



The Concept Of 'New Woman' In Anita Desai's 'Clear Light Of The Day'

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Anita Desai is disputably one of the most powerful contemporary Indian novelists in English. According to Anita Desai, "writing is a process of discovering the truth that is nine-tenth of the ice berg that lies submerged beneath the one - tenth visible portion 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 things", Thus, she is more concerned with thought, emotion and sensation than with action, experience and achievement.

A common contemporary issue facing every country is the question of women whether in western or Indian literary tradition, the women are seen as launching themselves for their identity. The 'New Woman' today challenges the traditional notions of 'Angel in the house' and 'sexually various' image. The 'New Woman' is essentially a woman of awareness and consciousness of her low position in the family and society. The feminist literary criticism has developed as a component of women's movement and its impact has brought about a revolution in literary studies.

Anita Desai's emerging New Woman is contemplative about her predicament and chooses to protest and fight against the general, accepted norms and currents. What is different about these woman is that they are prepared to face the consequence of their choices Anita Desai asserts that her protagonists are new and different: "I have interest in characters who are not average but have retreated or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against, the general current", It is for them a challenge to better their own personal existence.

Anita Desai's protagonists, brought up to be different, meek and quite in the face if exploitation, are yet highly sensitive and

intelligent and are desperate to find and outlet to their pangs. Their extreme sensitivity, however, channelizes their mode of liberation in various directions.

"Clear light of the Day" is chosen to evince and examine the wide space that divides the two types of women hailing from the same family -the woman who do not act but surrender and so keep the tradition alive and next the woman who choose not to surrender and be meek but break the convention to face their situation and take up a new road where no one can dictate to them.

Bim is the chief and simplest protagonist of Anita Desai her ambition was two fold : to be emotionally and economically independent. She never wanted to marry : "I can think of hundred things to do instead, I won't marry,....I shall earn my own living and look after Mira Masi and Baba and be independent". She would not depend on anyone, not even on her father. Had she depend on her father for education she would have been an illiterate : "For all father cared, I could have grown up illiterate and cooked for my living or swept. So I had to teach myself history and teach myself to teach." She gets education in history, a subject which has immense significance for her. The past is important as the progenitor of present, Bimla has confidence much like her creator that "both the past and the future exist always in time present." In an interview, Anita Desai points out clearly "time is presented as the fourth dimension of human experience. The whole novel revolves round. 'Time' drawing different impressions from the character Mrs. Desai herself says

"My novel is about time as a destroyer, as a preserver and about what the bondage of time does to people. I have totunnel under the mundane surface of domesticity".

It is he opinion of present as the important



section of past and future that makes her pursue her ambitions, despite the gloomy atmosphere at home, and the burden of responsibility Bim's desire to be independent, to be courageous, and to dress and smoke like a man enables her to grow up both strong and confident. It is only because she has trained herself to be different that the much eulogized characteristics of women i.e., weak will, dependence and shyness are alien to her perception. Bim refuses to confine herself to her role as a traditional woman, showing an insignificant victim or object for others use and pleasure, "woman in our society are still trained from infancy to entertain, to please and to serve men". But Bim was fortunate in her family. Her father was only known by his arrivals and exists and the mother through her diabetes and the cards, there was virtually no one to instruct the young girls the expected conducting pattern of weaker sex. The free will and the lack of training in meekness enable Bimla to pursue her ambitions.

Bim has confidence in herself that she could withstand the shock of the sudden death of her parents, the alcoholic Mira Masi, the tubercular Raja and the mentally retarded Baba without drawing back at any stage-Bimla alone is left to carry the family away from its perturbed atmosphere. Tara , being meek and weak willed, has to help. She has no courage to face the innumerable problems that the family al of a sudden starts to face. This sort of problem and her own business with insecurity and fear drive her towards Bakul. Tara with matrimony succeeds in getting away from the family which had suddenly gone out of control. With the death of Mira Masi and unexpected sudden departure of Raja, Bim because only disappointed but she never became bitter and angry upon them.

The confused condition of Bim's mind disappears, and she is able to consider her inner psyche 'By the clear light of day'. Her calmness of mind is the emblem of the quiet before the storm, which is to overtake her soon as she does not know how to conquer her psychic contrast between accepting her

sister and brothers and not accepting them. The growth of Bim's self is not yet to complete and this way her mind starts thinking about the past and the present. In spite of this she begins to study a book which turns out to be life of Aurangzeb. After perusal of the emperor's death, she is highly impressed by two sentences.

"Many were around me when I was born. But now I am going alone...'and'..... strange that I came with nothing into the world, and now go away with this stupendous caravan of sin".

Bim thinks her life again in the light of these too sentences and explores its meaning. The image of birds, animals and insects are indications of the landscape of the house. They depicts the atmosphere, participate in the emotional tumults of the chief characters, and throw their mental states into sharp relief. The novelist starts with the call of the Koel presenting soul of the day break:

The Koel began to a call before day light their voices rang out from the dark trees like an arrangement of bells, calling and echoing each other's call, mocking and entering each other into ever higher and shriller calls".

