

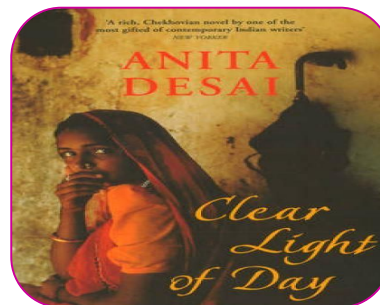


DARKNESS VISIBLE IN ANITA DESAI'S CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY**Sanjoy Garai**

Assistant Teacher in English in Joresal High School.

ABSTRACT

As a family drama Anita Desai's *clear Light of Day* moves us as our own ties with the society is through family. The early tensions and complexities are finely resolved towards the end of the novel exposing some dark spots that strike me. The reasons for calling particular events dark come within the purview of my analysis. I have tried to bring those events to the foreground of the novel. The entire course of the novel as well the happy ending draws my attention to be minutely analysed. Dark spaces pervade the novel. Some of the darkness is overt while some is covert. My object in this paper is to unwrap the issues that are detrimental as well as unwanted in our family and social life, though they play significant role in the context of the novel.

**KEY WORDS:** Complexities, tensions, pervade, unwrap, detrimental.**INTRODUCTION:**

In the beginning of the story parental negligence gets highlighted. Children are usually dependent on their parents for love and care. But here Mr. And Mrs. Das instead of giving time to their children go for their own amusement and recreation. They are totally oblivious of their duties towards their children. And this sense of loneliness and separation on the part of the children is what leads to the further complexities of the novel. This darkness of the disorder in family maintenance is at the root of the story.

Aunt Mira (Mira Masi) is the child widow who belongs to the upper class India, though she is not financially dependent. In the Das family she is little more than a servant who tries to commit suicide to escape the stern realities of her life. She becomes alcoholic to forget deprivation in terms of honour, money, sex and shelter. She is almost exploited in the Das family where she is nothing more than a drudge. Her death due to heavy drinking reminds us of the same events happening around the country now and then. Her endeavour to escape from the real world "charioted by Bacchus and his pards", in the language of Keats, is quite pathetic from social and mental perspective. This darkness poses a great threat to the smooth running of our society and life.

The death of Mr. And Mrs. Das – the parents of four children aptly exposes dark spots. Mrs. Das suffers from diabetes which is nothing but a life style disease fed by indolence and lack of exercise. Mr. Das's death in a car accident goads us to think of lack of road safety. Besides, the Dases living in the house of Hyder Ali as tenant only underlines the stern reality of the dearth of own house for a family. The three fundamental needs of a man's life are food, clothing and lodging. In this case the third need is strangled as the Das have no house of their own, thereby pointing finger to the bare necessities of life. Baba, the mentally retarded, is left at the care of his sister. There is not any scope of rehabilitation on the part of the government for the mentally handicapped. Hyder Ali invites Raja after the latter recovers from illness to go

to Hyderabad to join him there. Mr. Ali also promises a suitable employment in the city of Hyderabad. The problem of unemployment gets exposed at this.

The two sisters – Tara and Bim- are invited by the Mishra family to go with them for a picnic to the Lodi Gardens one day in an early spring. Two young men were also invited to join them. This young men were possible suitors for Jaya and Sarla (the two Mishra sisters). The main object of the picnic was to arrange for an informal meeting of the young men and the marriageable Mishra girls. The Mishra girls had, in course of time become strangely artificial in their speech and manners. During the picnic, the chosen young men remained mostly silent and sullen. The artificiality on the part of the Mishra girls and deep gloom of the young men mix up for dry and dark aspect of life. Bim and Tara, upset by the Mishra girls' artificiality of manner and by the two young suitors' deep gloom did not know how to deal with the situation. However, they left the scene saying that they wanted to pay a close look at the Lodi tombs. Their interest in tombs rather than in living men and women expecting to get married put out the light of hope and happiness crowning darkness deftly. While walking in silence to one of the smaller tombs the two sisters stood gazing at its black walls. Then they felt like sitting down on the grass. Just at this moment some fellow standing there flung a pebble at one of the walls, and happened to hit a bee-hive on the inside of the wall. The bees were disturbed and flew in large number. Bim happened to be the chief victims of the angry bees. Tara could not help running away to save herself from being bitten by them. Tara squeezed herself into a corner of the overcrowded car. She had been bitten by just one bee. But Bim was bitten by many angry bees. Tara left Bim in time of need. This is treachery and faithlessness on the part of Tara as she thought of her own interest leaving the other in the face of danger. The light of reason and relationship is obviously banished by this act of Tara.

