Das family. Although these readings help to define the historical and political contexts of the novel, they fail to examine how the very state of stillness becomes symptomatic of suspended historical time (Singh, 2004).

Narrative and stylistic works define Desai's prose as lyrical and introspective, with slow-moving emotional topography. Singh (1994) admits the centrality of stillness, but dwells more on the descriptive style rather than the consequences of the temporal stagnation to the narrative structure and character development. Lastly, theoretical literature on time and phenomenology (Bergson, 1910; Ricoeur, 1984) offers conceptual frameworks that are rarely used when treating the fictions of Desai. These philosophers consider time as lived, experienced, and subject to the senses as opposed to linear or mechanical. Their work provides useful tools in understanding the stillness of *Clear Light of Day*, a relationship not sought out in the current criticism.

3. Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of the paper is to discuss the way in which Anita Desai creates and uses stillness as a major narrative and philosophical tool in *Clear Light of Day*. This study, hence, aims at explaining the importance of stillness in the development of character psychology, the plot, and the emotional quality of the novel.

To be more specific, the research aims at the following:

- To examine how stillness is represented as an element of narrative that organizes the temporal and spatial plane of the novel.
- To explore the role of temporal stagnation on the emotional lives and identities of the main characters, especially Bim, Tara, Baba, and Raja.
- To understand stillness in terms of phenomenological and postcolonial theory of time.
- To understand the relationship between domestic space and time stasis.
- To show how stillness can be a poetic and moral mode of existence, and can allow some self-identification, reconciliation, and emotional fortitude to happen in the novel.

4. Methodology

The study is qualitative and employs textual analysis. The methodology is hermeneutic which is interpretive in nature. It employs phenomenology and postcolonialism as theoretical frameworks. The role of stillness in the text as a linguistic, spatial, and psychological phenomenon is explored through textual excerpts that address the themes of domestic practices, silence, memory, and immobility. The novel is set in the context of post-Partition India. Phenomenology and feminist domestic-space theory are used as a metric for understanding stillness as inhabited, moral, and emotional activity in the paper.

5. Theoretical Framework

The paper is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical approach that combines phenomenology, the theory of narrative temporality, and postcolonial theory of suspended time. These perspectives are used to suggest how the absence of movement is an aesthetic, psychological, and historical force in *Clear Light of Day*. Phenomenological theories of time focus on the lived duration as opposed to mechanical or chronological time. According to Bergson, the subjective experience of time is described as “durée” (1910) and implies that time is perceived subjectively via memory, emotion and consciousness. The concept is essential in deciphering how the characters in Desai see the time passing by or not passing by.

The perception of time to Bim, such as the perception of time in the case of duration, is influenced by emotional gravity and generates a subjective temporality that is full of stillness. In *The Poetics of Space* (1958), Bachelard reflects on intimate spaces and sheds some light on how the Das house turns into a memory, silence, and echo of emotions. The house is not a setting but a lived-in space where silence builds up and constructs identity. This reading is further supported by the theory of narrative time by Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative* (1984), who describes the structuring action of stories in the temporal experience. The nonlinear movement between the present and the past creates a narrative temporality in which stillness serves as an interruption and an extension at the same time in Desai.

According to the postcolonial theorists, time is usually discontinuous, delayed, or suspended in colonized and postcolonial societies. The (postcolonial) time, according to Bhabha (1994), is disjunctive, characterized by uneven modernity and broken histories. In *Clear Light of Day*, Partition as an aftermath creates a sense of temporal hesitation, a stop of life, memories, and domestic life taking over the historical trauma. The stillness in the novel can therefore be seen as the symptom of suspended postcolonial temporality. The characters live in a world where national and personal past cannot move completely ahead, leading to emotional and narrative stagnation.

The setting of the novel cannot be separated from its stillness. Domestic space theories, like the ones introduced by Bachelard and subsequent feminist theorists, can be used to explain the functioning of the home as the place of emotional memory. The Das house is a prison and a refuge at the same time, and its empty passageways and shabby garden reflect the stagnation in the souls of the siblings. According to feminist theorists, such as Jain (1998) and Menon (2000), domestic stillness can be gendered. Bim, in her case, continued to stay in the family house, which represents emotional responsibility but also turns into a statement of agency that makes it difficult to read female domesticity in traditional ways.

Finally, minimalist theory and the literary aesthetics of quietness help to interpret how Desai narrates his work. Desai's prose is described as being emotionally subtle and slow (Singh 1994). This is in line with broader discussions of the role of silence, pause, and stillness as means of expression in fiction. The theoretical perspectives of these lenses are put together in this study to theorize stillness beyond evocative quietness, which is a temporal, spatial, emotional, and ethical form through which Desai makes meaning in *Clear Light of Day*.

