



THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL- AN EMOTIONAL TURMOIL PICTURISED IN *CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY* BY ANITA DESAI

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ABSTRACT

Anita Desai the well known Indian novelist has portrayed the sensitivity and inner feelings of the female characters in all her novels. Her female characters are sensitive human beings, driven to the limits of the despair and live within a confined structure. Complexities of man – women relationship were the themes of her novels. She writes mostly on the tragic plight of women suffering under men. Her works have a psychological bearing and they prove her to be an adept at projecting the difficulties faced by her characters in shedding their fears and insecurities, resulting in the rupture of their familial ties. Their psychological turmoil creates psychic imbalances which in turn, handicap them in establishing harmonies and gratifying interpersonal relationship feminine sensibility gains an emphatic expression in her novels.

Keywords: *reminiscences, reconciliation, self-acceptance, patriarchal society, psychological turmoil, marginalization.*

INTRODUCTION

The novel *Clear Light of Day* has two epigraphs one referring to memory and other to the time.

“Memory is a strange bell---

Jubilee and knell_”

Emily Dickinson



*“See, now they vanish,
The faces and places with the self which, as it could, loved them.
To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern”.*
T.S.Eliot

Anita Desai’s *Clear Light of Day* echoes how women find different opportunity to exist. It interfolds the political and familial past of the Das sisters, Bimla and Tara, who reminiscences and reconciliation, constituting the plot. The novel *Clear Light of Day* is themed on reinterpretation of past events that creates the shadow of guilt and betrayal among the Das sisters. It is the novel of self-acceptance and forgiveness. Anita Desai’s approach to gender variation shows different female character in various situations. The novel expresses the changing inner feelings of Bim, the female protagonist. In an interview with Anita Desai, Feroza Jussawala states that Anita Desai admits that *Clear Light of Day* is “a fairly autobiographical novel”. Desai has also mentioned that her characters do not necessarily “stand for a certain society or a certain moment of history” (162).

In this novel, Desai represents family relationship and individuals act of self-realization. The novel developed “time in relation to eternity” – Meenakshi Mukherjee. The whole novel resolves around ‘Time’ drawing different impressions from the characters.

Moreover the link with the philosophy of the Four Quartets is obvious. The four untitled sections of the novel, record the transitions that take place in a New Delhi family. The initial part of the novel deals with the present, primarily on Tara and her musings. The second part is about the past immediately preceding the present, with Bim’s reminiscences of her and her siblings childhood. The third part goes back into an earlier past of Tara on gaining significance and the fourth part moves forward bringing the time sequence to the present again, Bim and Tara discuss about their brother Raja. Tara expresses her concern for Bim and Bim eventually recognizes Tara’s distress. The two sisters grow close and Bim roving “from note to note, searching for harmony, experimenting with sequences, realizes in a moment of vision that time the destroyer, is time the preserver.” (CLD 210).

The novel starts with Tara’s coming back to India from overseas with her diplomat husband Bakul. She stays with her elder sister Bimla and her brother Baba in her old family home in old Delhi. During Tara’s stay, some of the good and bad memories of their past were faced by the two sisters,. However the political realizations and personal exploration results in guilt, betrayal, inertia and responsibilities.

Aristocratic image in the social circles is consciously maintained by Bim’s parents. Raja is elder to Tara and Baba, last of the siblings is an autistic child. The parents bring a distance relation of the mother, Mira-Masi to govern the children. As a teen, Bim dreams are explored



– fantasy of glory that she shared with her beloved brother Raja. She envisages life as full of adventure. She aspires to be heroine and a rebel while Raja desires to be a hero. Both Raja and Bim like poetry. Raja had studied Urdu at school and was fascinated by the language and its refinement. When Haider Ali, Muslim landlord and neighbor came to know Raja's interest towards Urdu poetry, he invited Raja home and instigated a desire in him to read the Urdu books in his library. He became Raja's most immediate idol, eventually, Raja marries Hyder Ali's daughter Benazir.

While Raja left home to marry, Tara went abroad with her diplomat husband. Bim was at home to take care of her younger brother Baba, who is mentally handicapped and her aunt Mira-Masi, who has been frequently ill. This makes Bim feel betrayed both by Raja and Tara. Bim never married. She becomes a professor of history at a nearby college to manage the household.

Anita Desai's approach to gender is subtle. The female character such as Mira-Masi, Misra sisters, Bim and Tara are victims of the patriarchal system. It is assumed that they will find both protection and fulfillment in being wives and mother. Either security or happiness was not brought by marriage to them.

In the context, old Mira Masi, the ideal traits of an Indian wife is described and how the children behaved that she didn't embody these traits:

“What does make a wife? why, they felt a wife is someone like their mother who raised her eyes when the father rose from the table and dropped them when she sat down; who spend long hours at a dressing table before a mirror, amongst jars and bottles that smelt sweet and into which dipped questing fingers and drew out the ingredients of a wife sweet smelling but soon rancid; who commanded servants and chastised children and was obeyed like a queen.” (CLD 175-76).

When the Misra girls (young college students) are getting engaged, Tara and Bim discuss the girls prospects for the future. Bim reacts angrily as she is against marriage which marginalizes women within a group or society, but Tara in contrast to Bim doesn't find anything unusual or wrong about the Misra sisters.

“I don't know they're in such a hurry to get married. Why don't they go to college instead? ”Can't you think? I can think of hundred things to do instead. I won't marry....I shall earn my own living and look after Mira-Masi and Baba be independent.” (CLD 220-221)



Clear Light of Day evidences two types of women- the women who surrender and traditionalize. And other type who choose not to surrender but break the convention and face the situation boldly. They attempt to know themselves and that lead to self- illumination. They embody conflicting gender traits. Tara is modern but she is a devoted wife and mother, submissive to her husband. Bim's ideas are different from conventional society however at the end, she is the one who lives in her family house. She excelled at school in sports, in testing accepted gender codes for example by trying on Raja's trousers and smoking his cigarettes. Her intellectual hunger helps her to come out of "the sense of dullness and hopelessness" (CLD 152)

Bim always wanted to break free from the restrictive upper middle-class female identity. Bim wanted to be independent both emotionally and economically. She dislikes to depend on her father for education and she doesn't escapes from her responsibilities towards her family. She knew that she would have been "illiterate – and cooked for my living or swept so I had to teach myself history and teach myself to teach" (CLD 242)

Bim is woman with strong belief. She didn't accept the characteristics of women that is goodwill, dependence and shyness. She refuses to be a traditional woman.

The novel picturises the challenges and burdens imposed by patriarchal society towards the marginalized Indian women characters. It focuses on independent but burdened Bim, unambitious submissive Tara and Widowed Aunt Mira-Masi and Misra sisters who lost their education and got married at their young age and both rejected by their husbands soon after their marriage. I like to conclude this paper with the observation made by Amitav Ghosh in her study on the modern Indian women novelist,

"Desai points to a kind of feminist emancipation that lies are not limiting women to their traditional roles but in expanding and awakening them to several other possibilities. This kind of life, apart from being invigorating, also frees them from dependence on men" (Ghosh, 252)

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