Exploring Chronotopal Politics in Hindu Indian Culture Incorporating Muslim Traits in Anita Desai’s Clear Light of Day as a Nexus for Indo-Pak Dialogue

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In 1947, the partition of the subcontinent engendered geographical and psychological boundaries. Anita Desai incorporates the event of partition in her novel, \textit{Clear light of day}, thereby, showing the effects of partition on the different religious groups of the Indian sub-continent. This research aims to explore chronotopal politics in Hindu Indian culture incorporating Muslim traits in Anita Desai’s \textit{Clear Light of Day} as a nexus for Indo-Pak dialogue. Chronotope is a study of time and space. The objective of the research is to deconstruct the spatiotemporal ramifications of the event of partition in a bid to pose dialogic possibilities, as time and space make up the ‘whole entity’. As this ‘whole entity’ of India is sliced by the act of partition, Desai portrays cultural integration in the space of India through a dialogue between time and space. The timelessness of Art and Literature is surveyed in the open space of the alternative paradigm of the novel. This area with reference to partition literature has not been explored and according to this research bears dialogic possibilities between two opposing forces, India and Pakistan. M.M. Bakhtin’s theory of chronotope in conjunction with dialogism is used to analyze configuration of time and space politically. The concept of chronotope is used to identify the dialogic possibilities in the novel as it uses space as a literary trope of real and imagined dislocation of communities within the ambit of the relio-political dialectics of partition at the time of division. This research will open avenues for future researchers exploring traumatic experience of spatiotemporal dislocation.
Introduction

India comprises eight major religious groups, out of these Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Parsees are the dominant religious identities. Hindus form a majority in terms of number of population in India. Since, the twelfth century A.D. Muslims and Hindus had been living in the subcontinent, adopting and adapting cultural, social, political and even religious ways in an endeavor to integrate, communicate and exist beyond differences inherent between the religious identities. With the intrusion from the British and their subsequent colonization, there was initially adoption of English ways too, however, a united struggle against the English created an ideological similarity between the two religious identities. The united front comprising Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims became an eminent threat to the British rule thus, the British devised ways and means to divide and continue to rule. In doing so, the British created factions and groups amongst the Indians at large. This in turn, created irredeemable fissures between the multi-religious populace, breeding resentment and animosity amongst friends and neighbors on the basis of religious disparity.

The novels on partition like BapsiSidhwa’s, Anita Desai’s and MeherNigarMasroor’s novels proffer the introduction of this animosity, bred and nurtured by the colonizer in a bid to inculcate discord among the multi-religious groups, thereby, dismembering a unified movement against the rulers. While the novel, Clear Light of Day, depicts the differences inherent within religious ideologies, this English novel on partition, in particular, celebrates these differences as a nexus for coexistence also. Due to coexistence, there has been a cultural, social and psychological imbrication of ideas, ideals and values. This in turn, has created bridges and communication between distinct identities within the region. The research focuses on these points of confluence as means of dialogue among the dialectically separated individuals of the subcontinent, one example of shared symbol is the language Urdu, which Anita Desai’s Hindu character, Raja, appropriates for dialogue. The primary text is Anita Desai’s Clear Light of Day, and it is explored as a medium of intratextual fluidity offering dialogic conference through the acknowledgment and projection of distinct voices of Hindus and Muslims in particular. In this novel, there is no monopolization of one voice, which induces an anticipation of dialogic utterance from each word, giving full scope for contribution of unequivocal ideas and values.

Interestingly, this novel presents contentious, dialectical ideologies and dissensions yet the novel engages with the crisis at hand using dialogue as a tool. Thus, the multiple voices in the novel rise above the clash of beliefs, and confer at points of correspondence inherent within the strain of sociological and ideological differences. Therefore, the novel offers an alternative reality to the dialectical events of partition by offering intersections, conferences and debates. There is a dialogic fluidity in fiction on partition when deconstructed and evaluated as medium of dialogue. However, the research deconstructed hermeneutically
historical data on the possibilities of dialogue present in the archetypal shared symbols, as well as monologic presentation of ideologies. In doing so, the research elucidates that there are symbols, tools, means and mediums of confluence present in the text under peruse, which convey an eclectic intertextuality. This is further explored in the light of Mikhail M. Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, in particular, chronotope. Time and space are threaded in a chain of dialogue, keeping it alive intratextually as well as intertextually.

