

Clear Light of Day: A Panorama of Divine Perception

Dr. Ulka S. Wadekar

Associate Professor

Dept. of English, Smt K.L.College

Amravati

Abstract:

Anita Desai presents her characters with great resolve, persistency and firmness. They suffer from inner and outer conflict and prefer to remain alienated from society. *Clear Light of Day* is slightly different from her other novels. Published in 1980 by three time Booker Prize finalist Anita Desai the novel is set primarily in the city of Delhi. The narrative revolves round the setting of partition, overcrowded city of old Delhi and contains themes like religion, family and forgiveness. It is a story of Bim Das, teaching history and taking care of her autistic brother Baba, Raja, Tara and her husband Bakul. Bim suffers dejection, becomes a victim of arrogance and false pride but finally receives a true vision, a gleam of light, a clear light of day. *Clear Light of Day* is quite significant to the awakening of mind and acceptance of reality.

Key words: Arrogant vindictive, rejuvenated perception, purgation, gleam of light

Bim, the protagonist of *Clear Light of Day* suffers under her drives. Sometimes she appears irrationally angry and sentimental at other times. Unlike Monisha, a protagonist of *Voices in the City* there is a profound synthesis of emotions and knowledge in Bim. She possesses many attributes essential for healthy human development. But there are traits of unsteadiness in her behavior that swings between alienation and conformation. She initially finds herself entrapped in struggle and regains consciousness in the end.

According to Shantha Krishnaswamy, Bim develops the 'awareness of time and its importance in human life and strives to be whole, to be sane amidst all decay, destruction and death.' (TWIFE, p. 279)

She possesses a capacity to reject all that had hindered her way of acknowledging her true self. She is a victim of circumstances and her psyche shows inclination towards self-alienation. Some situations propel her to resignation but these forces do not crush her. Deep into her soul, there is willingness for actualization.

According to Bande Usha:

'Despite her frustrations, failures and pains, Bim's vision embodies a transfiguration of her sense of alienation into a new consciousness of wholeness through psychic renewal.' (TNAD, p. 141)

Bim is presented as an ageing spinster, living pathetically in the old house in Old Delhi.

A frenzied, decaying, crowded city appears to her as a 'great cemetery, every house a tomb.' (CLD, p.5)

Her sister Tara's yearly visit brings some respite to her dull and dreary life. In most cases women suffer because they are placed in a situation against their wishes sometimes by fate or family. In case of Bim, her brother Raja is the main cause of her plight. He freed himself from family responsibilities. So she has to look after the family and also take care of her mentally retarded brother Baba. Eventually she becomes hysteric. Various traits of her character are reflected in the novel. She is sometimes unnecessarily irate, fuming, unforgiving and becomes derisive, sarcastic. To her problems, she finds a neurotic solution of moving away from people. She wants to free herself from her past and becomes stoic enduring pain and hardship without showing contempt. But this strategy proves futile and she adopts a mode of pride system and drives into arrogant-vindictive rage. In spite of this attitude she retains the strength of her personality. She shows maternal affection towards her students and is still admired by Bakul for her 'decision, firmness and resolve.' (CLD, p. 18), loved by Dr. Biswas for her courage and is adored by her readers.

As Bande points out:

'Slowly out of the vignette of a disgruntled spinster, emerges a woman of seraphic vision of the clear light of day, of clear sunshine.' (TNAD, p. 142)

Her ability to laugh off pains brings her in the clear light of day. Raja, Baba, Bim and Tara make her family. Her parents are engrossed in their Roshanara Club and cards and do not give time to their children. They get all the motherly care and affection from Mira-Masi. Raja and Bim are always remain busy with their outdoor activities and do not seem to be in need of mother. But, Tara often looks towards Mira Masi for protection and Baba the retarded child gets emotional security from her. Bim always think of her as ‘the tree, she was the soil, she was the earth.’ (CLD, p. 111)

The atmosphere of the house affects Raja. He becomes self-centered and shrugs off all responsibilities. Bim who is aware of the situation, decides not to enter into a marriage with Dr. Biswas. The young girl in Bim at first is swayed by his courting but soon realizes that he is not the man of her type. She is surprised when Biswas remarks:

‘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 all your own life for them.’ (CLD, p. 97)

She becomes angry at being so disgustingly misjudging her. She presses her hands but soon calms down. ‘Rage, frustration...with laughter at such grotesque misunderstanding, and her tangled emotions twisted her face and shook her, shook the thought of Biswas out of her.’ (CLD, p. 97)

Her ‘self image’ is totally scattered by the remark. Bim, a talented student remains friendly with Raja and finds herself in the image of a great heroine. She is influenced by the work of her favourite role models, Joan of Arc and Florence Nightingale. She therefore scolds Tara for skipping visits to hospitals on charity Thursdays, ‘otherwise what good will you ever be? If you can’t even do this little bit for the poor, what will you ever be able to do when you grow up?’ (CLD, p. 126)

She admires her heroines and decides not to marry. She tells Tara; ‘I won’t marry...I shall work, I shall do things’ (CLD, p. 140)

She wants to remain independent and achieve something in life. But her decision is inclined towards a tendency of self-actualization. This is also called as compulsive idealism. It works at the subconscious level. A victim of neurosis wants to uplift their position in their own eyes and gains it by forming an idealized self image. It is not the real self.

