

ISSN 2249 - 4324

Indian Ethos

(A Peer Reviewed Inter- disciplinary International Journal)

Vol. 7 Number 1



UGC Approved Research Journal (48869)

Editor
S.D Sharma

Summer 2017

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**Understanding Agony Through Bim : A Critique of
Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day***

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ABSTRACT

Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980) is considered to be a landmark in the history of Indian novel in English. Through this novel the novelist portrays the inner recesses of human mind. It depicts how memories of the past intermingle with the present and generate tensions and jealousies. Through the protagonist, the novelist shows how Bim is a subject of constant mental torture and how she finds herself surrounded by frustrations and agony.

Key words : agony, frustrated expectations, memories of the past, sensitive nature.

Commenting on the thematic design of her novel *Clear Light of Day* (1980) Anita Desai points out in an interview given to Sunil Sethi :

My novel is set in old Delhi and records the tremendous changes that a Hindu family goes through since 1947. Basically my preoccupation was with recording the passage of time. I was trying to write a four-dimensional piece on how a family's life moves backwards and forwards in a

period of time. My novel is about time as a destroyer, as a preserver and about what the bondage of time does to people. I have tried to tunnel under the mundane surface of domesticity (42).

Through Bim's psyche Anita Desai makes an innovative attempt to understand the subtle nuances of reality in order to "tunnel under the mundane surface of domesticity". In this "four-dimensional" novel the novelist explores the nature and depth of time and critically examines the subtle relationship between past and present realities. It must be pointed out here that the theme of time is inspired by T.S. Eliot's concept of time as explained in *Four Quartets*, from which the novelist quotes the famous line _____

Time the destroyer is time the preserver.

It has been shown how time brings about a tremendous change in the lives of characters. M.K. Naik has a point when he observes:

The title of *Clear Light of Day* indicates the main theme of seeing the light.... The arrival of her younger sister in her family stirs old memories of shared childhood and past traumas. The shift from the present to the past and back in the narrative helps create the appropriate mood of nostalgia, of long-forgotten impression, words and actions being suddenly suffused with "light-of her days" (Naik, 1982 : 243-43).

On the other hand, in an article "Staying, Leaving, Returning : The Interconnectedness of Female Identities in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*", Jenni Veljento points out how the social milieu impinges differently on the consciousness of two sisters i.e. Tara and Bim: