



BIMLA, THE NEW WOMAN OF ANITA DESAI IN *CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY*

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ABSTRACT

Anita Desai's main objective is to reveal the inner crisis of her heroines. *Clear Light of day* deals with the psychological struggle of Bimla, who emerges as a new woman towards the end. The story of the novel is developed through the stream of consciousness of the two main characters, Bim and Tara. Bim, in the novel takes life as an adventure. She is both a heroine and also a rebel. She chooses to be a spinster and sacrifices her whole life looking after her autistic brother, Baba. Bim leads a life of her own likes and dislikes. Her subconscious is trying to cling on to the joyful moments of her childhood when she was always in the company of her siblings. All through the years Bimla has undertaken all the responsibilities in her shoulders. But her sister Tara has escaped from the house by marrying Bakul. Bim has taken care of Aunt Mira Masi, when she is sick and also her brother Raja when he suffers in tuberculosis. She is a history professor and she enjoys her profession. Though, outwardly Bim seems to be a rough person, but in her heart of hearts she longs for love and affection. She gives this to others but in return they all ignore her and left her alone. She is a strong, stable and a dominating, irritable character at one side on the other abstract at times a traditional Indian woman. As a child she desired to conquer the world but finally ended up by conquering herself. Towards the end of the novel, Bim accepts the reality of life and tries to live happily with her mentally retorted brother Baba. With this clear light, the novel ends.

Key words: psychological struggle, subconscious, stream of consciousness, emotional conflict, inner crisis.

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INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai is the first Indian woman novelist to introduce the deep psychological conflicts of her characters. She is not interested in portraying the social life, political events or economic background of her female protagonists. As R.A. Singh points out,

“Desai's fiction can be analyzed taking into consideration the psychological motivations of her novels as psychic drama . . . she explores the intricate facts of human

experience bearing upon the central experience of psychic tensions of her characters”(9).

As a novelist of the human heart Desai's main objective is to reveal the inner crisis of the characters. This psychological struggle of her heroines form a recurrent theme in her novels – *Cry, The Peacock, Where shall we go this Summer, Fire on the Mountain, Voices in the City and Clear Light of Day*.

Clear Light of Day is published in 1980. Like all of her other novels, it totally submerges us. The incidents in the novel carry the readers to another world and it is very hard for them to come back to reality. The background of the novel is set in Old Delhi.

The novel opens with the arrival of Tara, and her husband Bakul to Tara's native place. The old house where Bim, the elder sister and her autistic brother Baba lives is like a tomb in a graveyard. The story is developed through the stream of consciousness of two main characters, Bim and Tara. Raja, the elder brother has left the family by marrying Hyder Ali Sahib's Daughter who is the owner of their house. Actually Tara and her family has come to attend Raja's daughter Moyna's wedding. But Bim is reluctant to go to the wedding because now she hates Raja whom she adored as a hero in her childhood days.

Bim's subconscious is trying to cling on to the joyful moments of her childhood when she was always in the company of her siblings. As Arindam Das views, "She rather attains a spiritually and emotionally fulfilling sense of life developing understanding towards it. Indeed Bim's character grows in spite of adversity, lovelessness and betrayal"(80). Tara feels guilty for escaping from the house. All through the years Bimla has undertaken all the responsibilities in her shoulders. She has taken care of Aunt Mira Masi, when she is sick, and also brother Raja when he had tuberculosis. Now she is living in the old house with Baba who can't do anything of his own. He will be only listening to gramophone record always.

In *Clear Light of Day*, Anita Desai wove the history of Delhi which becomes for the most part the centre of action. Bim remains like old Delhi unchanged. The house is not painted. Bim not changed. She remains, rigid, rough and a spinster all through the years. Bim doesn't like changes as well. This shows her psychic state. She talks with Tara "Changed? How? You mean the house newly painted, the garden newly planted, new people coming and going? Oh no, how could I, Bim?"(12).

Desai successfully uses the flashback technique and in the novel both the happenings of the past and present go together. Through Bim's

remembrance Desai portrays Bim and Tara's parents as individuals who are completely unconscious of their children. They have no interest in them, leaving them in the care of others, and finally to their aunt Mira Masi.

