V. EMERGENCE FROM DARK TUNNEL
Clear Light of Day, one of Anita Desai's most gripping and sensitive novels, is constructed like a well-tuned musical instrument in analogy with Eliot's Four Quartets. Concerned with varied relationships between time and history and man, it moves on to revelation of the meaning of existence to the central consciousness. Drawn against the backdrop of pre-Independence India, Independence and subsequent Partition, the novel presents a moving account of a close-knit family ripped apart by time, by ambition as well as by the Partition. Echoing Four Quartets, it highlights the theme of “the renewal of the self in another pattern” (Dhawan:ed., 1993, p.249). As in Four Quartets, Eliot's persona undergoes various experiences in its four sections, similarly in Clear Light of Day. Bim, the heroine, passes through various experiences to come at last out of her dark tunnel of anger and grouse to the bright day-light of love and acceptance. Desai observes that this novel is closest to her heart as it is rooted in her experience and also that the novel mirrors her love for literature and great English writers at that point of time.

Expectedly the epigraph for the novel is taken from the poems of two of her favourite writers: Emily Dickinson and T, S. Eliot.
Memory is a strange bell-
Jubilee and knell-

Emily Dickinson

See, now they vanish,
The faces and the places, with the self which, as
it could, loved them,
To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.

T.S. Eliot

Clear Light of Day is concerned with memory - memories of the individual involved in the larger context of the national and international history. As in Dickinson’s poem, memory for these characters is both pleasant and painful. The quotation from Eliot, however, speaks of persons and places once loved but with time the relationship undergoing a change along with the self which loved them once get renewed in a new pattern. Hence, this apparent change, in the pattern in which the relationship is renewed, is in reality only a continuity of the old relationship. Thus, Clear Light of Day highlights as its theme the continuity in apparent change. In this context, Anita Desai observes that
her present novel is about "time as a destroyer, as a preserver and about what the bondage of time does to people" (Desai: 1980, p.142).

It would not be an exaggeration to say that all of Anita Desai's previous works lead to and culminate in Clear Light of Day where the themes of the preceding three novels are gathered together into a final statement as is often observed by critics. "Anita Desai seems to have asked her readers to read the novel in the entire perspective of her work as it has evolved in time" (Sharma: 1981, p.130), and the novel expectedly reverberates with the foot-falls of all her previous angst-ridden characters. With the sensitivity and dexterity that are always associated with her writing, Anita Desai transforms the unappeased, frustrated cry of the love-lorn Maya into the ultimate serenity of Bim. Conceived as a "four dimensional piece" by Desai, the novel comprises four sections, each concerned with one or more persons linked together by time, place or memory.

The first section deals mainly with the two sisters, Bim and Tara. It begins on a summer morning when Tara wakes up by the voice of birds and moves into the garden adjacent to the house. Bim has already been there and both the sisters discuss their past life and experiences as they
move inside the garden. Tara is particularly aggrieved to observe the
garden walks and their surroundings covered with dust of neglect. The
reference to shabbiness, to neglect, to the death-like city, overshadows
the desultory discussion of the sisters. But none-the-less, as Dieter
Riemenschneider says:

Recapturing the past, then, is to be understood not only as
man's attempt at giving meaning to life, . . . but, more
importantly, as an act of love. Bim and Tara conceive of the
past as a period essentially lacking in positive meaning.
However, sharing a number of memories makes them reflect
and comment upon them . . . Seemingly disconnected events
establish a logical sequence of their own and evoke strong
emotional and psychological responses in both of them which
gives scope to the author to examine her characters' interior
landscapes, . . . For Tara and Bim, to turn to the past means to
take courage and face the truth in order to live with it (Kripal:

The second section is placed in the past in 1947. The time is again
summer, where the memory is mostly of sickness, death and separation.
It presents the closeness between the brother and the sister, Raja and Bim, and their intellectual compatibility gradually dwindling into incommunication and separation; the death of the parents, Mira-masi’s slow movement from drunkenness to death, the penurious condition of the house; Tara’s marriage and the burden of Baba thrust upon Bim.

The third section relates to the birth of Baba and Tara’s fall from her position as the apple of the eye of her family. There is detailed recounting of Tara’s experiences of school, her humiliation and contrast with Bim loved and admired by all her teachers and fellow learners; and her solace in the company of Mira Masi and the Misra girls. The fourth section portrays Bim as a greedy house-keeper suffering from poverty; her troubles with her dead father’s insurance business; the revelation of her enduring love for Baba, Raja and Tara which “had started so far back in time and had had so much time in which to grow and spread”(p.165); and finally the musical soiree at the conclusion in which Mulk and his guru sing leading to Bim’s realization of the significance of the *Four Quartets* line: “Time the destroyer is time the preserver” in her life as well as her family’s. The novel, thus, ends with Bim’s emergence from the dark tunnel of imperfect and incomplete affection to the clear day-light of all-
encompassing love, forgiveness and acceptance. It is interesting to note that Desai also speaks about tunnel in connection with the novel. "The book begins and ends with the visits to give the impression of a tunnel into their ancestors and family history. I believe in going backwards into the past. I felt I was digging a tunnel back into the past (Tandon:2008, pp.203-04).

**Clear Light of Day** has received wide critical acclaim. R.S.Sharma terms it as a novel that tries to "discover the final pattern of meaning that emerges out of the apparent meaninglessness of life in a small family."

(Sharma: 1981, p. 130). Usha Bande alludes to Bim's self-actualization and "uniqueness of personality" (Bande:1988,p.154). She further states that: "Despite her frustrations, failures and pains, Bim's vision increasingly embodies a transfiguration of her sense of alienation into a new consciousness of wholeness through psychic renewal" (Bande:1988, p.141). According to Asha Kanwar, "Bim is able to purge herself of the intense hatred that she felt for Raja for with time she realizes 'No other love had started so far back...' than that she felt for her family" (Kanwar:1989, p.44). Santosh Gupta opines: "Bim discovers through the serious consideration of her whole life the urgent need to correlate her
knowledge with her imagination... and... a desire to recast the past and the present for the ultimate journey into the future" (126). Thus this enables her in “reintegration with her family, society and culture and her perception of a unity between divergent elements within herself and in the world” (Gupta: 1989, pp. 126,129).

The novel presents the experiences of growing up of the Das children of Old Delhi, especially of Bim (Bimla Das), who from a sapling has grown to a tree in the same compound unmoving and life-sustaining like her Aunt Mira. Her brother Raja and sister Tara have moved away to create their own nests and perch only occasionally on her old branches. She and her retarded brother Baba stayed all along in their Old Delhi home and she claims boastfully: “I never go.” (p.5). Clear Light of Day is about Bim’s passage from darkness to light, from stubbornness to flexibility, from denial to acceptance – in short her psychic renewal. This occurs through turbulent phases of rejection, introspection and then acquiescence. Bim, a spinster, is the eldest daughter of the Das family of old Delhi. Unlike her two siblings Tara, who now lives with her diplomat husband, Bakul, in Washington; and Raja, who after marrying their
landlord Hyder Ali's daughter Benazir, lives in Hyderabad, Bim has never moved out of the town.

Her present unenviable existence is the result of a long chain of events, particularly the apathy of Raja and her parents. The parents never cared for anything beyond club and card games. Their memory of the mother is a person "who commanded the servants and chastised children and was obeyed like a queen" (p.111), and the father as "the master of the entrance and the exit" (p. 53). But growing up in the tender shade of Mira-Masi's love, they could tolerate the hurtful neglect of the parents. Mira-masi, a distant, widowed relative, obsolete in her own house, was brought in to look after the retarded Baba- as their diabetic mother was incapable of shouldering his responsibility. But all the children gravitated to this shrunken, self-effacing, timid, 'quick, nervy, jumpy' (p. 110) aunt. Her love, affection and care became "the tree . . . the soil . . . the earth" (p.111) of their existence. But once they grew older they also moved away from Mira-masi and took to games and robust activity. They read copiously and quoted profusely from classics, which daunted Tara and dwarfed Mira-masi. Feeling intimidated by the sprightly children, and
later by the death of both the parents, Mira-masi takes to drinking which ultimately kills her.

