

# Exploring Enigmatic Realities in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*

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## Abstract

In each and every era, there arises a common search for the purpose of one's life and its predicaments. As William Shakespeare has rendered his answer for this interrogation, this world is a stage and all the mortal players are experiencing their own entrances and exits<sup>1</sup>. The writings of numerous writers have revolved around this motif. Anita Desai is one such novelist whose novel, *Clear Light of Day* (1980) exuberates the normal life of human beings, particularly it webs with the intricacies of female characters and their psychological perspectives. The enigmatic realities of time and the darkness and clear light are metaphorically picturized in the novel and it focuses on the exigency of uniqueness, compassion and temperance in human lifestyle.

**Keywords:** Forgiveness, Metamorphosis, Reunion, Self-Realisation, Transformation

## 1. Introduction

Anita Desai is a renowned contemporary Indian English novelist. Her novels simulate the inner world of females, their conflict between tradition and modern world, their alienation, emotional crisis, immigrant issues, female sensibility in war with hostility, existential angst, and trauma of females in an unbalanced social structure. These prominent themes mark a mature phase in Desai's novels. It mirrors up the existential traits of man in society. Srivastava states that Desai's novels "are not meant to illustrate theories of philosophy or psychology, although they may participate in such debates and enquiries"<sup>2</sup>.

Desai's representation of inner psyche is predominant in her writings. The female characters are repeatedly repressing themselves to fine-tune their impulses. It exhibits that the inner dynamics of characters are more eminent than the glittering surface of social lifestyle. As a meticulous artist, Desai undoubtedly portrays the essence of

self-validation in her works. The emotional turmoil, chaos and confusions in the mind of her suppressed heroines neither made them accept the traditional female role nor reject the entire system of social relationship.

## 2. Parent-Children Bond/ Callousness

The parent's delinquent attitude towards the emotional needs of their growing children- Bim, Tara, Baba and Raja leads their children to starve emotionally and they witness meaninglessness of their existence. "Their father's visit to their part of the house ceased, too. Once again he went through the day without addressing a word to them on his way out of it or into it. They knew him only as the master of the entrance and the exit"<sup>3</sup>. The negligence of father's duty and bond with children evokes a grim and sour attitude in the minds of the children that they understand the real nature of their father and even the death of their father does

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not arise any shock in the children's minds. Home becomes a place for anxiety and distress to the four children.

### 3. Tara and Bim - Polarisation

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Tara wishes to cling to her past memories and enjoy the life but Bim is tired of it and likes to endeavour into new identity. The identity of these two sisters articulates their own pattern of life style. While Bim is a highly sensitive spinster, a college professor, who is in her forties and takes care of her immature brother Baba and has an ambition to shape herself like Joan of Arc, Tara, the younger sister, marries Bakul and she is saved from a lot of family responsibilities. But Bim, being the elder daughter of the family, never thinks of escapism and she understands that it is her duty to take care of her ailing mother and brother Baba's hopeless future.

Once Bim utters, "I won't [marry] I shall never leave Baba... I shall work- I shall do things I shall earn my own living... and be independent"<sup>3</sup>. This independent spirit and energy are motivated by her teachers from her school days onwards. But circumstances are not the same at home. Thus the lack of parent and children bond creates a threat in the minds of their children and it is completely a broken relationship. Bim's choices in her life are taken out of compulsion of her family circumstances. But the same reason has made her an independent woman in the society. Bim realizes her foremost duty in a spiritual sense as she shoulders the responsibility of her family with a salutary resignation.

### 4. Marital Disharmony

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Though Tara has settled in her life, her husband does not heed much about her emotional imbalance. The lack of mutual understanding between the couple arises when there is a problem in proper communication. Bakul is a practical minded guy and Tara is known for her emotional slant of mind. In addition to it, Bakul's dominating attitude increases the vacuum in their married life. She is unable to communicate with other people frankly. She lacks confidence and strength. Finally she neither copes with her school life, nor with her family life. This emotional trauma engulfs her and makes her alienate from family and society.

### 5. Emotional Haunting

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The major concern of human life is to be cared and loved by family members. When that longing for love is ignored and that recognition is denied, there arises disharmony. Bim, the confident woman too becomes a victim of her own feelings and she cannot not escape from this emotional weakness in certain unfortunate circumstances. Once, she encounters a situation in which she experiences disturbing feelings about her brother Raja. It makes Bim shout at others angrily. Apparently, her ego and deep depression find a solution in the passage of time.