Anita Desai, provides an alternative perspective to the historical and political monologic point of view on the event of partition. In her novel, *Clear Light of Day*, she questions the fixity of geographical borders in a fluid world, where time and space are fluid. This novel is perused and evaluated in the light of her chronotopal representation of the events of partition. This research shows how the chronotopal movement establishes a dialogue between time past and present as well as a dialogue between time and space. Desai’s character Bim is a major link between past and present as she remains in a space which connects the past and present of the entire family. Thus, despite differences the family interacts and communicates through Bim and the meeting ground is the House[sic].

*Clear Light of Day* is a novel written by an Indian writer, Anita Desai of Hindu descent, however, she refrains from exhibiting Hindu religion or norms in her novel, while presenting Indian culture, incorporating Muslim traits. This aspect of distancing her novel from her own religion and its details makes *Clear Light of Day* a dialogic site. It has Muslim characters in the background. They are not given a mouthpiece at any time. The dialogue is between the Hindu characters who discuss Muslim characters. Hence, there is a distinct influence of the Muslim norms, values and culture but it is shown indirectly through the eyes of Hindu characters like Raja.

The novel is divided into four time frames. Its parts depict different eras. Thus, the novel is a depiction of transience in time and space, which makes it a chronotopal novel carrying dialogic possibilities through connection between moving time and altered space. It offers a different point of view from the space of Old Delhi and the time which moves back and forth. Contextually, Bakhtin’s claim that, “A point of view is never complete in itself; it is rather the perception of an event as it is perceived from a particular place, locatable only as opposed to any other place from which the event might be viewed” \(^1\), is integral for this study. Hence, the novel’s inner and outer meaning can be seen as ways of coming to terms with others’ points of view and their differences, in time and space.

**Research Methodology**

The methodology and the study design employed is essentially qualitative and inductive in approach, since the nature of the premise requires both an exploratory and explanatory approach towards the text. The primary text is *Clear Light of Day* by Anita Desai. The secondary texts focus on the theoretical analysis of chronotope and dialogism by M.M. Bakhtin, along with the historical analysis of the event of partition of India into India and Pakistan.
Literature Review
The novel is published in the year 1980, hence, the event of partition is seen in retrospect. It moves back and forth between past and present. These shifts in time are connected by the space the characters occupy which is the House [sic]. Therefore, it becomes imperative to study a historical text through its relationship to time and space. Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory on chronotope is a means to understanding the dialogic nature of texts. NeleBemong elaborates the reasons for understanding the concept are clearly outlined, “Bakhtin has shown how literature can help us to appreciate the fact that, in the course of cultural history, transformations of time concepts and spatial representations reflect radical changes in cultural attitudes and lived experience”. He explores and expounds upon chronotope in conjunction with dialogism, and explains, “The second reason is that the concept of the chronotope has helped us to understand more profoundly and more completely the concepts of ‘dialogism’ and ‘heteroglossia’ by connecting literary communication with concrete imaginative units and generic patterns”. He elaborates further, “Literature, then, is not merely an ideational phenomenon, but has to be considered as a unique epistemological instrument that concerns intellectual, imaginative and emotional attitudes”2.
The concept of chronotope means, “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships”. It is “tantamount to the world construction that is at the base of every narrative text, comprising a coherent combination of spatial and temporal indicators”3. Bakhtin “borrowed” this concept from the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant and German physicist, Albert Einstein. Einstein’s theory of relativity, which states that “time and space are in essence categories through which human beings perceive and structure the surrounding world and hence ‘indispensable forms of cognition’”, is seminal to the concept of chronotope developed by Bakhtin. So, in both the fictional and “physical worlds”, there is an “intrinsic connectedness of time and space”4. It is so “because in both realm chronology cannot be separated from events and vice versa”5. Holquist further explains this as “[a]n event is always a dialogic unit in so far as it is a co-relation; something happens only when something else with which it can be compared reveals a change in time and space”6.
Hence, the function of chronotope according to Bakhtin is to allow “us to see the emergence of singular cultural expression, which already possesses an ‘historical individuality’ because of their existence as aesthetic forms, and also allow us to conceive the ‘trans-historical’ relations of these forms among themselves”. These relationships form “a dialogue of cultural and literary traditions which put into practice the dialogism and dialectic of meaning”7. Therefore, Bakhtin “pleads for a re-opening of our understanding as a whole”. Bakhtin demands for the “poetic act” “that is the aesthetic creation”, giving a “creative expression” to “theoretical conceptualization” which Hegel focuses on. Art and specifically novel has the capacity to provide this aesthetic creation to “theoretical” concepts and “knowledge”. Subsequently, Bakhtin asks “for an opening of history more than a
‘definitive’ judgement of it™. This research opens history of India and Pakistan at the time of partition.