Raja contacts T. B. at this time. Throughout Raja’s illness Bim nurses him, takes care of the myriad problems of the house. Over-worked, exhausted and worried she fails to apprehend the real problems of Mira-masi or her addiction, or of Tara, who looking for company frequents their neighbour, the Misras. Bim and Tara have avoided, whenever possible, the company of the two Mishra girls, Sarla and Jaya, as they were considered “too boring to be cultivated. They had also been more than a little nervous of the Misra boys...” (p.62). So Tara’s sudden interest in them surprises Bim. But it is in their company that Tara meets Bakul, a young diplomat and marries him and leaves for U. S. A. Bim on her part refuses a marriage proposal from Dr. Biswas, Raja’s doctor and in refusal tells him:

“... when Raja is well again and I have the time – I think I will go back to college and finish my history course that I dropped when my aunt too fell ill, and when I get my degree – I might teach, she ended in a rush, the idea having just come to her...” (pp.85-86).
An intellectual gulf also grows at this time between Raja and Bim. While Bim realizes she “wants facts, history, chronology”, Raja turns to poetry. He criticises her for having ‘no imagination: to him, the saddest sin. That hurt and puzzled Bim: what need of imagination when one could have knowledge instead? That created a gap between them, a trough or a channel that the books they shared did not bridge” (p. 121).

As children they had boastfully claimed to grow up to become a hero or a heroine. Raja had promised to stay together and look after the family after demolishing their parents’ card house. But once he grows older he starts drifting away from his own bleak, peculiar family towards the more opulent household of their landlord Hyder Ali. And finally he runs away to Hyderabad, where his hero Hyder Ali had gone away on the wake of the partition trouble. He marries Hyder Ali’s only daughter Benazir and inherits his immense property after his death. He had written a letter informing about Hyder Ali’s death. In this letter Raja had allowed Bim to continue in the old house giving the old rent that her parents were paying. Bim misconstrues this as Raja’s snub at her poverty and gets morbidly angry, more so when she is thrust with the responsibility of Baba and is alone, unmarried, and there is none to care for her.
This has sapped and maimed her attitude to life. She has not moved nor has she grown. Instead, she has locked herself in a mental block for twenty long years. It is Tara’s visit to their home that summer to attend Raja’s daughter, Moyna’s marriage, and her caring and probing nature, which opens the flood gates of memory. Tossed in a turbulent sea of memories, Bim rants and raves, till all bitterness exorcised, she decides to destroy the hated letter. With this, she begins “the clearing of her own decks, the lightening of her own bark” (p. 169). She acknowledges, after rereading Raja’s poems, her failure to realise his mediocrity and his imitative style. With this she realises Raja’s limited ambition and learns to accept her undiminished, unceasing love for her family. Thus time plays a vital role in shaping and preserving family bonds despite the ups and downs through years.

The plot of the novel is developed through a time scheme: present-past-present, where the middle chapters deal with the past and the first and last chapters project the present. Narrated by a third-person narrator through consonant psycho-narration, frequent quoted dialogues and monologue, as well as narrated monologue, this complex narrative presentation delineates Bim’s gradual passage from distrust to faith, from
emotional disquiet to harmony. The novel opens with the sisters in their ‘rose walk’ in the first morning of Tara’s arrival at home in Old Delhi. In this section associative memory plays a crucial role in character delineation. In the opening chapter, the narration constantly shifting from Tara’s thought to Bim’s, presents the inner and outer vistas of Bim’s life, that act as an exposition of Bim’s character: her caring nature and her malice towards the pompous Bakul; her love for her family and her special attachment to Baba; her astute mind and her slovenliness toward her physical surrounding.

The narration begins with neutral narrative stance by describing the morning: “The Koels began to call before day light. Their voices rang out from the dark trees like an arrangement of bells, calling and echoing each others’ calls...” (p.1). From this objective description of the morning, the narration gravitates into emotive speculation of the surrounding:

A part of her twitched, stirred like a fin in resentment: why was the pond so muddy and stagnant? Why had nothing changed? She had changed - why did it not keep up with her?
Why did Bim allow nothing to change? . . . whenever she saw them, at intervals of three or five years, all was exactly as before (p.12).

The contrast between Bim's alert mind and her slovenly manner, her independent spirit and obsession to cling on to the past, confuses Tara. The description of the surrounding reinforces the impression of Bim's overall lackadaisical attitude. Tara's playing with the snail takes Bim back to their childhood. The consonant psycho-narration underlines narratorial sympathy when Bim's mind through associative memory, by watching Tara's re-enacting a childhood prank, takes her back to their shared childhood, but Bim does not wish to share her thoughts with Tara.

The doubleness inherent in Bim's nature can be traced in the second chapter through her narrated memory:

Bim was quiet, floating the sponge back and forth in the bowl with wrinkled, frozen fingertips. She felt her exasperation blotted out by wonder at Raja's way of thinking and feeling, so different from any one else's at that time or day. She could not help admiring what she saw as his heroism, his independent thinking and courage. Raja was truly the stuff of
which heroes are made, she was convinced, and yet here he lay, ironically, too ill to play the hero he longed to and, she half-believed, was meant to be (p.45).

This incident describes a day during Raja’s illness. The narration here brings out two aspects crucial to the understanding of Bim’s character. First, such comment as “what she saw as” (She could not help admiring what she saw as), highlights narrator’s ironic view of Bim’s blind admiration of Raja’s heroism actuated more by her sisterly feelings for him than by actual facts of the case. Bim should have by then realized that, Raja’s support of Muslims was caused by his admiration of only Hyder Ali. Thus Bim’s blind adoration of her brother leads to her myopic vision of Raja. Further, her thought is dominated by the memory of Raja and his progression from a dreamy boy to an escapist young man:

He read mostly Lord Byron. Reading, he seemed to form a picture of himself, an image, that Bim, not his college acquaintances, was the first to recognize.

Bim remembered how, as small children, Raja had announced, so grandly, ‘When I grow up, I shall be a hero,’
making her instantly, with shining eyes, respond ‘And I will be a heroine,’... 

Bim remembered that when she heard Raja read aloud to her from Byron... and tell her the story of Byron’s fight for Greek independence and his death in Greece as a hero and poet. ‘Like you,’ Bim murmured... and she later wondered if it had put ideas into his head – dangerous, heady ones about his heroism, his poetry (p. 55).

Psycho-narration here presents Bim’s panoramic vision of Raja’s and her life over a long stretch of time when Raja progresses from idle fancy to entertaining fanciful ideas of being a hero. The mutative summary shows Bim feeling guilty for aiding Raja’s delusion of grandeur, at first by supporting his desire to be a hero when they were children, and she responding to be a heroine as well; and then for being instrumental in creating in Raja his pompous assumption of becoming equal to Byron. Later, the psycho-narration moves on to highlight Bim’s care and concern while nursing Raja in his illness. Bur for Bim, Raja, the Byronic hero rescuing those in peril, has ironically become the dying, helpless Byron.
His situation was Romantic in the extreme, Bim could see as she sponged his face . . . his heavy, limp body as she lifted it as spent and sapped as a bled fish, and the city of Delhi burning down about them. He hoped, like Byron, to go to the rescue of those in peril. Instead, like Byron, he lay ill, dying. Bim was sure he was dying. Her eyes streamed with tears . . .

(p.60).

At the same time she is astute enough not to be myopic of Raja's nature and anticipates Raja's indifference towards the problems of their household. So when the doctor tries to assure her that Raja would very soon recover from T. B. and would be able to take over their father's place, Bim is sceptical about Raja's sincerity:

'Father's place? Bim mocked, then stopped: she would not reveal more. The hedges round the garden grew high-to hide, to conceal. She would not cut them short or reveal (p.68).

The quoted passage is a combination of psycho-narration and monologue. The scepticism hinted and not explicitly expressed in the monologue is now transformed by the narrator's description of the
hedges that conceal and Bim’s reluctance to cut them short to reveal the actual condition of the garden.