The news of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination is given to Raja by Bim. Bim shouted, "Raja, Mahatma Gandhi has been killed. He is dead". Raja does not believe her and thinks that she was out of her mind. Radio news confirms the event. He sobbed that there would now be more riots, more killing, and more slaughter, and that every Muslim in India would be put to death. Raja felt relieved that it was not a Muslim but a Hindu who had killed the Mahatma. This killing of the Father of Nation filled everyone with darkness and gloom.

Sometimes darkness puts on mask as radiance of light tries to reign supreme. Tara marries Bakul. They lead a happy conjugal life. There is nothing wrong in it. When Bim asks Tara if she married Bakul merely to escape from the house, Tara does not altogether deny this fact. The mask of marriage is only a tool here to flee from the burden of the house. All the splendour and grandeur of marriage becomes dull at her partial acceptance of the allegation thrown by Bim.

A birthday party was arranged in honour of Mulk's Guru. Mulk and his Guru were two star performers of the evening. Mulk sang in a voice which rang with the pride of discovery and which had triumph in it. Everybody praised Mulk. This applause stands in sharp contrast with the performance of Mulk's Guru. Old age has robbed of his skill in singing. His performance was not satisfactory. The artificial teeth which did not fit him suitably caused the trouble in singing. His ancient voice was marked by agony. The feelings of conflict, failure and dejection were evident in the Guru's voice. Mulk's voice was marked by sweetness and melody but the Guru's voice was cracked, not merely because of old age but because of the bitterness of his experiences, and because of the sadness and the passion and the frustration gathered during a life's journey. His voice was pregnant with storms, rages and pains. He knew 'fever and the fret' from close quarters. Thus, the voice of Mulk and that of his Guru are diametrically opposite. At the same time we get ample suggestions that one day the melody of Mulk's voice will be engulfed by what have devoured the voice of his Guru. This darkness of transience gets amplified when the contrasting pictures are presented. A sweet thing with the certain threat of being bitter in future is a sure indication of approaching darkness.

The song "Don't Fence Me In" regales the ear of the retarded Baba but Bim gets irritated when it is played time and again. She feels as if she has been split into two parts. Indeed, she feels decapitated by her anger being raised by the song. Walking into Baba's room, she tells him in a loud voice that she wanted to

have a talk with him and that he should stop playing that record. The popular song here serves to be the cause of annoyance to Bim. Music generally has a soothing touch on our mind but in this case it arouses her anger and frustration. She proceeds to tell him that she has decided to sell her share and that of his of the insurance business to Mr. Sharma. They will certainly lose the income from the insurance business. This certainly brings Bim's incapacity of management to the surface. Bim even tells Baba that the latter will be sent to the house of Raja as she will not be able to afford the expenses for Baba's upkeep. Finally she asks Baba if he is willing to go and live with Raja in Hyderabad. Later, however, she says that she does not mean what she has said. In fact, she apologises to Baba. But this is not the reality. Bim is tired of serving and helping Baba. She happens to feel that Baba is burden on her. Her wish to throw off the burden from her shoulder becomes evident when she asks helpless Baba if the latter is willing to go and live with Raja in Hyderabad. The thought was perhaps long suppressed within her. This long nurtured darkness looms large to contaminate her duty and responsibility that she has been showing since long.

In the evening Tara and Bim paced the terrace trying to talk. Bim could not understand herself. Bim was feeling exhausted by the thoughts of Tara, Baba and Raja and of Bakul. It seemed to her that she loved them all and yet did not love them. It seemed to her that she accepted them all and yet did not accept them. It seemed that she understood them all and yet did not understand them. In fact, we find two contradictory Bims who are quarrelling with each other over everything surrounding her. She is not only perplexed but also a person who cannot find and sense the earth on which she stands. It is a kind of darkness of crisis that forbids one to find oneself. Bim was tired and she wanted to go to bed early. However, she entered her dusty room and picked up a book at random from her book self. It was titled *Life of Aurangzeb*. She read the last words of Aurangzeb:

"Many were around me when I was born, but now I am going alone. I know not why I am, Or wherefore I came into the world. Life is transient, and the lost moment never comes back. Now I am going alone. Every torment I have inflicted, every sin I have committed, every wrong I have done, I carry the consequences of it with me. Strange that I came with nothing into the World and now go away with this stupendous caravan of sin."