According to Bande:

‘The striving to be really great like others indicates growth, but, trouble arises when instead of the real self the idealized self-image is upheld.’(TNAD, p. 144)

Growing dissatisfaction in the family and Raja’s restlessness affects Bim and Tara differently. Bim grows ambitious and Tara falls in love with Bakul and wants to become a mother of his children and knit for her babies. Bakul’s love saves her from mental trauma. On her decision Mira Masi remarks:

‘There, there, You’ll see you grow up to exactly what you want to be, and I very much doubt if Bim and Raja will be what they say they will be.’ (CLD, p. 112)

Raja achieves his goal by marrying his boyhood hero Hyder Ali’s daughter. Thus Tara and Raja achieved what they wanted but Bim gets stuck with her family ties and her abnormal brother Baba. Bim’s failure to achieve what she wants turns her into arrogant vindictive. Her target is Tara. She often humiliates her. By inflicting pain on her, she derives a sense of achievement. The cause of her rage is Raja. Raja had been her childhood friend, a hero, a playmate, a companion of vigorous activities but as he grows, he withdraws from her. Bim cannot resist his withdrawal and resents it by pouring all her fury on Tara. As the novelist has mentioned:

‘his maleness and his years were forcing him to withdraw from the cocoon-cosiness spun by his aunt and his sisters out of their femaleness and lack- or surfeit- of years, she grew resentful.’ (CLD, p. 118)

She becomes cynic and cruel to Tara. Her unconscious impulse to defeat or humiliate others grew stronger. A suggestive example of this is, when Tara longed for curls, Bim deliberately clips her long hair and feels triumphant.

In young age also she wants to be at par with Raja. She shows her superiority by wearing his clothes, puffing his cigarettes secretly and flying kites. At intellectual level she develops an interest in reading. When Raja ridicules her for her lack of imagination, she feels hurt. This creates ‘a gap between them, a trough or a channel that the books they shared did not bridge.’(CLD, p. 121)

Bim accepts Tara's decision of marriage happily. But when Raja leaves shrugging off family responsibilities, she reacts vehemently. As a boy he should have to bear the burden of a family. She condemns him of being selfish. She tells Tara; 'he is too rich to be interesting any more, too fat, too successful. Rich, fat and successful people are boring. I'm not interested Tara.' (CLD, p. 143)

When arrogant- vindictiveness grew stronger, self-esteem is replaced by self-pity. Such persons start taking pride in the detachment. They prefer to stay distinct from ordinary people. To satisfy their self, they insult others and become cynic. Cynics usually project an exaggerated view of their sufferings because of the fear of left alone. They choose weaker targets to vent the rage, pain and frustration.

Bim also projects an exaggerated view of her sufferings because of the fear of being left alone. Raja's decision leaves a deep scar on her mind. The stress and pressure ultimately results into mental illness. She shows signs of neurosis by gesturing with hands or talking loudly to herself. One afternoon her deep buried anger bursts into volcano acquiring demonic proportions. Baba is the target, 'to vent her hurt, and pain and frustration on.' When the vent is spent, the purview is cleared. Sometimes it is necessary to express our thoughts or give way to the buried emotions and anger. It is necessary to relieve us from stress. It acts as a therapy. Such purgation of emotion gives scope for self examination and helps in liberation from neurotic compulsion. When Bim is liberated from neurotic compulsion, her perception is rejuvenated. This new vision implies the acceptance of the inner core of the being. It further leads to self-realization. In this stage the characters become conscious and enraged at their own weaknesses. After purgation of emotions, Bim understands the real self of Raja. She admires him for his love for poetry. Since childhood she sees in him a young Byron, a hero, a poet; 'writing stormy poems, fighting for a cause.'

She always wants Raja to be heroic. Once she confides to Tara that raja was not meant for trivial things like family, money and business. That is not Raja, 'What Raja had wanted from life. He doesn't need a hobby, he needs a vocation. He knows he has given his up. Just given up what used to be his vocation, turned it into a silly, laughable, little hobby...' (CLD, p. 145)

However when she sees Raja in clear light, she realized that she has erroneously crafted a picture of heroic Raja. He is just like any other ordinary person. When she reads his poems again, she is shocked to see that his poems are nothing but a mere imitation, an adolescent romanticism.