Bim’s doubleness inherent in her nature as shown by her attitude to Raja is evident in her attitude to their neighbour, the Misra girls:

Bim stood apart, feeling a half-malicious desire to go into the house and watch the two grey-haired, spectacled, middle-aged women - once married but both rejected by their husbands soon after their marriage - giving themselves up to demonstrations of ecstatic song and dance, . . . She hadn’t the heart after all . . . (p.30).

The passage has a complete cohesion of the narratorial and figural language highlighting the narrator’s understanding and sympathy with Bim’s acerbic humour in presenting the ironic situation of the Misra girls. But, elsewhere psycho-narration also brings out Bim’s kindness, her affection and her caring nature:

. . . rushing off to clean the mess in aunt Mira’s room, found that she had cut her hands and was crying and bleeding all over the bed, more over the spilt drink and the splintered
glass than over the strips of blood that hung from her spidery grey fingers in scarlet webs and which she barely noticed in her lament. It was Bim who cried over them (p. 88).

Here psycho-narration reveals both her surrounding and her action. Inspite of her overwork, Bim is tender and caring towards Mira-masi. The description of aunt Mira ends in a simile showing her weak, emaciated figure and her helplessness. It also shows Bim’s tender, motherly nature that cries with the weak, needy and the suffering. The following incident also brings out a characteristic of Bim crucial to the reader’s understanding of her life in the dark tunnel:

Aunt Mira lay back on her pillows and weakly glowed with pleasure and gratitude like a very small dim bulb . . . smiling guilelessly and purely as a baby relieved from discomfort. Clasping those knuckled ankles, Bim wished she could remain such a baby in a cot, innocent and malleable (p.89).

The passage reveals Bim’s subconscious desire to be cared for and to be free from her problems and troubles, failing which she goes
unconsciously into the dark tunnel that the reading of D, H. Lawrence's *Ship of Death* has showed her:

... she read Lawrence's *Ship of Death*, moving her lips to silent words, wishing she dared speak them aloud ... and wished, almost, that she could herself lower herself into that dark tunnel and slip along behind the passage made for her by the older, the dying woman (p.98).

Thus this time and this incident are central to Bim's present attitude to life. She locks herself in that metaphoric tunnel and lives a death-like existence. The dynamic aspect of her character gets overshadowed by a mask of apathy and ineptitude. And with Raja's departure she becomes totally dejected but she refuses to own up her loneliness:

Bim sank down onto the steps beside him, sat there in a slumped way, both tired and relieved, her arms hanging limply over her knees and her head drooping. . . .

'So now there are just you and I left, Baba,' she muttered. 'Does the house seem empty to you? . . . We needn't worry now that they're all gone. We're just by ourselves and there's
nothing to worry about. You’re not afraid, are you? There is no need to be afraid. It’s as if we were children again - sitting on the veranda, waiting for father and mother, when it’s growing dark and it’s bedtime. Really, it’ll be just the way it was when we were children.’ She yawned hugely, her eyes staring out of her head...

But she didn’t say any more. She laid her head on her lap and seemed nearly asleep (p.101).

This quoted monologue framed by consonant psycho-narration, focuses on Bim’s consciousness. The psycho-narration delineates Bim’s sense of loneliness and dejection through the narrated gesture: “sat down in a slumped way . . . head drooping . . . laid her head on her lap and seemed etc.” that clearly underlines her dejection. The monologue: ‘So now there are just you and I left, Baba’, ‘Does the house seem empty to you?’ corroborates this initial impression, as the ‘just’ gives away the sense of vacuum. Bim’s thought presented in the dialogue form is in reality her monologue as we know Baba does not talk. The circulatory argument underlines her sorrow at her loneliness. The reference to the parents and their childhood of hopeless waiting is a shield to protect her
trouble. Thus this monologue brings to light a buried truth—Bim’s helplessness, her fear of loneliness, her need for love, care and reciprocation that was once there among the brothers and sisters. So to withstand the fear of loneliness she tries to recreate her childhood and unconsciously gets locked in the memory. And in Bim’s memory, it is Raja who is primary while the other brother and sister are secondary.

In contrast, in Tara’s memory, however, there is an equal distribution of importance among all the characters. On her arrival in their old home after a long interval, her concern for the appalling condition of Bim and her surrounding make her recollection move around their childhood when Bim was a more mentally and physically agile person. She remembers the closeness between Bim and Raja and later Raja drifting away from them:

As he grew long-legged and lanky, he became more difficult to catch. Tara, who had always felt at a disadvantage when competing for Raja’s attention since she was the smaller and weaker one, born to trail behind the others, while Bim and Raja were not only closer in age but a match for each other in many other ways, began to realize that she and Bim were
actually comrade-in-arms for they pursued Raja together now and Raja eluded them both (p.116).

Psycho-narration here reveals key information about Bim. It shows Bim’s strong physique and her agile mind that can make her a proper companion to Raja and the closeness of both brother and sister that makes Tara jealous. Moreover Tara’s thought shows how with time and maturity a fissure grows between Raja and Bim and how the later unconsciously comes closer to Tara. Tara’s jealousy is also caused when she observes that Raja can share his leisure with Bim and not with her. She observes:

Yet when they came together it was with a pure and elemental joy that shot up and stood straight and bright above the surrounding dreariness (p. 121).

The narrator duratively summarises the closeness and compatibility between Bim and Raja. The striking image of “flame” functions at two levels – the extreme closeness and affection between Raja and Bim that surpasses the gloom of their house and also Bim’s vivacity. The narrator also presents Bim’s effort to overcome the gloom of their house:
It made Bim more ambitious at school, working consciously and deliberately at coming first in the examinations and winning honours. She was not quite sure where this would lead but she seemed to realize it was a way out. A way out of what? (p.130).

A discursive narrator communicates to the readers about the character. The crucial narrative event presented as indirect thought quotation is in the question- what Bim seeks release from? She does not have the answer, still then she is determined to excel and succeed. Presented through Tara’s perception, the narrator seems more interested in Bim’s achievement than her thoughts. Thus we come to know through Tara, Bim’s promise to remain single and shoulder the burden of the family.

Her grouse against Raja has maimed her psyche and sapped her usual zest for life. She now takes offence at Tara’s every innocuous comment. But being a concerned sister Tara watches and observes her and is conscious of Bim’s self-doubt:
she went out of the room with an oddly uncertain step. Tara was disconcerted by it but would have been far more upset if she had seen how Bim’s lip was trembling and how her hand shook ... (p.147).

From here on the narrator projects Tara as a direct observer of Bim’s character. Through Tara’s growing anxiety and concern we see Bim’s uncertainty and anger particularly when inadvertently she asks Bim about Dr. Biswas:

‘Oh, and Bim, Do you ever see Dr-Dr-what was his name?’

Bim sat very still, very rigid, a shape in grey wedged into a canvas chair (p.152).

Bim’s immobile posture, reiterated through the simile of the grey painting, brings out her hurt and anger at Tara’s insensitivity. Understandably she compares Tara to a mosquito:

The mosquitoes that night were like the thoughts of the day embodied in monster form, invisible in the dark but present everywhere, most of all in and around the ears, piercingly audible. Bim could hear Tara’s voice repeating all the cruel
things she had so gently said – 'Do you ever see Dr-Dr-what was his name?' and 'When one is old, one has all kinds of fears, apprehensions' - and Tara reading aloud a letter from Raja, a letter Raja had written to her, not to Bim. Her own name was not mentioned in that letter. Raja had not written to her or referred to her. Had there not been a quiet, primly folded-up pride in Tara's tone as she read that letter addressed to her? At last the adored, the admired elder brother was paying attention to her, whom he had always ignored, for now he had turned his back on Bim.

Bim saw all their backs, turned on her, a row of backs turned. She folded her arms across her face-she did not want to see the ugly sight. She wanted them to go away and leave her (pp. 152-53).

Beginning and ending with psycho-narration, this narrated monologue displays Bim's extreme agitation. The language "embodied, monstrous, piercingly audible," etc is of Bim. Teeming with repetitions, unmarked exclamation, over statements (adored elder brother, primly folded-up pride), the language shows its monologic inception. The form
as well as the content underscore Bim’s hurt at being ignored: “the mosquitoes that night were like the thoughts of the day.” The ‘mosquitoes’ here has got an anaphoric reference to an actual mosquito bite that sets off a chain of thoughts. Narrated monologue continues for a whole page and comes to a halt with an actual mosquito bite.

