

**Struggles for self-discovery: Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* is a novel of Intricate Relationship.**

**BY**

**PRADIP KUMAR BERA**

Assistant Professor in English  
Pingla Thana Mahavidyalaya  
(Affiliated to Vidyasagar University)  
Maligram, Paschim Medinipur, W. B.

**Abstract**

Against the backdrop of postcolonial India, one of the most famous Indian novelists and Emerita John E. Burchard professor of humanities at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* precisely goes across the different terrain of personal identity and familial relationships. Examining the characters' influential attempts to establish the peace with the past and the present, this study shines light on the contradictions between tradition and modernity, nostalgia and advancement, as they are depicted in the lives of the Das siblings through a careful examination of character development and theme inquiry. The present study draws attention to the novels wider ramifications within the framework of postcolonial literature, which provides a sophisticated viewpoint on the changing terrain of individual and national identity. The abstract highlights Desai's literary skill and the work's ongoing significance by offering a view into the complex fabric of feelings, ideas, and society portrayed in *Clear Light of Day*.

**Keywords:** Postcolonialism, Woman Empowerment, Social Dynamics, Identity Crisis, and Intricate Human relationships.

**FULL PAPER**

One of the most famous Indian novelists and Emerita John E. Burchard professor of humanities at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*, often regarded as the literary masterpiece that intricately intertwines all the lives of the Das siblings against the backdrop of postcolonial India. Desai dives deeply into the intricacies of family relationships, individual identity, and the cultural environment of a nation that is always changing through the intricate development of character and sophisticated narrative. After the close scrutiny of the themes, characters and the narrative techniques, this paper exposes the multiple layers of the novel. The essay clarifies the characters' drive for self-discovery and their shared attempt to make peace with the past in light of a changing present by analyzing the interaction between tradition and modernity. The paper aims to reveal the deep insights provided by Desai's work through a careful study, illuminating the novel's wider ramifications within the framework of postcolonial literature and the human condition.

Using a thematic and contextual analysis of the novel *Clear Light of Day*, this article takes a qualitative approach. And after applying this technique, we examine the various aspects of the themes, the gradual development of the characters and the societal setting of the novel *Clear Light of Day*. The central theme of the study is established after the minute observation and evaluation of all the information, taken from both the sources – primary and secondary.

Actually, a thorough analysis of Desai's writings will be conducted in order to delve deeper into the study's main research question. The "arguments and counter-arguments basis" analysis will therefore be the most practical method for the research.

As they reflect on their history, the two sisters' old rivals resurface: Bim, who is stronger, more intelligent, and more attractive, and Tara, who was once timid and insecure. But both of them have changed as the years have gone by. As extended silences permeate the house and surrounding areas, tensions rise. Tara questions how Bim manages to take care of her brother, Baba, who has a mental illness, live in a ruined home, and teach history to young ladies at a college. Tara is both drawn to and repulsed by the family's "petrified" state, which causes her to reconsider her escape to "the neat, china-white flat in Washington, its cleanliness, its floweriness" (*Clear Light of Day* - 31).

In particular, Bim has devoted her life to helping others, including her mentally challenged brother, her alcoholic aunt Mira, Raja during his final illness in 1947, and even Begum, the dog of Hyder Ali Sahib. Both sisters recall a history of unhappiness and monotony at home, only alleviated by the presence of kind neighbors, although Tara's life changed after her marriage and time abroad. Even in Delhi, their brother Raja's life was different, but after he left, it changed dramatically. He romanticised Hyder Ali Sahib, a Muslim guy who resided in the area till 1947 and then moved to Hyderabad. He inherited property by marrying Benazir, daughter of Hyder Ali Sahib. Bim and Tara both cling to the delusion of Aunt Mira, whose ghost appears to haunt the yard or house. Baba, their autistic brother, is physically present, but he has no real existence - no ideas, reactions, or actions that could improve his or others' lives. The parents, Das's mother and father, are dead and hardly ever seen, even while they are living; Hyder Ali Sahib and his family have left the nearby house; Raja has physically moved to Hyderabad; Tara is currently present in the Old Delhi residence but absent overseas. The presence of these missing people and their relationships to the people who currently occupy this place, however, are the main themes of the novel.

Accordingly, even though Raja lives in Hyderabad, he continues to play a major role in the Delhi-set story. Despite her passing, Aunt Mira continues to shape Tara and Bim's memories of the house and how they see its character both now and in the past. The book is a sombre tribute to Delhi, both old and new, modern and ancient, a city that has seen the rise and fall of both the British Empire and the Muslim Empire. Delhi keeps its own pace, balancing history and development, diversity and togetherness, and maintaining its innate ties to its residents and those who have left. Finally, the novel explores the intricate relationship between public events and individual notions of order. Since 1947, the Das family's control over their lives hasn't improved beyond what it was before.

