



# Anita Desai's Approach To Human Life: A Study Of "Clear Light Of Day"

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Anita Desai, one of the most prominent novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Indian English literature, deals with the socio-cultural situation of the time from her own perspective. She believes that the issues related to human life can be resolved if the persons give more emphasis on human values with a positive outlook. This new perspective is related with the exposition of human relationship in the fictional world of the novelist. Perhaps the readers may get a glimpse of her approach that almost all of her works deal with aspects of human relationship – the relationship two human beings or the relationship between individuals and family or the relationship between one individual and society where he/she lives in. Perhaps Anita Desai has framed her own philosophy on that dimension of human relationship which is expected to be based on some fine human values – values essential for a healthy social living, values which are gradually eroding and the absence of such values causes the deterioration of man as an individual and his relation with other individual member of the society. Perhaps the emphasis on the distorted mentality of the characters, the imbalanced behaviors and the unexpected tainted relationship on the part of the novelist has been indicating her painful urge for a more fruitful and better human life. In the study from this perspective the novel, "Clear Light of Day" has been critically analysed. An attempt has been also made to reveal that unexplored psychic human troubles specially of the women section which indicate the erosion of human values which are required to be overcome in order to lead a better expected life and to establish a better society. In the present confused society Anita Desai may indicate a way-out with her own perspectives.

**Key Words:** Human values, Deterioration, Troubles, Emphasis, Relationship, Better.

## Discussion

It is quite evident in the history of Indian English writings that Indian English novels make a departure or shift in the writings of Anita Desai and Arun Joshi, and catches up with the modern western world. These two novelists shift from the outer world to the inner side of human life. As a modern woman novelist Anita Desai grapples with the moments of acute trying situation in human life specially of women. She tries to expose the confrontation of women with herself and the question of her own existence. It appears that her search is directed to the mysterious psyche of human beings. The inward journey of Anita Desai as a novelist moves readers to the hidden recesses of the ever changing consciousness of the characters and relates to the happenings in their mind. Unlike her contemporaries Anita Desai also deals with the chaos in the mind of the characters. Her preoccupation with the individuals and their inner sensibility pushes her nearer to the existential philosophy, but she is not a Camus or a Sartre rather a woman – an Indian woman with her troubles of life has a keen desire to lead an ideal life.

As a writer Anita Desai is not so much interested in social life, political events and mundane aspects of her characters. She is deeply concerned with the personal sufferings of individuals, and shapes their inner crisis.

Rather she is more interested in the 'interior selves' than in socio-political realities. Her protagonists are individuals for 'whom aloneness alone' is 'the sole natural condition, aloneness alone the treasure worth treasuring'.<sup>1</sup> Her main trust is on the inner crisis of the characters and their razor-like sharp awareness of the crux of life. For this she comments: "My novels are no reflection of Indian society, politics or character. They are part of my private effort to seize upon the raw material of life- its shapelessness, its meaninglessness".<sup>2</sup> Again she clearly unfurls her vision: "Writing to me a process of discovering the truth – the truth that is nineteenth of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath the nine-tenth visible portion that we call Reality. Writing is my way of plunging to the depths and exploring this underlying truth. All my writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of truth".<sup>3</sup> Side by side it is also true that Anita Desai's fictions frequently remind the readers of the three words that emphasize the human condition – anguish, abandonment and despair. But even after that it appears that she has been searching for a truthful life that every human being desires.

Since last one century human society has been facing the most agonizing problem – they fail to perceive the very purpose behind life and the relevance of existence in a hostile world. Man is shocked to realize that he is no longer the master of his destiny and that there are forces threatening to wither his life, and its joys and hopes. The potential meaninglessness of human existence has corroded human life from various corners. The existential encounter with nothingness is typical of human life in the present age. The hiatus between what the individual aspires for and the hard reality what he confronts has mercilessly crumpled his life leaving an insidious effect on his inner being. Again he suffers from inner problem - a conviction of isolation, meaninglessness in his way of existence. The existential problem is so pervasive that it threatens to corrode every sphere of life. Anita Desai seriously sets herself to voice the silent miseries of women specially of married women tortured by existential problems and predicaments. In her novels there is a deliberate attempt to discover and then to underline and finally to convey the significant ones. Apparently her protagonists are persons for whom aloneness alone is the treasure and most of them are female characters who are fragile introverts.

Besides all the features of her writing it appears that Anita Desai herself is not an existentialist, rather something more than that. The troubles of life, and turmoil in the inner world dominate her fictional world but even after that it appears that there is a fine tapestry of urge for a fine pattern of life which Desai carefully lulls in her life. The agony of the characters or their abnormal behavior demands for the restoration of a serene life-style. That is mainly based on some fine human values which rejuvenate the otherwise disturbed human life. Under the cover of external troubles and the inner psychic turmoils one may feel the presence of desire for a very fruitful life. As a woman she has understood the troubles faced by Indian women in that society and perhaps, for this she has presented their pent-up feelings and troubles of life. It is through her total involvement in the consciousness of the women that she enables her readers to understand the Indian women from outside.