Like any narrated monologue, the narration here starts from a neutral and objective stance: the description of the night and mosquito bite. But quickly it moves into Bim’s mind to project her extreme agitation. As Cohn says “narrated monologue themselves tend to commit the narrator to attitudes of sympathy or irony” (Cohn:1984,p.117) and this narrated monologue underscores narratorial sympathy, as the narrator blames the mosquitoes, then Tara’s unthinking reference to Dr. Biswas, and Raja’s letter addressed to Tara for her temper. Thus the agitated physical gesture (she folded her arms across her face), that appears at the wake of Bim’s mental vision (all backs turned on her), belies her false claim (she wanted them to go away and leave her). Thus this mode of narration betrays her agitation when she is forced to revisit the past and accost her “life-lie”.
All these years she had felt herself to be the centre—she had watched them all circling in the air, then returning, landing like birds, folding up their wings and letting down their legs till they touched solid ground. Solid ground. That was what the house had been... Bim’s domain... Bim, who had stayed, and became part of the pattern, inseparable. They had needed her.

But the pattern was now very old. Tara called it old. It had all faded... Bim, too, grey-haired, mud-faced, was only a brown flake in the faded pattern. If you struck her, dust would fly... An heirloom, that was all-not valuable, not beautiful, but precious on account of age. Precious-to whom? (p.153).

Here psycho-narration marked by stylistic contagion reveals the narrator’s complete sympathy with Bim’s rage. Bim’s mind sways rapidly from one point to another. At first the Donne-like metaphor of Bim becoming the fixed leg of the compass, then the repetitions, and the last interrogative sentence, bring to the fore a key psychic condition: her agitation to acknowledge the truth. Bim continuing to stay at home
nurses her grouse, her thwarted desire to re-enact the past, to hold the family together. By equating herself with solid ground her assimilation with earth is complete. She is the proverbial mother earth that holds all, sustains all and rejects none. She perceives her wholeness through her family. But now after agonizing inner debate she acknowledges that she is no longer the centre. Like a faded painting she has lost her value, her importance. Thus this narration brings out the source of her feeling of alienation, her grouse at being used by others when necessary and then abandoned. With this realization comes her anger which she vents out on the mute Baba:

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 . . . leaving nothing but a soggy shadow in the shape of Baba's silence.

No afternoon in all that summer had been so quiet, so empty as the one Bim spent that day, lying as still as a bone left on the sand by the river . . .
Only the questions thundered and thundered, one dark wave succeeding another. Why had she chosen Baba to vent her hurt and pain and frustration on? Why had she not written a letter to Raja, pouring out all she had to say to him over the years? Or attacked Tara instead . . .

She knew why of course: she could so easily have drawn an answer out of them . . .

It was Baba’s silence and reserve and other worldliness that she had wanted to break open and ransack and rob . . .

Like the smashed egg and the bird with a broken neck outside. Filth to be cleaned up.

Her eyes opened at this sight against her will and she looked around the room almost in fear. But it was dark and shadowy . . . and in their shade she saw how she loved him, loved Raja and Tara and all of them who had lived in this house with her. There could be no love more deep and full and wide than this one, she knew. No other love had started so far back in time and had had so much time in which to grow and spread.
Although it was shadowy and dark, Bim could see as well as by the clear light of day that she felt only love and yearning for them all, and if there were hurts, these gashes and wounds in her side that bled, then it was only because her love was imperfect and did not encompass them thoroughly enough, and because it had flaws and inadequacies and did not extend to all equally (pp.164-65).

This narrated monologue reveals Bim’s intense agitation. After the “thundered and thundered” the narration delves into her mind to lay bare the process of her self-realisation. The language becomes increasingly introspective and imagistic till it reaches the essential point through a metaphor of the ransacking hunter that objectifies and animalises the psychic force raging inside Bim. The passage goes from psycho-narration to narrated monologue and back by following the motion of the eyes: “Now she pressed her hand across her eyes but the resulting flashes and pinpricks of light darting and dashing across her eyelids did not amount to an answer”; and again when her mind has gone through the self-analysis and arrives at the conclusion: “Her eyes opened at this sight”. Ensconced between these two optical references the
narration shows Bim’s passage from rigidity to flexibility, from alienation to acceptance. This psychic renewal is delineated through the geographical contiguity of the storm raging all afternoon inside Bim and outside the house. Like a summer storm her outburst soothes her nerves. She feels guilty at her anger. So she takes Baba’s tea to his room, seemingly contrite. But her reaction to the sleeping Baba is an eye opener for the reader to her all-encompassing love and greatness:

She felt an immense, almost irresistible yearning to lie down beside him on the bed, stretched out limb to limb, silent and immobile together. She felt that they must be the same length, that his slightness would fit in beside her size, that his concavities would mould together with her convexities. Together they would form a whole that would be perfect and pure. She needed only to lie down and stretch out beside him to become whole and perfect (p.166).

The narrator coming back to consonant psycho-narration again shows the end of Bim’s crisis. The cohesion is achieved through the sensation she feels at the sight of Baba’s serenity. In her desire to lie down beside Baba to be whole again, she acknowledges the need to
connect, to forgive and to accept her unlimited, unquestioning love for her family.

In Bim's self-realization the dynamic aspect of her character re-emerges, and this reaches its climax with her final act of tearing Raja's hated letter. Her epiphany coincides with her reading from the book, *Life of Aurangzeb*: “Many were around me when I was born but now I am going alone...” (p.167). Her regeneration continues when she finally reads Raja's poems and accepts their 'derivative' quality and his 'wish to emulate' (p.168). She forgives, she accepts, and finally releases herself from the dark tunnel. Acceptance paves the path for enjoyment and she goes to the Misras' house for a musical soiree.

Unlike *Fire on the Mountain* where silence dominates the action, *Clear Light of Day* reverberates with sounds of talk, music and chirping of birds. The novel opens with the dialogues of the sisters and it continues throughout the novel exposing their respective mind-style.

‘How everything goes on and on here, and never changes,’ she said. ‘I used to think about it all,’... ‘and it is all exactly the same, whenever we come home.’
‘Does that disappoint you?’ Bim asked drily. . . ‘Would you like to come back and find it changed?’

Tara’s face was suddenly wound up tightly. . . ‘Changed? How? You mean the house newly painted, the garden newly planted, new people coming and going? Oh no, how could I, Bim?’ and she seemed truly shocked by the possibility.

‘But you wouldn’t want to return to life as it used to be, would you?’ Bim continued to tease her in that dry voice. ‘All that dullness, boredom, waiting. Would you come to live that all over again? Of course not. Do you know anyone who would – secretly, sincerely, in his innermost self-really prefer to return to childhood?’

Still frowning, Tara murmured meaninglessly ‘Prefer to what?’

‘Oh, to going on- to growing up-leaving-going away-into the world – something wider, freer- brighter,’ Bim laughed. ‘Brighter! Brighter’ she called, shading her eyes against the brightness (p.4).
The dialogue of the sisters produces a comic effect when Tara fails to understand Bim’s playfulness. Bim’s dry voice and Tara’s confusion add to this impression. But with the repetitive use of the modifier “secretly, sincerely, really” a hidden aspect of this dialogue comes to the fore: Bim’s reluctance to confront certain issues. The psycho-narration towards the end of this quoted dialogue also increases this impression when Bim’s narrated gesture “shading her eyes against the brightness” comes. Bim’s gesture coming immediately after she repeats the word “Brighter!” creates an ironic effect as it shows she is neither capable of nor appreciative of the brightness of this vision.