6. Results and Discussion

The analysis of *Clear Light of Day* reveals that stillness is not only a stylistic element but also a significant structuring element that influences the emotional, temporal, and narrative structure of the novel. Through a close reading and theoretical interpretation, it is possible to highlight some of the most significant points concerning the functioning of the concept of temporal stagnation in the novel and its impact on the psychological profile of the characters

One of the most consistent themes of the novel is the atmosphere of calmness that is present in the Das household. The rhythm of silence, communication gaps, and the routine of daily life create a narrative rhythm of what Ricoeur (1984) calls temporal hesitation. Action is not used to develop the plot, but rather reflection, memory, and nuanced emotional change. Baba is the embodiment of this extreme version of stillness: his continual listening to old gramophone records is a manifestation of the temporality that does not allow any progress. It serves as a reminder of the past; his presence lends credence to the emotional inertia of the novel. The sound over and over again in the same song is a way of emphasizing the cyclic character of time in the house. The same rhythm can be traced in Desai's language: there is not much dialogue, long descriptive sentences, and those scenes when nothing happens, but everything is filled with emotion. This promotes the concept of subjective duration proposed by Bergson, time experienced instead of time quantified.

Bim appears as the character who has been influenced by stillness the most, but she turns stagnation into a kind of agency. Despite the criticism she is often subjected to for being a victim of the

domestic sphere, a closer inspection shows that she prefers stillness as a moral and emotional stance. She does not leave the house when Tara and Raja do. It's a conscious act of remembering and continuity. It's not something that's accepted; it's a moral attitude, one that's grounded in responsibility, loyalty, and self-definition. Desai, according to Jain (1998), negotiates frequently through the acts that she has based on domesticity. The immobility of Bim is therefore a radical emotional work. One of the principal scenes that depicts this change is when she understands that love and forgiveness are not founded on merit (Desai, 1980). This revelation sums up the argument of the novel that stillness may result in reconciliation and emotional healing.

The stasis of Bim, rather than being a sign of defeat, is a place of contemplation where she gets healed. In opposition to the stillness that Bim has chosen, both Tara and Raja want to move to get rid of the emotional burden of the home. The fact that she is mobile, married, moved, and wants to live without the shadows of her childhood life shows that Tara is not comfortable with the stasis of the Das house. But her coming back shows that movement does not always bring internal conflict to a resolution. Her insecurity as an adult is the result of memories that were not successfully resolved, and that her stillness has managed to retain, but her movement was unable to handle.

The mobility of Raja is accomplished in terms of intellectual and cultural aspiration. His identification with Hyder Ali is a wish to go beyond the staleness of the middle-class life of the family. But his exit disintegrates the family and adds to the emotional load that Bim has to bear. To Bim, it was like, "someone had to remain, someone had to hold the house together" (Desai, 1980, p. 54). The wish of Raja to move forward, therefore, creates another stagnation and abandonment. These opposing modes of motion and stillness help to underline the fact that immobility is not necessarily bad, but the emotional content of the movement, or non-movement, that defines its importance.

The Das house is an imaginary and emotional storehouse where silence builds up. The house and its inhabitants are "caught in a time that would not move forward" (Desai, 1980, p. 158). The Das house is a

symbolic, emotional storage site where nothing has changed. Based on the idea of Bachelard (1958) of the house as a vessel of dreams and memories, the physical setting of the novel tells about the interiority of the characters. The wildness of the memory represented by the overgrown garden is wild and uncontrollable. There is a resonance of silence in the unused rooms that signifies unoccupied emotional spaces. The library and the old files represent frozen intellectual and musical worlds that are not easily changed. All these spaces lead to a poetics of stillness in which the house traps and maintains time instead of letting it elapse. The house is turned into a chronotope of suspended time, determined by the historical shadow of Partition and the emotional discontinuities of the family.

Even though the violence of Partition is not preempted in *Clear Light of Day*, the event lingers through the story as an ominous silence. According to Singh (2004) and Butalia (1998), Desai employs minor domestic disturbances rather than direct trauma to represent the long-term consequences of Partition. The case of Raja and Hyder Ali can be an illustration of such historical stasis. The Ali family is forced to go because of the Partition, which stopped the dream of Raja and left him with the feeling of cultural and emotional incompleteness. This suspended history adds to the larger ambience of stagnation in time that afflicts the family. In this regard, stillness is turned into a postcolonial state: a break in the continuity of history, an incompleteness. The idea of disjunctive temporality of Bhabha (1994) can be used to understand why the characters have to live in a discontinuous time when the personal and national past do not coincide.

It is important to note that stillness is one of the greatest discoveries of the analysis since it ultimately leads to reconciliation. The emotional transformation that Bim experiences, i.e., her forgiveness of Raja and her reunion with Tara, is the result of staying in the state of stillness until reflection and healing set in. Nothing stands still and becomes fruitful. It gives characters the chance to face instead of going away to their emotional backgrounds. The resolution, with a slight softening of relations, implies that stagnation has created a place of renewal. Therefore, stillness is not the

antithesis of change but its other form: a silent change that is based on reflection instead of action.

In *Clear Light of Day*, Anita Desai turns stillness not only into a figurative tool of description, but also into a three-dimensional structure of a narrative, a philosophical law. Through the synthesis of the results of this paper, stillness can be seen as a force that exists in the temporal, spatial, psychological, historical, and ethical realms and creates what can be called a poetics of stillness. Not a passive but an elaborately choreographed dance of narrative and character psychology and symbolic resonance, this poetics is not a simple or naive one.