Bimla is an educated unmarried working woman, enjoys financial freedom. Mrs. Desai appears indirectly to demonstrate that violence and oppression against women which can be diminished if women are financially self sufficient and self assured, R.K.Srivastava has rightly said that 'The man-woman relationship becomes more important due to rapid industrialization, growing awareness among women of their rights and individualities, and westernization of attitudes and lives of the people".

D.H. Lawrence has also pointed out that "The great relationship for humanity will always be the relation between man and woman, parentan-d child, will always be subsidiary".

Bimla, eldest of all, incurs upon her all the burden of the family. During his days her father passed his time in the office, and in the evening at the club. But after his death Bim accepts the role of a father care of her sisters and brothers and later marrying them. Due to



the responsibilities she has no time for her own love and life. Even though she has an affair with a doctor who becomes her family doctor. In this present novel she appears as a middle aged woman teaching history in a college, living an ascetic life, the only luxury she affords is to buy books. She explores her solace and refuge to buy books and reading of them. Bim is fairly representative of a new woman of contemporary Indian urban women - single, independent, self-assured, At a superficial level, such woman may be seen as 'westernized'. Madhusudan Prasad, commenting on this image points out, "The image combined with the image of sisyphus, A momentous image it is connected with the theme of the novel illuminating the real character of Bim.

It is her extreme sense of responsibility for the family and for Baba which makes her feel strong, and in control of herself. She does not lose her courage with the burden of responsibility. She appears to show that a woman can look after the family such better than any man, Bim is careful and conscious enough not to think the need of protection or love of any one. She hates Mira Masi who craves for love and protection and is elated to receive it from the children if not from any one else.

"The crowd about her so that they formed a ring, a protective railing about her. Now no one could approach no threat, no menace...They owned her and yes, she wanted to be owned."

The novelty in Bim is that she has no desire to be owned. She doesn't want any one to feel either kindness or responsibility for her.

In spite of all the odds Bim gets success in building up her ambitions, is triumphant in being independent, and it is Tara and Bakul who realize this.

"Bim had found everything she wanted in life. It seemed so incredible that she hadn't had to go anywhere to find it, that she had stayed on in the old house, taught in the old college, and yet it had given her everything she wanted.

"Isn't that strange Baul...she did not find it-she made it, she made what she wanted.

Bim appears as New Woman of the coming years. She is independent and liberated and yet there is no mark of arrogance or superiority in her. Bim is very clear about her aspirations urges and expectations, yet she is not the one to roll in pity about her alienation. If she felt cheated and stranded and thought Raja and Tara to be selfish. She was ready to forgive them, She was ready to see every flaw of other in the light of understanding. She would have to forgive her parents too, towards whom she was resentful because she could not grasp the disturbed atmosphere of their lives. Bim is able to obtain everything in life without the help of the masculine forces due to her confidence in herself. It is in Bim that we recognize the emerging New And Independent Woman that Simon de Behavior delineates.

"Once she ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependence crumbles; between her and the universe there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator."

Bimla and Tara in their quest for identity, liberty and individuality act and react in radical ways to the set conventional construct. Tara was certainly not unhappy is obeying her husband, but the question which finally perturbs her is how long ? She realizes that she does something that she never likes.

"She felt she had followed him enough, it has been such an enormous strain, always pushing against her grain, it had drained her of too much strength, now she could only collapse inevitably collapse".

Tara analyse her position as a young and hopeful girl.

"I must have used him as an instrument of escape. The complete escape I could have made - right out of the country."

She used him as the direct track of escape because ;

"Bakul was so much older, and so impressive, wasn't he ? And then he picked me, paid me attention it seemed too wonderful, and I was overwhelmed."

The attention he used to pay her was something she always craved for but never received from anyone at home. So she became meek and her sub-masculinity and



deference were used to keep her at the level of a docile and unquestioning wife.

Tara feels that it is time for her to stop being submissive, She does not want to make Bakul stoop to come to her level, rather she would stretch out and reach over to his position.

In comparison, Bim has everything that Tara has not. And in that she would stretch out and reach over to his position.

In comparison, Bim has everything that Tara has not. And in that she has all this, and not want the society and tradition expect her to be, she is mostly misunderstood :

'Now I understand why you do not wish to marry. You have dedicated your life to others to your sick brother and aged aunt and your little brother who will be dependent on you all his life. Yo have sacrificed your own life for them, "But Bim concedes to carry the burden of responsibility in spite of the dismal atmosphere of the house. She uses to do manly dties and breaks the traditional norms and currents. Here Mrs, Desai seems to suggests the significant sign of New Woman.

Anita Desai's woman are all reflective about their condition. Their protest is not for equality but for the right to be acknowledge as individuals capable of intelligence and feeling. They do not look for freedom outside the house but within, without painting their lives in various artificial shades of sentiments.

Thus, this leads us to the very concept of New Woman.

The New Woman that has been explored in the book reveals that she (Bim) is not the 'ideal' or the 'best' woman. She is new in the dimension of time by being a rebel against the general current of the patriarchal society, and in exploring her true potentially along with the struggle to fulfil her urges and needs.

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