So gradually the image of a woman bright and playful, ironical and rigid emerges. This doubleness of her nature is reflected in every step, in every dialogue:

‘Oh, I never go anywhere. It must seem strange to you and Bakul who have travelled so much – to come back and find people like Baba and me who have never travelled at all. And if we still had Mira-masi with us, wouldn’t that complete the picture? The faded old picture in its petrified frame?’ (pp.4-5).
Bim’s reference to the withered aunt brings out the sarcasm inherent in Bim. Her language shows her education, her alert mind as well as her “petrified” surrounding. In contrast to Tara, Bim has been stagnating in the same place. Hence, when she says ‘strange’, we know she is seeing things through Tara’s eyes and finding her life inferior and tries to cover up her confusion with bright, sarcastic chatter. Thus the last sentence: ‘faded old picture...’ actually reflects Bim’s petrified existence. Interestingly, she gives this little speech with her eyes still shaded against the vision.

Bim’s reluctance to accost the bright picture gradually emerges through a long conversation with Tara, when they were walking in their terrace one evening:

‘Imagine,’ she said, with wonder, for she could not believe the long-remembered, always-remembered childhood had a backdrop as drab as this, ‘we used to like playing there—in that dust and mud. What could we have seen in it—in that muddy little trickle? Why, it’s hardly a river—it’s nothing, just nothing.’
‘Now Tara, your travels have made you very snobbish,’ Bim protested, but lazily, good-naturedly. ... ‘Nothing?’ She repeated Tara’s judgment. ‘The holy river Jumna? On whose banks Krishna played his flute and Radha danced?’ (p.24).

The dialogue, full of easy, playful banter from Bim, brings out the difference between the sisters: while Tara, removed in space and time, has grown practical, Bim is still emotionally attached to the scene of their childhood. This unravels the impact of time and distance on individual perception. While it has wrought a transformation in Tara’s observation, Bim’s little speech at once reveals her unchanging state, as her perception is coloured more by culture than logic. Tara, now removed from the locale, has forgotten such cultural associations and can be unemotional and pragmatic. But Bim, inspite of all her teasing, all her education and intelligence, perceives the river only through analogy.

They have also grown apart in their relationship with their brother, Raja.
'Yes, and d'you remember Raja marching up and down here on the roof, swinging his arms and reciting his poems to us ... I used to feel like crying, it was so beautiful ...'

'They weren't. They were terrible,' Bim said icily, tossing her head with a stubborn air, like a bad-tempered a mare's. 'Terrible verses he wrote.'

'Oh Bim,' Tara exclaimed in dismay, widening her eyes in horror at such sacrilege. It was a family dictum that Raja was a poet and wrote great poetry. Now, Bim, his favourite sister, was denying this doctrine. What had happened?

'Of course it was, Tara—terrible, terrible,' Bim insisted. 'We're not fifteen and ten years old anymore — you and I. Have you tried reading it recently? It's nauseating. ...'

Tara was too astounded, and too stricken to speak. Throughout her childhood, she had always stood on the outside of that enclosed world of love and admiration in which Bim and Raja moved ... Now here was Bim, cruelly and wilfully smashing up that charmed world with her cynicism...
'And, apart from poetry recitals, Tara, this terrace is where I cut your hair for you and made you cry. What an uproar there was.' She gave her head a quick, jerky toss. 'And here you are, with your hair grown long again, and its mine that's cut short. Only no one cared when I cut mine' (pp.25-26).

This quoted dialogue full of gestures and similes stands as a watershed in the delineation of Bim's character by bringing out her hurt and grouse against Raja. Tara's romantic personality stands at opposite end to Bim's acerbity which betrays Bim's bias against Raja. The exaggeration, the repetitions of calling his poetry 'terrible, terrible . . . nauseating' is a pointer to her anger. It is an attempt on her part to prove the point more to herself than to Tara. Moreover the simile of the bad-tempered horse corroborates this impression. Representation of Tara's thought at this juncture fills an important gap of the story here: the deification of Raja by the sisters and the seeming unshakable bond of love between Raja and Bim – the breach of which shocks Tara out of her complacence and becomes the turning point of Tara's changed perception.
The recollection of an incident of the past at this juncture, Raja's letter from Hyderabad, underlines Bim's loneliness and hurt leading to her present state in which she has fortified herself from any further hurt by severing contact with the outside world. In her decision she reveals a childlike innocence that goes side by side with her more intelligent, working-woman's self. This innocence is corroborated in her dialogue with Tara about the letter when Tara asked her to tear the hated letter:

'I will keep it. I must look at it and remind myself every now and then. Whenever you come here and ask why I don't go to Hyderabad and visit him and see my little nieces and nephews — well then I feel I have to explain to you, prove to you . . .'

She stammered a bit and faltered to a stop.

'Why, Bim?'

But Bim would not tell her why she needed this bitterness and insult and anger (p.29).

The quoted dialogue interspersed with narratorial comments reflects Bim's hurt which she hides under a barrage of insult and anger. The word 'must' (I must look at it and remind myself) betrays a key
psychic condition: anger does not come easily to her; she has to ‘remind’ herself to be angry or indifferent towards her nieces and nephews. Knowing of the way Bim cared, loved, nurtured and nursed her brother and her aunt, with immense tenderness, selflessness, and care, Bim’s present speech reveals the crux of her dilemma: the anger and indifference against Raja are not self-sustaining; it needs constant reminder through reading of the letter again and again to rekindle that anger. Thus this incident exposes Bim’s ambivalence: her bitterness for being deserted, with her abiding love for her family. Living alone she has carried her grouse for long with her. In the inquisitive presence of the gentle sister, Bim reveals facets of her character as yet unsuspected. Her obsession with Mira-masi’s ghost is one other unexplained incident of her life:

‘Do you know, for a long time after Mira masi died – for a long, long time - I used to keep seeing her, just here by the hedge - ’ (p.41).

The hyphen and the parenthesis are a disclosure of Bim’s inner disquiet, both at the content of narration and the need to narrate. This hallucinatory vision repudiates her claim at self-sufficiency and gives
away the confusion she must have felt at that time of total seclusion. It also reveals her suppressed need for company. This she reveals in a thought transference when she likens her hallucinatory vision to one of those Antarctic explorers which T.S. Eliot wrote about in his notes to The Waste Land.

'Only I was not at any extremity like those explorers in the icy wastes who used to see ghost figures,' she continued. 'I was not frozen or hungry or mad. Or even quite alone. I had Baba. After you married, and Raja went to Hyderabad, and Mira-masi died, I still had Baba. And that summer I got my job at the college and felt so pleased to be earning my living —'

She stopped abruptly as though there were a stone in the grass that she had stumbled on (p.42).

The conjunction of this quoted dialogue with the psycho-narration highlights a key psychological condition of Bim: behind her erudition, her bravado, her evasiveness, there is an acute sense of loneliness following Raja's desertion and Mira masi's death.
The meandering style marked by comparatives, conjunctions, analogies and her evasiveness reflect the difficulty in evoking the past and an acute sense of loneliness. Her reference to Eliot’s notes and the subsequent repudiation of her analogy with the lonely traveller by her statement that she ‘still’ had Baba, reveals her situation as Baba is actually no company for anyone, particularly for someone as vibrant and intelligent as Bim. Further, her abrupt stopping in the course of the dialogue and the simile of the stone in the grass on which she stumbled in her process of recapitulation, she reveals that the past is to her the stumbling block.

‘Isn’t it strange how life won’t flow, like a river, but moves in jumps, as if it were held back by locks that are opened now and then to let it jump forwards in a kind of flood? There are these long still stretches – nothing happens - each day is exactly like the other – plodding, uneventful – and then suddenly there is a crash – mighty deeds take place – momentous events – even if one doesn’t know it at the time – and then life subsides again into backwaters till the next push,
the next flood? That summer was certainty one of them — the
summer of '47 - (pp.42-43).

As has been discussed earlier, Clear Light of Day embodies Anita
Desai’s vision of time and its impact on human psyche. In this novel, the
quoted dialogue serves the purpose psycho-narration does in other
novels. It provides the key to an elided event or reveals a hidden
psychological situation. Here, the dialogues systematically unravel the
situations and events leading to Bim’s present emotional entanglement.