'For the poems were really derivative. On each of them she could clearly see the influence of the poets he loved and copied. There was no image, no metaphor, no turn of phrase that was original. Each was a meticulous imitation of what he had read, memorized and recited.' (CLD, p.168)

She feels cheated, defeated, ignored. To escape from this felling she seeks the way of self-glorification. She projects herself with actualized self-image and the eclipsed her natural vitality. She speaks of her with pride. She tells Dr. Biswas; 'I could have been a nurse or a matron in a plague hospital. I can handle it all.' (CLD, p. 85)

She prides in her role of a nurse, a head of a family. She is praised by people for her sacrifice. She likes it. But gradually everybody takes her sacrifices for granted and she feels irritated. She feels self-pity for her. 'there is never anybody except me'

She becomes desperate, anxious. Her anxiety reaches to the peak when Raja asks to go and look after the welfare of Hyder Alis. Out of desperation she accuses her father:

'for all father cared, I could have grown up literate and- and cooked for living or swept. So I had to teach myself history, and teach myself to teach. But father never realized- and Raja doesn't realize....'(CLD, p. 155)

In fact she knows that her father did not care for children. Even to remain unmarried and self-sufficient has been her own decision. She enjoys life when she is high on the wave of success. When she fails, she looks for peace of mind. She doesn't feel zest or vitality in life.

A bright conscious student, who retains first grade in examination and win laurels, is now turned into a middle aged spinster. She suffers quietly. Deep beneath this sufferance lays a submissive, subdued rebel. Inwardly she rebels against her inner-self and her weaknesses. Outwardly she emptied her anger on Baba and Tara but inwardly she is enraged by her act of asking help from Bakul or Raja. She remarks:

'How my students would laugh at me....if they knew how badly handicapped I still am, how myself haven't been able to manage on my own- they would laugh, wouldn't they? They would despise me.' (CLD, p. 155)

In fact this is only her fear. She becomes angry with herself. But her rebellion against her inner self helps her in liberating from the neurotic compulsion. She rediscovers her inner self. As the narrative unfolds, she is presented with a changed vision. By attaining internal freedom, she achieves wholeness. She feels one with her siblings.

She realizes:

There could be no love deep and full and wide than this one, she knows. 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, so that the anger and disappointment she felt in them was only the anger and disappointment she felt at herself. Whatever hurt they felt, she felt. Whatever diminished them diminished her. What attacked them, attacked her. (CLD, p. 165)

Awakening with this her vision promotes acceptance of the inner core of her being. The self-acceptance and self-knowledge lead her to trust herself. When she achieves the wholeness with intense consciousness, she discovers the 'gleam of light'. She discovers the true relationship between herself and her siblings.

As Emerson advises:

To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men-that is genius. Speak your talent, conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for always the inmost becomes the outmost.....A man should learn to detect and watch the gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the luster of the firmament of bards and sages. (SR, p. 59)

Clear Light of Day symbolizes nothing but awakening of the real self. This 'waking up' make a constructive,productive effect on Bim. The novel opens with a Koel calling a note of love suggest the day and the waking up. Bim discovers the wholeness. Her mind is filled with inner delight and harmony; the delight through which complete identification of the inner and the outer world is established. It prepares Bim to rediscover and feel the final aesthetic experience. This experience leads her to comprehension of eternal unity. She feels the energy and vibrations in her real self.

With her inner eye she saw how her own house and its particular history linked and contained her as well as her whole family with all their separate histories and experiences-not binding them within some dead and artless cell but giving them the soil in which to send down their roots, and food to make them grow and spread, reach out to new experiences and new lives, but always drawing from the same soil, the same seed of darkness. That soil contained all time, past and future in it. It was dark with time, rich with time. It was where her deepest self lived, and the deepest selves of her sister and brothers and all those who shared that time with her. (CLD, p. 182)

Bim rises above all the restrictions and bindings of the ego-centric self. With a new vision and perception, her quest of identity ends. She discovers the real Bim .Through this story, the novelist shows the progression of self-actualizing person towards the uniqueness of personality. When dualities disappear, conflicts come to an end. Thus *Clear Light of Day* suggests a true vision, perception of inner soul. Light is a symbol of awakening, accepting; awakening of true self and experiencing true delight.

Works Cited:

- Anita, Desai, *Clear Light of Day* London: William Heinemann, 1980
- Shantha Krishnaswamy, *The Woman in Indian Fiction in English*, New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1982
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Self-reliance*, East Aurora New York: the Roy crofters, 1841
- Bande Usha, *The Novels of Anita Desai* New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1988