In this novel, the mother and father play the same roles. For the first time in twenty years, she diverges from her particular schedule on one specific occasion. As Anita Desai describes in the novel, she chose to stay at home, claiming to be ill, and missed her regular club outing:

"And then their mother, for the first time in twenty years, missed an evening in the club, said she did not feel well and would stay in bed. That night, she slipped quietly into a coma so that when her husband returned from the club after an unsatisfactory game with an unaccustomed partner, he found her lying motionless and flaccid on her bed, quite beyond questioning him on his game."

(*Clear Light of Day* - 81)

They believe that a wife has traits that are similar to those of their mother. When her spouse gets up from the table, she raises her eyes, and when he sits down, she lowers them. At her dressing table, surrounded by aromatic jars and bottles, she spends long hours plunging her fingers into the sweet-smelling, soon-to-be-rancid elements of wifely responsibilities. This ideal woman is obedient like a queen, directs servants, and corrects children. The protagonist of the novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer* is Sita, a mother of four children who is hesitant to have her fifth kid because she believes it would become an increasingly undesired problem. The strong desire to destroy stifles the creative impulse. Desai paints a vivid image of Mrs. Das's traits in *Clear Light of Day*, which are very comparable to Sita's:

Aunt Mira would not have made a wife. 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 he sat down; who spent long hours at a dressing-table before a mirror, amongst jars and bottles that smelt sweet and into which she 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. Aunt Mira had none of these attributes.

(*Clear Light of Day* - 169-170)

Early in the summer, Tara, a grown mother and woman, and her spouse visit her childhood home in Old Delhi. There, her brother Baba and sister Bim still live. Three times a year, Tara travels to India to attend important occasions like her brother Raja's eldest daughter's wedding. Despite the difficulties of raising children in a foreign culture, Tara is happy as an adult woman and the spouse of a foreign ambassador. Despite her bustling teaching career, Bim is stuck in the past, much like Baba, who is engrossed with his 1947 record collection. Anita Desai says of Bim and Baba's unwavering respect for customs and the past:

“Old Delhi does not change. It only decays. My students tell me it is a great cemetery, every house a tomb. Nothing but sleeping graves. Now New Delhi, they say is different. That is where things happen. The way they describe it, it sounds like a nest of fleas. So such happens there, it must be a jumping place. I never go. Baba never goes. And here, here nothing happens at all. Whatever happened happened long ago—in the time of the Tughlaqs, the Khiljis, the Sultanate, and the Moghuls - that lot.”

(*Clear Light of Day* - 7-8)

The two sisters' initial uneasiness, which is characterized by awkward conversation and awkward silences, worsens as their niece's wedding approaches. Bim strongly declines to take part in the family celebration for reasons that are first apparent to Tara. Baba, who has a mental disability, is unable to comprehend the reality of the impending wedding and is instead lost in his world of old gramophone recordings and solitary games. Bim shares her recollections of their early years with Tara, who is anxious to comprehend her long-standing resentment towards Raja, her former closest confidante. They reminisce about the tumultuous summer of 1947, which marked the independence of India and the division of Pakistan. At the same time the *Clear Light of Day* also explores the characters' personal struggles, their inner conflicts due to the political implication of India's independence that makes a complex relationship within each other.

In the end, Bim and Tara both realise that their current situation is greatly impacted by hidden emotional challenges rather than being purely determined by financial or physical limitations. The ladies achieve emotional liberation by facing their personal demons, in part because they are willing to examine the highly guarded areas of their vulnerability in private.

The way their connection is portrayed, though, is everything from tender. A moving and incisive psychological portrayal is produced by combining two complex viewpoints that would otherwise remain clearly distinct. The tale of Bim and Tara develops into an engrossing investigation of human motivation, exploring the complex elements that influence human behaviour and emotional reactions.

By using retrospective narration, Desai gives the Das sisters' return to their childhood and adolescence significant psychoanalytic meaning. Presenting events from several points of view helps to resolve old issues, even though the method is not therapeutic. The human empathy that Bim and Tara frequently lack for one another is infused into the plot via Desai's storytelling method. They are opposites of one another due to the sharp differences in their worldviews, emotions, and thoughts, which emphasizes how neither of them has a critically reflective self-image. Desai explores the intricacies of their relationship and provides a thorough examination of each character's mind and interactions with the other through this narrative.