The language here is the most important character indicator. Bim’s
erudite language reveals her education and polish. When she uses such
phrases as ‘mighty deeds’, ‘momentous events’, these lend to the crisis
situation of man’s life a tragic dimension. Thus, the horrendous impact of
the events of ‘47 on their lives makes both Tara and Bim reluctant to
revisit their past:

‘Nineteen forty-seven. That summer. We could see the fires
burning in the city every night —’

Tara shuddered. ‘I hate to think about it.’
‘Why?’ It was the great event of our lives- of our youth. What would our youth have been without it to round it off in such a definite dramatic way?’ (p.43).

The focus shifts from the ordinary events of their youth to the momentous one, the Partition, which has very great impact on their lives. Tara’s “shuddering” at the memory of that great event finds reflection in Bim’s language, and shows that inspite of her bravado, that fateful event has left its indelible marks on her psyche. Thus we find the past as well as the Partition are the unwanted memories for the sisters and they want to avoid all mention of the same.

‘I was glad when it was over,’ Tara’s voice trembled with the passion she was always obliged to conceal. ‘I’m so glad it is over and we can never be young again.’ . . .

‘Youth?’ said Bim, her head sinking as if with sleep, or sorrow. ‘Yes, I am glad, too, it is over – I never wish it back. Terrible, what it does to one- what it did to us – and one is too young to know how to cope, how to deal with that first terrible flood of life. One just goes under – it sweeps one
along – and how many years and years it is before one can stand up to it, make a stand against it—‘ she shook her head sleepily. ‘I never wish it back. I would never be young again for anything.’

An invisible cricket by her feet at that moment began to weep inconsolably (p.43).

This section of the novel rendered through psycho-narration and quoted dialogue underlines the sisters’ unpleasant and bitter memory of their youth. The metaphor of youth as a flood powerfully delineates the cataclysmic impact of youth on their lives. Bim is trying to obliterate this bitter memory. Therefore Tara’s constant effort at drawing Bim out of her cocoon enrages her:

‘I mean,’ said Tara looking away, ‘I mean - you need a change.’

‘What makes you think that?’ asked Bim in wonder...

‘I mean – I’ve been watching you, Bim. Do – d’you know you talk to yourself? . . . when you think you are alone -’
‘I didn’t know I was being watched,’ Bim broke in, flushing with anger.

‘I – I couldn’t help overhearing. And then – your hands. You keep gesturing with them, you know. I don’t think you know, Bim.’

‘I don’t – and I didn’t know I was supposed to keep my hand still when I talked. The girls in college did a skit once – one of them acted me, waving her hands while she talked. It was quite funny’ (pp. 142-43).

This quoted dialogue brings out Tara’s anxiety and concern for Bim and Bim’s magnanimity towards her students. While Bim can enjoy a skit on her by her students she holds her grouse against Raja’s letter for too long a period.

This gulf between Raja and Bim owing to their different perspectives on life has been growing since their youth.

‘It’s nothing to worry about, see, Bim. These aren’t the things to worry about in life.’
‘No?’ she said shortly. ‘What do you worry about then?’

‘Oh Bim, Bim,’ he said, dramatically gesturing towards the door. ‘Look there—look,’ he said, ‘the city’s burning down. Delhi is being destroyed. The whole country is split up and everyone’s became a refugee. Our friends have been driven away, perhaps killed. And you ask me to worry about a few cheques and files in father’s office.’

‘No, that’s only for me to worry about,’ said Bim, as dour as her father, as their house, popping the thermometer into his mouth. ‘That, and the rent to be paid on the house, and five, six, seven people to be fed every day, and Tara to be married off, and Baba to be taken care of for the rest of his life, and you to be got well again—and I don’t know what else’ (pp. 66-67).

This quoted dialogue holds the key to the dilemma of the Das family: the basic, unbridgeable gap between Raja and Bim is that while Bim worries over the problems of the house Raja is rather irresponsible. His ‘dramatic’ gesture: is meant not to acknowledge his responsibility for the family by pointing out the general situation during Independence and
Partition of the country. Raja’s flippant attitude is contrasted with Bim’s anxiety revealed through her manner of articulation: ‘five, six, seven people’. Bim’s speech betrays extreme mental tension in trying to maintain a family. Thus their different perspectives and nature create an unbridgeable “gulf, a trough” between them that Bim fails to apprehend because of her love for and worries about Raja.

But Tara, inspite of being less intelligent, is a better judge of character and observes the intrinsic difference between Raja and Bim.

Raja breathed out in awe. ‘It is Hyder Ali Sahib on his horse.

He looks like a general! Like a king!’

‘Perhaps he likes to imagine he is one,’ said Bim tartly, . . .

(p.122).

This quoted dialogue contains its own distancing technique through the comic effect it creates by the interpolation of Raja’s double exclamation and Bim’s ironic comment. The double exclamation points to Raja’s predilection for grandeur, which is commented upon by the narratorial report of “said Bim tartly.” This conjunction of dialogue and narratorial glosses reveals the disparity between Raja and Bim. Ironically,
Bim’s own bias for Raja had made her blind to his faults but now that she
is biased against him she is unable to change her attitude and persist with
the same.

‘I am bored with Raja. Utterly bored,’ she said evenly. ‘He is
too rich to be interesting any more, too fat and too
successful. Rich, fat and successful people are boring. I’m not
interested, Tara.’ . . .

‘Why do you imagine such things about Raja? You haven’t
even seen him – in how many years, Bim? You live in the
same country and never visit each other . . . You don’t know
anything about his life, about his family, or his work.

‘Yes, I do know’, Bim replied loudly (p.143).

Bim’s conversation with Tara brings out Bim’s habitual action of
omission, of avoidance of unpleasant truth by adopting the proverbial
ostrich attitude. But the constant goading of Tara finally makes Bim
confront the issues troubling her for twenty years. She does so in her
characteristic manner by saying “I am not interested Tara”. But for Tara,
to accept this new Bim is difficult as she has been seeing Bim through the perspective of their youth:

‘What did we really see?’ she wondered aloud in the evening when the dark laid a comfortingly protective blanket on her and no one could make out too much in the dark . . . ‘I think it’s simply amazing – how very little one sees or understands even about one’s own home or family,’ she felt obliged to explain when the silence grew too strained . . .

‘What else do children ever do?’ Bakul asked . . . ‘Children may see – but they don’t comprehend.’

‘No one,’ said Bim, slowly and precisely, ‘comprehends better than children do. No one feels the atmosphere more keenly – or catches all the nuances, all the insinuations in the air – or notes those details that escape elders because their senses have atrophied, or calcified’ (p.149).

This passage begins in audible quoted monologue. Tara’s conversation with Bakul draws the family to the memory of their childhood. The language of Bim, though strident, is also the language of
an educated person who is observant and analytical by nature. Elsewhere, Bim’s speech brings out a dynamic aspect of her life, her swiftness of taking a decision:

‘What I think I shall do— I mean when Raja is well again and I have the time — I think I’ll go back to college and finish my history course that I dropped when my aunt too fell ill, and when I get my degree— I might teach,’ she ended up in a rush, the idea having just come to her as in a natural sequence of affairs (pp. 85-86).

The narratorial comment, coming just after the reply in the dialogue, brings out the salient point of Bim’s personality, her habitual action of taking major decision on the spur of the moment (‘what I think I shall do’/the idea having just come). This reiterates the dynamism in Bim’s nature, her love for education and her independent spirit.

‘I won’t marry. . . . I shall work— I shall do things . . . I shall earn my own living—and look after Mira-masi and Baba and— be independent’ (p.140).
This habitual action of swift decision is a key ingredient of Bim’s dynamism. The “I shall” gives it an appearance of a vow. It also shows that she has not included Raja in her plan. Perhaps she has acknowledged Raja’s need to break free.

But the same person can also throw a temper-tantrum. On receiving a letter from her father’s business partner she feels herself at the end of her endurance:

‘I don’t understand the insurance business. Father never bothered to teach me. For all that father cared, I could have grown up illiterate and-and cooked for my living, or swept. So I had to teach myself history, and teach myself to teach. But father never realized – and Raja doesn’t realize . . .