Bim, in the novel takes life as an adventure. She is both a heroine and also a rebel. She chooses to be a spinster and sacrifices her whole life looking after her autistic brother Baba. Like Maya in Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*, who is attached towards pets, Bim a spinster is also attached towards pets. She talks to Tara, "You think animals take the place of babies for us love – starved spinsters', . . . 'But you're wrong', . . . 'You can't possibly feel for them what I do about these wretched animals of mine"(16).

Bim leads a life of her own likes and dislikes. She is a history professor and she enjoys her profession. She is greatly attached towards the students as well. For Bakul, Tara's husband this old house is a dull, lazy place. So, Tara had accepted him leaving the worries, dullness, harsh responsibilities, everything to Bim and escaped from this prison.

Bim is a strong, stable, stubborn and a dominating, irritable character at one side on the other abstract, at times a traditional Indian woman. Bim as a child desired to conquer the world but finally ended up by conquering herself. Bim loves to read Lord Byron's poems to Raja, when he is sick in his bed. But Raja doesn't face the world bravely like Byron's characters. Only Bim takes life as a challenge.

Though, outwardly Bim seems to be a rough person, but in her heart of hearts she longs for love and affection. She gives this to others but in return they all ignore her and left her alone. She is also loved by a doctor namely Dr. Biswas, who comes to treat aunt Mira Masi. He understands her feelings and tells her, "Now I understand why you do not wish to marry. You have dedicated your life to others – to your sick brother and your aged aunt and your little brother who will be dependent on you all his life. You have sacrificed your own life for them"(154).

Bim is shocked to hear all these things. If she is an ordinary woman like Tara she can accept him and can lead a happy life with him. Bim even in

her young age when they play games she always wants to be heroine,

“She would hear their voices ringing, as pure as glass, or flame. Raja and Bim, tall and straight and true, their voices ringing out. I will be a hero, one had called out from the pure white peak of a candle flame, and the other had echoed back, as in a song, ‘And I will be a heroine’(125).

Not like Anita Desai’s other heroines like Maya, Sita and Monisha, Bim wants to be a ‘new woman’ herself. She chooses not to marry because she is not the usual, timid, submissive type of a woman. Sexual consciousness is out of her range. But at the same time she is not a man hater. It is difficult to find a suitable love-partner for her. But like a very real woman, she cannot live without love, love for Baba and Raja.

“She saw how she loved him, loved Raja and Tara and all of them who had lived in this house with her. There could be no love more deep and full and wide than this one, she knew. No other love had started so far back in time and had had so much time in which to grow and spread. They were really all parts of her, inseparable, so many aspects of her as she was of them”(257).

Bim in her childhood days wants to become Joan of Arc or Florence Nightingale. Both these figures led a life of sacrifice, surrendering themselves totally for others. Bim also becomes a sacrificial Lamb. “Bim of course worshipped Florence Nightingale along with Joan of Arc in her private pantheon of saints and goddesses”(200). Bim suffers when both Raja and Tara realize their ambitions, and Bim, the most intelligent and spirited of the three, has to live with a mentally retorted Baba. Tara’s highest ambition is to become a housewife and it is realized and Raja married Hyder Ali’s daughter thereby inheriting all his properties. Bim’s mind is troubled because of the demise of a Byronic hero in her brother and the death of a Florence Nightingale in her.

At one instance, Bim feels that her brother Raja and sister Tara have been ungrateful to her. Bim finds them as blood sucking mosquitoes, “They had come like mosquitoes – Tara and Bakul and

behind them the Misras, and some where in the distance Raja and Benazir – only to torment her and mosquito like, sip her blood”(239). They have received all kinds of help from her. She has taken care all of them but they have given only pains to her. “All of them fed on her blood, at some time or the other had fed – it must have been good blood, sweet and nourishing. Now, when they were full, they rose in swarms, humming away, turning their backs on her”(239).

Towards the end of the novel, suddenly a transformation comes. Bim could see the *Clear Light of Day*. She decides not to go to Raja’s daughter Moyna’s wedding and sends Tara and bakul happily to the wedding. She along with Raja participates in the music consort arranged in Misra’s house. As R. A. Singh presents,

“The reading of Aurangzeb’s last words brought out a catharsis. Bim repents. Affections win and Raja is reconciled. The emotional conflict is decided in favour of affections which is the life philosophy in this novel upholding human affections and love as the highest value in life(14).

Bim accepts the reality of life and tries to live happily with her mentally retorted brother Baba.

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