The novel explores the sisters' long-standing rivalry, which has taken many forms. Their united ambition to get Raja's esteem is far more important than their rivalry for adult attention as children. For Tara, this means assuming the character of a capable and polite diplomat's wife and forgetting her childish, emotionally dependent self, whose marriage easily eased her family's difficulties. However, Bim, who is adamant about maintaining her dignity, uses the only option available to her in response to what she believes to be Raja's financial and emotional betrayal. Bim intentionally distances herself from Raja in order to reaffirm her uniqueness by avoiding contact and keeping a physical distance. Since "Bim, struggling to maintain her self-righteous dignity, counters Raja's perceived emotional and economic betrayal with the only tools available to her," this continuous competition highlights the complexity of their relationships and sheds light on the complex dynamics between the characters.

The characters of these two ladies are expertly realized by Anita Desai, who skillfully resolves any seeming incongruities and skillfully incorporates them into an engaging psychological drama. Through recollections and internal admissions, the sisters' darkest fears - which have been kept unsaid between them - find a voice, helping the readers to understand them better. Bim's account of traumatic experiences that marked the passage from infancy to maturity gives the story more depth. Tara, on the other hand, talks about incidents from their early years that have symbolic meaning, such the unimaginable horror that was connected to the household. Like her other works, Desai's concentration in *Clear Light of Day* seems to be limited to the family ties and personal quests for self-realization. Desai crafts a sophisticated and fascinating story that explores the intricacies of human experiences and familial bonds through her subtle character development and memory research.

The personal experiences of the people in this novel - guilt, treachery, inertia, and responsibility - act as windows onto more general political insights. The story explores the difficulties women in postcolonial India faced following the country's independence in 1947. In a patriarchal country where gender is sometimes reduced to a symbolic construct - the 'mother' nation - Desai argues that women must negotiate a new political position. Beyond personal hardships, Desai's examination of gender and politics also includes a critique of Indian nationalism. She makes the case that gender concerns were conspicuously missing from the political language of rejuvenation and liberation, emphasizing the necessity for women to claim their position in a society that is going through major social and political transformations. Desai provides a critical viewpoint on the difficulties experienced by women attempting to gain respect and empowerment in the political sphere by illuminating the nuances of gender dynamics in

postcolonial India. Through her reinterpretation of the maternal figure, Bim experiences a transformation in her self-perception and her view of the country. According to this perspective, the mother is a political symbol that male politicians in contemporary India have twisted, as well as a personal role that Bim has been forced to play by her family. Bim needs to re-establish a good parental image in order to move past her constrained job as a career and her socially inactive status. She transcends the boundaries of her personal obligations and social norms by doing this.

It is clear from the portion about the Das siblings' early years that the two eldest children indeed share a unique affinity. Only once Raja realizes the distinction between men and women does he start to turn away from Bim, and her rejection is so intense that she purposefully hurts her sister. Years later, Bim's psychological distance and alienation from her brother Raja grows as a result of Raja's relocation to Hyderabad, his acceptance into Hyder Ali's family, his obsession with his wife and kids, and his financial success. The literary masterpiece *Clear Light of Day* by Anita Desai paints a moving portrait of life's challenges and the tenacious spirit of people who face them by deftly capturing the subtleties of relationships and the complexity of human emotions. Tara, a mother of nearly grown girls and the wife of a diplomat, tries to keep up the image of diligence in their ruined family home, driven by her husband to overcome the inertia of her unruly upbringing. However, given the gloomy and abandoned surroundings, her attempts appear pointless. She questions why her sister Bim Das seems happy in this messy setting where no one is in charge and no one's personality stands out. Tara feels alienated in this static world as her younger brother, Baba reacts to her confrontation with silence and shadows. In order to deal with the stifling atmosphere of the house that threatens to consume Tara and leave her as powerless as she was as a child, Tara hopes that Bim, who has always been decisive and determined, will divulge her secret. Here, Anita Desai maintains Tara's oppressive state:

“How could Bim bear to look at it for all of her life? Had she developed no taste of her own, no likings that made her wish to sweep the old house of all its rubbish and place in it things of her own choice? Tara thought with longing of the neat, china-white flat in Washington, its cleanliness, its floweriness. She wished she had the will to get to her feet and escape from this room - where to?”