‘How my students would laugh at me. I’m always trying to teach them, train them to be different from what we were at their age-to be a new kind of woman from you or me-and if they knew how badly handicapped I still am, how I myself haven’t been able to manage on my own – they’d laugh, wouldn’t they?(p.155).
This passage sheds a flood of light on Bim's inner-self. Duties and responsibilities of the family have been thrust upon her as she is the eldest child, but no one cared to perform his/her duty towards Bim. The element of harangue in the dialogue betrays her grouse which she has kept bottled up inside her for years. Through her reference to her students she reveals her secret desire to be independent, self-sufficient and not handicapped to manage her affairs on her own. The hypothetical question, to Tara therefore, focuses on Bim's psychic upheaval when she starts to accept her limitations. This admission also leads to her inner crisis, resulting in uncontrollable and illogical anger.

When she swung down the veranda for a baleful afternoon rest, she nearly stepped on a smashed pigeon's egg and the unsightly corpse of a baby bird . . . made Bim drawback for a moment, then plunge on with a gasp of anger, as if the pigeon had made its nest so crudely, so insecurely, simply to lose its egg and anger her and give the trouble of clearing it. It was a piece of filth-Bim nearly sobbed-not sad, not pathetic, just filthy.
All afternoon her anger swelled and spread, acquiring demonic proportions. It was like the summer itself, rising to its peak, or like the mercury in the barometer that hung on the veranda wall, swelling and bulging and glinting (p.163).

Bim's inner crisis takes the shape of uncontrollable anger. Presented through consonant psycho-narration, the narrative mode reveals narratorial understanding and sympathy with Bim's turbulent psychic upheaval that results in uncontrollable, illogical anger. Since Tara's arrival, her constant questioning has been forcing Bim to face reality. Now in the sleepless night of torturous memories she has lost her self control and she directs her anger at the whole world, as it were.

The technique of representation in the novel also brings out the character of Bim through comparison and contrast with Tara through the presentation of their respective thoughts, their voluntary and involuntary features, their action and comments on other characters.

The sisters are contrasted by their dress sense:

Tara in her elegant pale blue nylon nightgown and elegant silver slippers and Bim in a curious shapeless hand-made
garment that Tara could see she had fashioned out of an old
cotton sari by sewing it up at both sides, leaving enough room
for her arms to come through and cutting out a wide scoop
for her neck. At the feet a border of blue and green peacocks
redeemed the dress from total shabbiness and was-Tara
laughed lightly- original (p.3).

This difference in their attire brings out the difference between the
sisters. Bim’s shabby surrounding like her poor attire are in contrast to
Tara’s rich elegance. Bim moreover sports a short hair-style while Tara
has long, curly hair that she had been craving for since childhood. Bim
also smokes. Thus these voluntary features show Tara’s cultivated poise
and Bim’s disregard for social custom. Also Tara has married and left the
home while Bim clings on to the old house. The presentation of the
personal details of the sisters, thus, shades light on Bim’s character as a
person with a careless, lackadaisical, and defiant attitude to life but at the
same time sentimental in clinging to their family home and surroundings.

The sisters also are different in their physical appearance. As Bakul
observes:
... if Bim were not, for all her plainness and brusqueness, the superior of the two sisters, if she had not those qualities – decision, firmness, resolve – that he admired and tried to instil in his wife who lacked them so deplorably. If only Bim had not that rather coarse laugh and the way of sitting with her legs up . . . now Tara would never . . . and if her nose were not so large unlike Tara’s which was small . . . and Tara was gentler, more tender . . (pp.18-19).

Bakul’s thought presents Bim as a brilliant but unsophisticated person, while Tara, inspite of her polish and good looks is indecisive. And Tara jealously thinks, when Bakul lights the cigarette of Bim:

... Tara was pricked with the realisation that although it was she who was the pretty sister . . . it was Bim who was attractive. Bim who, when young, had been too tall and square-shouldered to be thought pretty, now that she was grey - and a good deal grey observed Tara - had arrived at an age when she could be called handsome. All the men seemed to acknowledge this and to respond . . . Bim could not be said to flirt (p. 36).
The narrator draws up the picture of Bim through a comparison with Tara:

Tara, who had always felt at a disadvantage when competing for Raja's attention . . . while Bim and Raja were not only closer in age but a match for each other in many other ways, began to realize that she and Bim were actually comrades-in-arms for they pursued Raja together now and Raja eluded them both (p.116).

This primary impression is later reiterated through the thought presentation of the sisters. Their respective thoughts on the first morning of Tara's arrival in New Delhi are quite revealing:

But the rose walk had been maintained almost as it was. Or was it? It seemed to Tara that there had been far more roses in it when she was a child-luscious shaggy pink ones, small crisp white ones tinged with green, silky yellow ones that smelt of tea . . . she had trailed up and down after her mother who was expecting her youngest child and had been advised by her doctor to take some exercise . . . Tara had danced and
skipped after her, chattering till she spied something flashing from under a pile of fallen rose petals—a pearl, or a silver ring question—and swooped upon it... (pp.1-2).

Bim observing Tara, also recollects the past:

As Tara performed the rites of the childhood over the handy creature, Bim stood with lowered head, tugging at the hair that hung loosely about her face as she had done when she had sat beside her brother's bed that summer that he was ill, with her forehead lowered to the wooden edge of the bed, a book of poetry open on her lap, reading aloud the lines...

Her lips moved to the lines she had forgotten... she would not say them aloud to Tara. She had no wish to use the lines as an incantation to revive that year, that summer when he had been ill and she had nursed him and so much had happened in a rush. To bury it all again, she put out her toe and scattered the petals evenly over the damp soil (pp.2-3).

This quoted passage executes two distinct functions - the technique of narration underscores the emotional polarities of the sisters and the
narrated matter gives proof of their individual obsession. Thus the difference between the sisters is revealed through their respective invocation of the past. Tara’s memory, redolent with nostalgia for the good times of childhood, complete with an invocation of smell (tea) and gesture (danced, skipped etc.) is presented through psycho-narration. The narration of Bim’s thought, though begins in psycho-narration, swiftly moves to narrated monologue: the technique used for extreme mental agitation and the narrated gesture (tugging of hair) corroborates it.

Their difference is also presented through the nature of their recollection of the past. While Bim recollects only the trouble, the sickness and the problems, which made her determined to fight against her restricting situation, Tara’s thought moving around her mother’s morning walk, Mira- masi’s quilt and all the protective, dependable things at home, makes her an escapist. Through the recapitulated events Bim is shown as a sensitive, caring mother figure. Her indefatigable ministration brings the T.B. patient Raja back to health. Her tenderness and tears are for Mira- masi. But Tara growing in the same house and inspite of her gentle nature does not share those qualities. When Bim struggles with the sick, Tara goes with the Misra family to club or to picnics.
Tara wanting to escape the depressing home atmosphere finds a solution through her marriage to Bakul although she feels guilty for deserting Bim. She also is haunted by another incident in their youth. While visiting the Lodhi Gardens with the Misras, Bim was attacked by bees but without coming to her sister's rescue, Tara had run away from the site. So when Tara comes home this time she wants to exorcise these ghosts of her past. But Bim only said 'you couldn't help it – if you had stayed, you'd have been stung, like me–you had to run' (p.136). This shows Bim's superior understanding, her care and capacity for forbearance and ungrudging forgiveness. However, she holds on to her grudge against Raja for long.

While they were young, Raja and Bim were perfect match in age, intelligence and energy. Both of them were voracious readers and used to quote from great poets that daunted both Tara and Mira-masi. But gradually with age the difference between Raja and Bim grows. Bim's practical approach to life is contrasted with Raja's dreamy, escapist nature.

Bim is also shown as a good student and a natural leader as opposed to Tara's poor performance in every field. Tara's recollection of
their teacher's berating of her as in the following sums up the habitual action of Bim.

'Look at your sister Bimla. You should be more like your sister Bimla. She plays games, she takes part in all activities, she is a monitor, the head girl (p.123).