Discussion and Analysis
Anita Desai’s novel epitomizes emotional attitudes and places these in a political relation to the space and time the characters occupy. According to Ayesha Jalal, in her book, *The Pity of Partition*, “Creative writers have captured the human dimensions of partition far more effectively than have historians”™. The story is a journey of a family through time spent in the house during the course of growing up. Each child grows up in the same surrounding, however, adopting and adapting distinct and different ways of living. Bim, becomes the caretaker. The House retains the living and the dead, as well as the memory of time spent together and apart. Bim refuses to go to Raja’s daughter’s wedding since, she feels alienated from her most beloved sibling, Raja. She feels abandoned by him. Raja, not only severs ties with his endearing sister, Bim and their brother Baba, but also bids farewell to his religion and language. Raja connects the two houses at the same time disconnects himself from family members living in his own house. His fascination with Urdu and Muslim ways bridges the Hindu household with the distinctly Muslim household of Hyder Ali Sahib. Yet, his abandonment of his siblings detaches the bond they share. However, Bim’s act of tearing away his letter, in which he takes on the role of a benevolent relation rather than an endearing brother, reconnects her to Raja, opening a dialogue between her pseudo Muslim brother and her. She asks Tara to tell him that “he should come”, she wants Tara to explain to Raja, how she is not used to travelling, but Tara should “Bring him back”. Bim wishes to connect with Raja but not leave her space. She opens a dialogue with him through maintaining the space. Raja can come to the House and they will connect, but at Hyder Ali’s mansion, she would feel alienated and unable to connect. Hence, space is a dominant motif in Desai’s novel. Time is used as a tool to connect and disconnect characters, and most importantly the space of United India. So both space and time create and maintain dialogue. Dialogic possibilities are seen in Desai’s specific spaces in the novel, in time frames and in both space and time as seen through the characters. A dialogic space is a site representing the development of relations, in this case Old Delhi and the House, metaphorically depicting India, united and divided.

Dialogue in the Divergent Political and Cultural Space at the Time of Partition
Desai points to the presence of conflict on political and cultural issues. The geographical space of India is rendered contentious due to political agendas. However, political agents mask these agendas and try to portray strife due to religious differences. Desai’s characters portend violence as a precursor of religious rift created by politically contrived religious parties. According to Henri Lefebvre, a French Marxist sociologist, “An existing space may outlive its original purpose and the raison d’etre which determines its forms, functions, and structures;
it may thus in a sense become vacant, and susceptible of being diverted, reappropriated and put to a use quite different from its initial one”\textsuperscript{11}. The house Raja idealizes is rendered “vacant”, thus he “reappropriates” Hyderabad. Although, the dialectics of societal, political and religious oppositions become powerful at the time of partition, appropriation of a new space, Raja’s presence and subsequent convalescence is a proof of prospective dialogue. Thus, the confluence of space and time is rudimentary in understanding dialogue especially in the light of the event of partition.