(*Clear Light of Day* - 31-32)

Bim's animosity towards their formerly cherished older brother Raja who moved out years ago to wed the landlord's daughter and inherit the family estate, disturbs Tara much. When Raja's name is brought up, Bim gets critical and skeptical. In her messy and disorganized room, she has kept an old letter from him, treating it as a relic, stashed away in the roll-top desk. Bim rushes down the stairs with a furious purpose, demanding that Tara go with her so she can read the offending letter for herself. Although Bim is emphatic about feeling mistreated, Tara is appalled by her sister's scathing charges and tries to justify them by pointing out that the letter is outdated. In an unpleasant but sincere act of goodwill, Raja, who was just designated as the heir to his late father-in-law, lets Bim and Baba stay in the family house at the same rent as before. But Bim is extremely offended and resentful since she is left to take care of Baba alone. In *Clear Light of Day*, Anita Desai reveals the psychologically estranged Bim and her internal contradiction:

“So now there are just you and I left, Baba; she muttered. Does the house seem empty to you? Everyone's gone, except you and I. They won't come back. We'll be alone now. But we don't have to worry about anyone now -

Tara or Raja or Mira Masi. We needn't worry now that they're all gone. We're just by ourselves and there's nothing to worry about.

(*Clear Light of Day* - 154)

This duty would typically fall to her brother Raja, who has developed a terrible case of tuberculosis, and Aunt Mira, who has tenderly raised them, is becoming increasingly unable to care for them due to her alcoholism. Bakul, Tara's then-potential husband, approaches Bim to get her consent before asking for her hand in marriage. "I don't think you need to ask anyone - except Tara", Bim responds. At first glance, Tara seems to be quite different from her older sister, Bim. Tara has joined the ranks of India's rising elite and married a diplomat. Bim, however, has continued to live within the dilapidated family home. Bim still lives in their ancestral home, but Tara has travelled far from it to join her husband on his several diplomatic assignments abroad. Like Bim, Tara feels a great desire to re-establish a connection with her family's history despite her life appearing to be affluent. Tara changes throughout the course of the book. She hates the role of the sheltered wife, which she first accepted as a way to get away from the demands and annoyances of her family. Similar to Bim, Tara is drawn to her heritage in an effort to better comprehend her own identity and her family's past. A major part of the story that emphasizes the sisters' complicated relationships and their common attempt to make sense of their history and present lives is this parallel path of self-discovery and reconnection.

Paradoxically, in order to fully emancipate herself and uncover her actual self, Tara must go back to her childhood home and face her past. The Das family's situation is reflected in this journey, which also reflects the overall plight of India. Tara is sitting on a filled chair that feels clammy and spongy to the touch when she gets at Bim's house, looking through a book from her early years and Nehru's "Letters to a Daughter", which is a fundamental text for the Indian nation. A heavy spirit suddenly descends upon her, pressing down on the back of her neck and her eyelids, immobilizing and pinning her. This symbolic weight highlights Tara's and, by extension, India's, fight for independence and self-discovery by embodying the burdens of the past, both personal and national. In fact, the character is shown in the paragraph as being immobilized by the weight of her burdensome soul, which is a result of her recollections of her early years. Tara experiences substantial development and change throughout the course of the book. She overcomes the paralysis of her early recollections by the story's conclusion and makes peace with her history. This reconciliation represents her newfound independence and emotional liberation. In order to overcome the limitations that had previously confined her, Tara's quest also led her to separate from her husband's overly protective inclinations. Through her transformation, Tara becomes a stronger, more independent person who is embracing her newfound freedom and is no longer bound by her past.

A thorough examination of family dynamics, individual identity, and the larger socio-political backdrop of postcolonial India may be found in Anita Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day*. The Das siblings' lives are deftly interwoven throughout the narrative, emphasizing their hardships, disputes, and reconciliations inside the ruined family house. The characters - Tara and Bim in particular - symbolize the intricate relationship between tradition and modernity, capturing the difficulties people encounter in a society that is changing quickly. The story explores themes of identity, nostalgia, and the unbreakable bonds to one's history via the Das family's perspective. The protagonists embrace their common origin while battling the weight of history and unresolved emotions. The book also functions as a microcosm of postcolonial India, capturing the country's quest for identity and autonomy following its independence in 1947. Additionally, as seen by the disparate lives of Tara and Bim, the narrative emphasizes the

conflict between tradition and advancement. India's own path towards independence and self-discovery is reflected in Tara's transformation from a sheltered wife to an independent lady. Bim, on the other hand, symbolises the conflict between accepting modernity and respecting cultural roots, as well as the effort to maintain the past in the face of societal changes. In addition to providing a gripping account of family relationships, the novel delivers a moving commentary on the difficulties of postcolonial identity and the long-lasting effects of the past on people's lives. A close reading of Desai's exquisite narrative reveals *Clear Light of Day* to be a complex fabric of feelings, beliefs, and social changes. It is a noteworthy addition to modern literature that gives readers a deep understanding of the human condition inside the complex web of social and familial ties.

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