Bright, intelligent and a role model for others Bim stands far superior to her friends and also to Tara. A clear difference between Tara and Bim is to be noted in their attitudes to the Misra girls. Bim unlike Tara disdains Sarla and Jaya for their early marriage. They had very little contact with the Misra girls, only occasionally they would read together but used to cycle to the school together as it was considered safe. They had to go to the Misra house to get their mending done by the many aunts and female members there. But generally they used to shun their company as “they had always regarded- or at least Bim had- the Misra girls as too boring to be cultivated” (p.62). When they chose marriage over education Bim was the first to denigrate the idea and pities them when they were separated soon afterwards. The Misra girls on their part have no sympathy or concern for Bim. When Tara worriedly approaches Jaya, towards the end, to discuss Bim she said with scorn: 'No need to
worry about Bim—she’s always looked after herself. She can take care of
herself. ‘Bim has Baba to look after—she has always liked to rule
others—and he needs her. Bim’s alright’ (p.161). Thus we see Bim as
generally considered to be strong and independent. She is also caring and
loving like Mira- masi.

But it is interesting to note that Tara tactlessly compares Bim to
Mira -masi when she replies to Bim: ‘You can have all the time you want
with them,’ . . . ‘and influence them as much as you like. In our family,
aunts have that prerogative. Like Mira-masi had’ (p.172). Though Bim
shudders at this, there is a lot of similarity between these two inspite of
their external differences. Like the diffident Mira-masi, the confident Bim
takes care of the weak and the needy, and like her also she is
unappreciated and uncared for.

As in her other novels, Anita Desai uses a variety of symbols in Clear
Light of Day for the purpose of character delineation. One of the most
important symbols is music, which is interwoven into the structural
design and the entire novel resonates with music whether ethereal or
earthly. Unlike the novel Fire On The Mountain, where silence dominates
the lives of the characters, this novel full of sounds, anticipates emotional
emancipation of the central consciousness. Music whether of an ephemeral or of the living world is used here as a major device for character delineation. The novel opens with the music of the koel and they are present throughout the novel marking the passage of time. Reference to song, singer or music continues throughout the novel. The song of birds, the old gramophone records of Baba, the sound of the pebbles he plays at regular intervals, mark the unchanging aspect of time and of Bim, as when there is the narratorial interjection of a weeping cricket at the end of the first chapter. This symbol serves dual purpose: Bim, who is still locked in her childhood, claims to be happy with the end of youth, and just after this claim, the next chapter begins with her recapitulation of her youth, thus belying her claim. This self deception is a manifestation of her psychic state which is symbolically represented through her shabby, neglected house.

The representation of the house stands as a key character indicator. House - the symbol of safety, security, and also a sense of belonging- becomes the centre of activity of all Desai characters. Bim’s dusty, dirty, crumbling house stands for her cluttered thinking and stilted growth. Like the house she is fixed, unchanging and decaying through years of neglect.
The symbol of the house also works at another level. The entire action of the story takes place within three houses— the Das’s, the Misra’s and the Hyder Ali’s. In their contrast there is also certain similarity. Against the riches and the opulence of Hyder Ali’s house the other two houses are dismal, or at least that is what Raja thought about those. But now all the houses have turned to be partially empty either through death or desertion of their inmates.

Like the house, Bim’s garden is also in a state of total dereliction. The wilted rose plants, the dusty bougainvillea, the overgrown hedge, all become objective correlative of Bim’s listlessness and apathy. This effect is reiterated through the geographical parallelism of Old Delhi: the city that “does not change. It only decays” (p.5) aptly presents the “atrophied, or calcified” (p.149) state of an once bright, dynamic girl. It is Tara’s constant probing and cajoling which creates a whirlpool of emotional turmoil in Bim.

This emotional upheaval finds a reflection in the dust storm. The reference to dust storm, prior to unravelling of some mystery or confusion, finds a place in all the previous novels. In Cry, the Peacock, the storm unhinges Maya’s last remnants of lucidity; in Fire on the Mountain
the dust storm precedes the breakdown of Nanda’s self-delusion. In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* the experiences with the stormy rainy season wash away the remnants of Sita’s self-doubt and makes her determined to say the big ‘No’. Finally in *Clear Light of Day*, the dust storm raging outside finds a parallel in Bim’s violent eruption of rage. The storm thus becomes a symbol of Bim’s inner turmoil that forces her to accost her “life-lie”.

...the dust — storm had left the whole garden shrouded in grey. Each leaf, each bush drooped with the weight of dust. Even the sun appeared to be swathed in grey cobwebs. Everything seemed ancient and bent. Everything seemed to have gone into eclipse. The house would need a thorough cleaning (p.147).

With her experience of the dust-storm Bim’s vision of life, which was till now shrouded in the dust of hurt and grouse and shattered dreams, gets cleared and she realizes the need for both literal and metaphoric cleansing of her house.
Besides the symbols, fantasy plays a vital role in character presentation of the novel. Fantasy provides the escape route from the gloomy atmosphere of the house for the Das children. Raja and Bim as children had fantasised about destroying with sword and scissors their parents’ excessive obsession with cards. They had also fantasised about becoming hero and heroine. When Raja playfully declares to become a hero, Bim says she would be a heroine “although she would secretly have preferred to be a gipsy...”(p.112). Fantasy plays an important role in characterization in the novel. Bim’s idealisation of Raja goes side by side with her emergence as an independent individual and the same is later manifested in her admiration of Joan of Arc while Raja preferred to become Lord Byron.

Bim’s character is also represented through the symbolic incident of the attack of bees in Lodhi Garden, where they had gone with the Misra family. Though she was attacked by bees she had made Tara run away. Tara, crushed under guilt for deserting Bim, raises this topic again and again. Bim, sensing her guilt, tries to console her: ‘You ran for help,’ said Bim in the voice of a sensible nurse applying medicine to a wound. ‘I sent you to fetch help’(p.150). The revelation of Bim’s character as a tender,
protective, sacrificing mother figure is intensified by this incident serving as a symbol.

The title of the novel, *Clear Light of Day*, is significant and suggestive like other symbols in the novel. It relates to Bim’s experiences of moving from darkness and half-light of the night of her existence to the clear day light in which her self-realization gets actualised. That shadowy light of night was caused by her incomplete and imperfect love:

“She did not feel enough for her dead parents, her understanding of them was incomplete . . . Her love for Raja had had too much of a battering, she had felt herself so humiliated by his going away and leaving her, by his reversal of role from brother to landlord, . . . Her love for Baba was too inarticulate, too unthinking . . . her concern had not been keen, acute enough. All these would have to be mended, these rents and tears,...” (p.165).

But now, notwithstanding the “hurts, these gashes and wounds in her side that bled” (p.165), she realizes that her love was imperfect and did not encompass them completely and extend to all equally. With this
realization, she turns a new leaf and decides “to mend and make her net whole so that it would suffice her in her passage through the ocean” (p.165) of life.

Thus, through technique of narration, character contrast and use of images and symbols Anita Desai represents in Bim her ideal of woman as strong, intelligent, independent, affectionate, and protective. Bim is not absolutely an exceptional woman: she has her flaws and failings, her prejudices and her laughable attempt at emulating Joan of Arc and becoming the heroine. Her smoking, her coarse laughter, her crisp, sarcastic language, all speak of her lack of concern for polish or custom. But, despite her limitation, she displays her capacity to overcome her restrictive situation in life through abundant love and understanding as well as clear thought and intelligence. In her delineation of the character of Bim, Mrs. Desai presents her final vision of womanhood in the four woman-centred novels. Except Maya and Monisha, all Desai heroines uphold a positive vision of life. Nanda’s vision of the “mysterious” light lighting up the house on the knoll stretches up to Sita and is finally transformed into “The Seraphic Vision” (Bande: 1988,p.140) as the clear light of day for Bim. In the representation of Bim’s character, Anita Desai
has, as it were, created a perfect symphony: moving “from note to note, searching for harmony, experimenting with sequences,” till at last she “found the right combination, the sequence that pleased her” (p.179) by its harmony and thus, achieves her quest for a complete woman. With Bim’s transcendence over self-negation, Anita Desai seems to have solved her own problems that she has been grappling with since Cry, the Peacock. In Bim, we come across a caring, giving, female figure with a positive, masculine intellect, and independent spirit. Her flexibility raises her above her narrow world and makes her immensely endearing to the readers. No other woman portrayed by Mrs. Desai can reach the acme of womanhood achieved by Bim in Clear Light of Day.

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