After going through the last words of Aurangzeb, Bim regained peace. She repeats the last words of the Mughal emperor like a prayer. It is quite strange that the words uttered by Aurangzeb at the time of his death become a source of solace for Bim. As an emperor Aurangzeb does not glorify history. He even goes to the extreme of captivating his own father at Agra where the latter was to embrace slow and painful death. He treated his brothers brutally for gaining power and position. It is quite natural that the emperor was repentant on his death bed. But why does Bim take those last words of Aurangzeb who has not only ill-treated his brothers and father but also his common subjects? And as such he was always in suspicion about others. Towards the end of his rule he suspected even his shadow. In fact Bim identified herself with the monarch of darkness. Bim unknowingly embraces death and despair as she gets refreshed with the dying words of the emperor.

The novel presents violence and aggressive behaviour. Mrinalini Solanki in her book *Anita Desai's Fiction: patterns of survival strategies* finds these traits:

" *In clear life of day* one comes across various shades of violence, ranging from violence and aggressiveness in inter personnel relations to socio- political violence in the country.

There is a violence in the form of melancholia that shatters Bim's mental balance for a long time. But it is different from what is found in other characters as it has been subordinated to understanding and reason. The social as well as psychological factors affect the psyche of Bim, Raja, Tara and Baba. As they relentlessly pursue their individual goals in life, their emotional strength weakens. Unconsciously they feel something abnormal going on inside them. At times, they express their fears and anxieties in violent outbursts.....

Aggressive behaviour and violent outbursts are more characteristic of Bim than of Raja and Tara. It is so because Bim has been left alone to lead a life of dullness and boredom. She lives, almost alone in a rotten house. The old house in old Delhi reflects the destruction and decay which has extremely affected her consciousness. Bim, Raja and Tara are also in one way or the other influenced by the suffocating crowding

locality of old Delhi. The only change in the city is towards destruction, "A great cemetery, every house a tomb". All the children are brought up as if in an apparently absurd and 'grey' world, which has very little to offer by way of hope or inspiration.

Raja's withdrawal makes her (Bim) resentful. A change takes place in her temperament. Though she still engages herself in various activities of life, yet all this is done "with a brooding air, resenting being left there, bored and inactive, by Raja". Raja is beyond her reach. She cannot attack him in any way. Tara becomes scapegoat. Bim's resentment leads her at times to be cruel to Tara"

The ending of the novel is more interesting. Bim forgives her brother, Raja. A note of forgiveness and reconciliation rings to mark an apparent happy ending of the novel. When Bim forgives her brother, Raja, one can find another dark aspect lying hidden. A person who commits a mistake can be forgiven. But to forgive a person who cheats! When Raja promises not to raise the rent of the house where Bim and Tara live, the former not only denies his blood relationship but also pollutes it. Raja gains property through marriage. Bim is, in reality, losing the strength of her backbone. So she prefers reconciliation with her brother whose mercy she needs for her lodging and also Baba's lodging without any change of the rent. When she gives message of peaceful understanding to Tara for Raja, it is her weakness that comes to the surface. It is evident that Bim surrenders to patriarchic society for her survival without any trouble. The strength of mind and sense of honour shown by Bim since she receives Raja's letter assuring not to raise the rent of the house weaken and vanish towards the end. This message of assurance is insult and humiliation in disguise which Bim takes no time to see through. She perhaps fails to cope with the stern realities involving her own unmarried life and also the life of Baba. A sense of loneliness that threatens to engulf, particularly an unmarried woman, is exposed and silently spoken through her message for Raja. One who has riches and power can forgive another who is less powerful and less rich. But when Bim forgives her 'landlord' she does so out of her lack of integrity and stability. This is of course dark side of the protagonist.

Anita Desai has silently exposed some dark spots while some other marks of darkness have been skilfully concealed. Raja marries Banazir and inherits the entire property of Hyder Ali. The inter-communal marriage between Raja and Benazir has resulted in no trouble in the context of the novel. But is this the reality? Is this the truth? Mrs Desai has adroitly kept that darkness from the view of the readers. Perhaps that was too dark to release.

REFERENCES:-

1. Anita Desai's fiction: patterns of survival strategies-by Mrinalini Solanki.
2. Clear Light of Day by Anita Desai.
3. Ode to a Nightingale by John Keats.



Sanjoy Garai
Assistant Teacher in English in Joresal High School.