In this context, Bakhtin’s explanation of co-relation between time and event through Einstein’s theory of relativity is significant. He says,

\begin{quote}
For Einstein there is no chronology independent of events. The movement of the clock’s hands…must always be correlated with something happening outside the clock. An event, in other words, is always a dialogic unit in so far as it is a co-relation: something happens only when something else with which it can be compared reveals a change in time and space.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

In \textit{Clear Light of Day}, the co-relation of the event and the time is integral to the story. Baba finds comfort in living in his own time zone, where he plays records of a particular era and does not like to play recent records. Bim tries to escape from the past but her indulgence in history and historical texts keeps her in a constant monologue with the past events. For Bim, living in the same house, same neighborhood, partition is the only event that takes place in her life. She says, “There are these long 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”. Bim considers it only from her perspective but Tara reflects upon the event from the Hindus’ and Muslims’ perspective. Thus, the same event, time and space of event are seen through different perspectives in the same novel. Tara reminds Bim that the summer of 1947 was eventful for all, “For everyone in India…For every Hindu and Muslim. In India and Pakistan”\textsuperscript{13}. Therefore, “everything” depends on “how the relation between what happens and its situation in time/space is mediated. That is to say, not only are particular happenings subject to different interpretations…the very question that an event has occurred at all is already an act of interpretation”\textsuperscript{14}. However, Bim’s interpretation of the event of partition a few decades later shows indifference. Bim has not lost her space either, so she feels remoteness towards the feelings of those who suffered during the event of partition. Bim’s reconnection to Raja’s Urdu poetry and Raja’s affiliation and appropriation to Muslim culture enable a re-appropriation of the past event in the future as a means of dialogic possibilities.

Though, from the beginning it is shown that Desai’s character, Raja is interested in Urdu and Islamic Studies and remains connected to the events of partition. Desai presents a Hindu character, which remains steadfast towards his ideals and
concerns despite the current flow of time bending all Hindus to a particular stance and forming a Hindu fanatic faction. He experiences animosity and violence from his co-religion friends. For Bim and Raja the sanctity of neighborhood, friendship and co-existence remains unthreatened. For them time and space are static and unvarying. Later in the summer, Raja’s illness isolates him further to the flow of time. His disease makes his space fixed and time inert. Though, Hyder Ali Sahib’s household does change their stance towards the Hindu boy, Raja. The political tide filters through Raja as he listens “silently” to Muslims speaking of “Jinnah, of Gandhi and Nehru, of Mountbatten and Atlee and Churchill” and “he began to see Pakistan as they did- as a possibility, very close to them, palpable and real”\(^\text{15}\).

Desai presents in Raja’s character, a Hindu advocating the creation of a separate Muslim state. She shows the Hindus resenting Raja’s inclination, but Raja remains constant in his beliefs. His Hindu college mates “found that Raja accepted the idea of Pakistan as feasible, they changed from charmed friends into dangerous enemies”, he is called a “traitor”. Desai writes Raja’s “piping efforts at reasonableness” “drowned out” by “powerful arguments of fanatics”\(^\text{16}\).

Desai portrays Hindu fanaticism rather than Muslim. She writes, “When he spoke to them of Pakistan as something he quite accepted, they turned on him openly, called him a traitor”. These Hindu boys accept that they are “members of terrorist societies” and would fight “to defend their country, their society, their religion”\(^\text{17}\).

Desai points to the presence of conflict on political and cultural issues. The space of the country is rendered dialectical and a source of contestation. The boys continue their attempts to instill feelings of aggression and violence against the act of partition. They inform him of “news of refugee camps and killings, of looting and burning in the city, and pleading with him, in conspirator’s voices, to join their society”. He idealizes the thought of “fighting for the Hyder Ali’s, brandishing a sword, keeping a mob at bay”\(^\text{18}\), but he is physically incapable of defense even. He is rendered useless in his space which is his bed. The dialectics of societal, political and religious oppositions become powerful, yet, his presence and subsequent convalescence is a proof of prospective dialogue.