When Bim feels the pangs, she decides to fight and gain control over the developing neurosis of her mind. She eventually determines to accept societal service whole heartedly, "Life is transient and the lost moment never comes back... when I have lost hope in myself, how can I hope in others? Come what will, I have launched my bark upon the waters"<sup>3</sup>. She starts to read the book *Life of Aurangzeb* to pacify her haunting soul. "Many were around me when I was born, but now I am going alone.... Strange that I came with nothing into the world and now go away with this stupendous caravan of sin"<sup>3</sup>. These lines enlighten her soul and make her get rid of her ego and pave way for self realisation that selfless love renders meaning to life.

Bim, the uncrowned queen in her emotional world, dexterously amalgamates her bewildered burden of living helplessly in the society bristling with incongruous realities. Though Bim is endowed with imaginative resonance, she minutely observes and deeply experiences all the imperfections of the world around her. The realisation of this infirmity and unfulfillment, hankering and helplessness, stress and anger, struggle and surrender within the societal relationships make her wiser and prudent.

### 6. Time - The Destroyer/The Preserver

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This novel aptly brings to light that change is permanent and the outlook in the attitudes of two sisters - Tara and Bim is the evidence for the metamorphoses in life. The tremendous transformation undergone by them lets them to recall their childhood memories which are noted for the love and intimacy among four siblings. This whole-hearted mindset is cracked when they grow up into individual per-

sonalities. Tara is known for her meek and submissiveness, a dull and timid girl who is afraid to go to school which looks like a confinement. But Bim is exactly opposite to the temperament of Tara, who loves to learn new things, possesses a bold and impetuous spirit and curious to learn new things. This temperamental difference is reversed in their future lifestyle. They start accusing each other for their misunderstandings. All these oscillations and struggles result in the discovery of wholeness making Bim aware of time and its prominence in life.

Desai renders significance to time concept which she states, "...my preoccupation was with recording the passage of time: I was trying to write a four-dimensional piece on how a family's life moves backwards and forwards in a period of time. My novel is about time as destroyer, as a preserver and about what the bondage of time does to people"<sup>4</sup>. Time is a catalytic agent which enables the characters to regain their losing identity. This renewal of self-identity of one person is the passport for the other.

The final chapters of this novel throw light on the waning anger in the heart of Bim and she acknowledges that the love for family is irreplaceable and can remedy all mistakes. Bim's emotional breakdown leads to clarity of thought and insight that the bond of family is prominent and Bim comprehends that sometimes relationships may cause pain but she cannot reject the family members for their mistakes. Although Bim differs in her opinion from others and embarks on a long voyage to identify her own self, there arises an urgency and she mutually accepts it which removes the clouds of resentment and depression.

## 7. Clear Light of Day

The title suggests that all misunderstandings, hatred and enmity are highlighted as darkness, and kindness, temperament, adjustments, sympathy, friendliness and knowledge are metaphors of clear light which has the potential of erasing the darkness in life. The prejudices within the family must be removed by gentleness, sympathy and generosity.

There was nothing left in the way of a barrier or shadow, only the clear light pouring down the sun. They might be

floating in the light-it was as vast as the ocean, but clear without colour or substance or form. It was the lightest and the most pervasive of all elements and they floated in it. They found the courage, after all, to float in it and bath in it and allow it to pour onto them illuminating them, wholly, without allowing them a single shadow to shelter in<sup>3</sup>.

Ultimately, the annihilation and immolation of self rejuvenates Bim and she could find the clear light of day. Desai aptly substantiates the words of T. S. Eliot, "time is the best remedy for relationships to be renewed and transfigured in a new pattern"<sup>5</sup>. Dark attitudes like anger and jealousy will get diluted in the process of time. Desai resolves all emotional discords of her characters with philosophical and psychological solutions.

## 8. Conclusion

The spiritual and psychological enlightenment eventually moves Bim from discomfort and uneasiness to hope and fulfilment. The differentiation between dark and clear light helps her to overcome the bitterness and achieves a sense of self and solemnity at the end. Her dedicated commitment towards her familial bond brings this transformation. Paradoxically her acceptance shifts her to create a positive bond around her. Through mutual adjustments, Bim accomplishes family reunion and a journey towards altruism.

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