An attempt has been made to critically analyze one of Anita Desai's prominent novels "Clear Light of Day" from these perspectives. The title of the novel focuses on the main theme – understanding the truth of life. The interest of the novelist is to reach to the shaded line of true life which is covered by various layers of existential experience or tainted forms of life. The novel "Clear Light of Day" speaks of the Das family chronicle. The narrative is divided into four parts: Part I is set in the present; Part II goes back to the summer of 1947; Part III is set in an even earlier period of the Das children's childhood, and Part IV returns to the present with a futuristic perspective. Bim and Tara, two sisters of the Das family, meet after a long time. Tara is the younger sister who is married to Bakul, an Indian Foreign Service Officer. Bim is single and situation has not allowed her to remain aloof from her family matters. From the very childhood it is clear that the younger sister Tara is very much concerned about herself only. She is not at all interested to take any other matter seriously except herself. Bim and Tara may naturally bond as siblings but their personalities make their relationship a problematic one. This duality in their relationship is best captured in the remark made by one

of the Misra sisters, Jaya makes to Tara: “ Bim has her own mind”.<sup>4</sup> The Bee Episode in the novel indicates very clearly how different the two sisters are. At a picnic spot Bim and Tara visited some tombs where they were attacked by bees. Bim was badly affected but Tara ran away in desperation. At the time of the episode Tara did not have the courage to apologize to Bim. Much later in their lives Tara discusses the episode with her sister asking her for forgiveness. Bim’s generosity is exposed when she tells Tara: “You could not help it – if you’d stayed, you’d have been stung, like me – you had to run”.<sup>5</sup> Bim’s selflessness extends to all her siblings and the old housemaid, Mira Masi after the death of their parents. She serves her duty as a teacher in a college; she looks after their autistic brother Baba; she is her caretaker. Tara, on the contrary, does not view herself in this light. Their parents were indifferent and disinterested in family affairs. They also have to live with a mentally retarded brother. The death of the parents makes the girls emotionally destitute. Tara, the younger girl, gets married and goes abroad with her diplomat husband. Now Tara is the mother of two daughters and a typical Indian woman. The other brother, Raja, who was very close to Bim has drifted away marrying a daughter of a rich muslim landlord , Hyder Ali. After Ali’s death Raja inherits all his property including the house where Bim lives. The rift between the brother and sister is widened when Raja writes a letter to Bim saying- “I want to assure that now he is dead and has left all his property to us , you may continue to have it at the same rent, I shall never think of raising it or of selling the house as long as you and Baba need it.”<sup>6</sup> It is a big blow to Bim’s self-respect. Several times Tara tried to settle the matter but she failed. Because Bim is not interested to bow down to any pressure at the cost of self-respect.

Now Bim is left alone, unmarried, teaches in a local college, and is left to look after her autistic brother. She lives with Baba in their old rented home in Civil Lines in Old Delhi. Tara sometimes visits the house as her husband wishes to be in touch with his roots in India and she has to attend the wedding ceremony of Raja’s daughter. Tara requests Bim to attend the wedding ceremony so that she can look after her children. Raja also behaves with Bim just as a house holder, not as a brother. Mira Masi fails to fulfil her kernel desire in due time; she finds consolation in alcohol and ultimately dies in utter frustration. Mira Masi acted as a mother surrogate and sacrificed her whole life for the welfare of the helpless children of the Das family. Her suppressed desires find way in a distorted manner. The normal desires of Bim also are not fulfilled; she is in a crux of life – overburdened in family life. In her earlier life she had a rosy dream – a dream to be full-fledged lady. She had a desire to love and to be loved by the nearest one; she had also a desire to lead a free rational life by crossing all social and family barriers. But reality gradually binds her to mould herself . Bim comments: “ I would never be young again for anything”.<sup>7</sup> Once a happy dreamer of free successful human life the college teacher Bim is now annoyed of youth, love, and marriage at the end of the novel. In front of her eyes love, marriage and above all life are spoiled or distorted. Tara turns into a selfish woman, Raja , a rude rich man devoid of any sense of humanity. Even after that Bim tries to accept life with a new motif.

At the end of the novel “Clear Light of Day” Bim has come to realize that different types of people have been residing in this world at the same time. This realization has helped her to accept all people as they are. Now it is clear to her that there is a huge gap between what she has been struggling to achieve and what she accept at last. She admits : “I myself haven’t been able to manage on my own”.<sup>8</sup> Bim takes the whole responsibility of the family on her own as a guardian. Anita Desai, the novelist defines the situation at the end: “Then Bim’s rage was spent at last. It had reached its peak, its acme, like a great glittering wave that had hovered over everyone and that now collapsed, fell on the sand and seeped away , leaving nothing but a soggy shadow in the shape of Baba’s silence”.<sup>9</sup> So it is clear that the novelist has explained the troubles of life, but she does like to continue life with a new perspective of new shining meaningful life.

## Conclusion

For her understanding of the socio-cultural situation of the time and her philosophical outlook of life Anita Desai has not made the novel “Clear Light of Day” a happy-ending comedy, nor she is satisfied with the mere presentation of the frustrated life. Desai is very much interested to remain attached with her struggle for a better life based on better human understanding and fine human values. It is felt that at every movement of

the novel there is an undercurrent tapestry of her mental design to lead a free normal shining human life. Undoubtedly on the surface the agony of the unfulfilled desires has been vividly presented by the novelist in "CLEAR Light of Day". As absurdity may not be the target of the absurd dramatists, the presentation of life full of confusion, frustration, and agony is also not the ultimate goal of Anita Desai. Perhaps she tries to indicate the troubles in the life of the main characters is the result of the absence of fine humane values. She thinks that the healthy existence of any society to a great extent depends upon the healthy growth of human bonds and bondages concerning some factors which influence them at different stages, and different points of time. It appears that Anita Deasai has a keen desire to cross the bar of confused existence of human beings.

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