Raja’s character is a dialogic site and through him Desai depicts possibilities of integration and hybridity, which are significant at the time of partition and even later. Desai endeavors at portraying probability of dialogue through change in space and time with Raja’s marriage to a Muslim girl and bearing a child who has Muslim as well as Hindu ancestors but this time enjoying immaculate health. Though, Desai is cautious in showing how idealism was abandoned and lost to unnerving terrorist ideas. Bim thinks he would die, but he didn’t, and managed to commune and unite with his Muslim friends procreating a hybrid breed, Benazir and his daughter. This hybrid existence becomes a source of dialogue biologically as well as culturally.

Despite Raja’s departure, Bim tries to encapsulate time in her house, remaining remote and aloof to the events changing the fate and space of Old Delhi and even India. Her history books imprison her in a time frame. Tara’s family breaks that time frame, bringing change, and a connection with the ongoing world like Raja’s
daughter’s wedding in Hyderabad. Desai weaves the story, but deforms the chronology of events, thus, the story scuttles between past and present and never disconnects with the history of the House or Delhi. As Bim, reflects upon her life while listening to the music played at Mulk’s house, she sees “with her inner eye” “her own house” “binding” it to the “soil” which “contained all time, past and future” shared with her siblings. Towards the end of the novel, Bim finally accepted the differences. Thus, she reconciles with the distinctness of Raja’s ideologies, wishes to connect with him, confer with him whilst retaining her distinct space and respecting his space. She finds solace in listening to the verses Raja always listened to. The verses provide a nexus for dialogue between the two estranged brother and sister. Desai evokes an awareness for respecting the other’s view, despite religio-social disparities. Moreover, she projects how shared time and space can corroborate in the resumption and subsequent retention of dialogue. Old Delhi and the House would always be the pivot of their past adventures and shared memories. Raja may have been displaced yet the memories bind Bim and Raja through the passage of time and space. Bim, has to accept his dislocation as relocation and move on. Thus, metaphorically, the novel depicts how communal and mutual existence retains the element of dialogue despite dislocation and separation. Even disparate ideologies can hinge on a fulcrum and oscillate towards their inclinations, yet remain dialogic and connected.

**Conclusion**

Desai gives voice to Bim’s inner eye, and sums up time and space of the soil, turning time into a space where all her siblings, friends and herself reside and share events and happenings of their lives. Music becomes the medium of her transportation into the space of time, where she connects with her disconnected brother, Raja. Though Raja’s world is different but is connected by the world of timeless music. Muhammad Iqbal, Raja’s favorite poet connects the Muslim and Hindu world in a timeless chain of poetry. Desai coalesces her Muslim and Hindu characters by acknowledging a chain present in the space of timelessness. Keeping in view, the strategically fragile, sometimes hostile, situation of India and Pakistan after partition, dialogue is inevitable. In this context, it is important to point out that fiction generating from India and Pakistan, including Bapsi Sidhwa and Mehr Nigar Masroor’s works, has proved that it has dialogic potential, as it encapsulates the opinions of all and anticipates the response of the other as a means of Indo-Pak dialogue and not strife.

It is therefore integral to locate the human dimension of political and cultural strife, in order to reassess peace among humanity. Jalal quotes Saadat Hasan Manto’s character Mumtaz,  

> Don’t say that a hundred thousand Hindus and a hundred thousand Muslims have been massacred…Say that two hundred thousand human beings have perished…the loss of life is futile.  

This research thus, identifies the uniqueness and discrete representation of plural and heterogeneous groups in the primary text, yearning and struggling for points of
convergence, as humans, in the divergent setting of partition. These points as shown earlier are surveyed through the lens of Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism. The theory provides a foothold to the interpretive faculties of research in a bid to locate heterodoxicchronotopal existence present in Anita Desai’s creative work. Thus, dialogism as a theory projects an anticipation for a word in response to an utterance, which is unique in its time and space of utterance as well as in its transmission as a voice distinct from the other. The novel, thereby has the space to open borders rather than close them as it opens debates of the time.
Bibliography


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Notes and Reference

4 Ibid, 84
11 “Review of Henri Lefebvre’s The Production of Space”. Web 13 Feb 2016.1
16 Ibid, 93.
17 Ibid, 93.
18 Ibid, 96.
19 Ibid, 284.