Stillness appears at the temporal level in the form of subjective nonlinear time. The movement between the past and the present makes Desai break the traditional chronology of narration, and time can slow down or even seem to be in suspension. This stasis of time is a reflection of the concept of the *durée* of Bergson (1910), in which time is perceived emotionally and not mechanically. Every moment, be it the silent morning stroll in the garden or a lengthy silence at a common dinner table, is filled with the burden of memory in the Das family. Time is not determined by objective experiences but by the emotional meaning of lived experience. In this case, the silence allows a reflection and makes the areas in which the characters can address unresolved feelings and memories.

The concept of stillness is closely related to space, especially to the domestic space. The Das house is a literal and symbolic memory storage and emotional inertia. All the rooms, corridors, and gardens are permeated with the past life and the unfinished past. The idea of the home as a repository of psychic and imaginative experience introduced by Bachelard (1958) is especially applicable: the house keeps the remnants of childhood, family relationships, and cultural heritage, and turns the physical inability to move into the emotional and moral visions. The spatial expression of stillness enables the home to serve as a time capsule, in which past and present history are both maintained and challenged at once.

Stillness psychologically provides the opportunity to introspect and reflect on morality. As the emotional hub of the novel, Bim represents the

contradictory agency of immobility. The fact that she chooses to stay at home, to take care of her brother Baba and keep the emotional structure of the family intact, shows how stasis could turn into an ethical and self-assertive position. Stillness enables characters to live in the emotional realms of regret, longing, and forgiveness and creates internal change without action. Contrary to the conventional story that favors motion or plot-based resolution, Desai preempts silent reflective practices as centers of psychological richness and moral questioning.

Stillness, as well, operates in the postcolonial temporal context. The unresolved consequences of Partition cause a gap between the individual and national past that places the characters in emotional and historical stasis. The concept of disjunctive temporality that is introduced by Bhabha (1994) sheds light on the fact that the characters live in a world where progress is postponed or disjointed. Even the lack of violent conflict, the Ali family leaving, the halted dreams of Raja, and the silent consequences of Partition all infiltrate the domestic. In this case, the motionlessness is a result and an outcome of the historical displacement, which reflects the slight, residual effects of the national trauma.

The poetics of stillness involves the ethical and affective meaning. Silence in the story of Desai gives one time to reflect, reconcile, and forgive. Emotional healing is not done in dramatic confrontation but rather by living in the silent areas of home and memory. The last thing Bim can do is forgive Raja and come back to Tara, which is an illustration of the ethical part of quietness; immobility in this case is the instrument that brings about empathy, making moral judgements, and reconciling relationships. This tendency conflicts with a traditional view that many environmentalists dismissed as "foolish tree-huggers". This inclination challenges a traditional understanding of stillness as passivity and demonstrates that silence and stability can be effectively employed to nurture moral and emotional growth.

The example of immobility as agency is presented by Bim, the main representative of the stillness. The decision to live in their family home is a conscious one, and it is a moral commitment to do so. A means of preserving memory, coping with the

unsolved, and a mediation of family relationships. On the contrary, some characters, like Tara and Raja, show that nothing can be gained from movement and escape from the inner or interpersonal sphere. The moral and emotional values presented in this novel are brought to light by the narration of Desai. Bim is relaxed in the state of nothingness, immobility, as the state of contemplation, reconciliation, emotionality, and healing.

Another issue, which is brought to the fore in the study, is the intersection of stillness with historical and postcolonial aspects. The persistence, albeit precarious, of Partition is an indication of historical discontinuity. It has created 'suspended temporality' not only in the houses, but also in the characters' minds. By situating a literary space in which one encounters stillness at the intersection of personal, spatial, and historical time, Desai has affected the literary world. Desai has left her mark on the literary realm by creating a space where one finds stillness at the intersection of personal, spatial, and historical time. Stillness: A quality of philosophy and of feeling that is strong. The temporal, spatial, psychological, historical, and ethical nature of the stillness in *Clear Light of Day* is vibrant within these dimensions. It is a structural concept which is based on the rhythm of narration, and it not only develops the characters, but also provides a philosophical key that questions the ideas in the novel. It is a link between past and present memory, psychological and moral aspects.

7. Conclusion

This paper analyzes *Clear Light of Day* in terms of stillness and shows that the novel is narratively, aesthetically, and philosophically dominated by the concept of temporal stagnation. Unlike the more common interpretations of the experience of stasis as passivity or degradation, this study shows how stillness in Desai is a constructive and flexible force. It sets the time beat of the story, it structures the domestic and emotional space of the Das family, and it provides a means of psychological introspection and moral reflection. Lastly, this study reimagines the poetics of stillness as one of the key tenets of *Clear Light of Day*. It is not an absence of narrative momentum, but a deliberate style of art through which Desai explores the subject of memory, identity,

moral obligation, and emotional fortitude. The idea of the centrality of stillness opens up new possibilities to read Desai, and it is possible to imagine that the themes of quietness, reflection, and immobility are not devices for the narrative but are important aspects of the human experience in literature.

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