CHAPTER – 6

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT
CHAPTER 6.1

From Darkness to Light

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT (i) A study of Amla (Voices in the City) and an affirming faith in life.

Voices in the City is so much preoccupied with the nausea of Nirode and the despair of Monisha that Amla, the youngest of the Ray family, has drawn but scant attention of scholars and critics. They often limit her functions in the novel to her utility in revealing the characters of others by her pungent observations. Amla is assigned a secondary place in criticism and is seen only as a shadow of her neurotic siblings. Socially, she is caught in the whirl of Calcutta which excites her in the beginning and disgruntles her later. Psychologically, Amla is a brilliant portraiture of a rebellious young women, eager to master life and triumph over every obstacle. Her ambitious pursuit drags her through various psychic situations till finally she establishes a contact with her real self and achieves equanimity. B. Ramachandra Rao recognises Amla's move from revolt to conformity which he terms "surrender". One may, however, establish that Amla's conversion into a spontaneous person signifies her growth-potential.

Amla, unlike Nirode and Monisha, finds no special charm in a life ridden by faces and anxieties. She wants to enjoy life with all its sunshine and flowers. Aunt Lila appreciates it "That's the spirit in which to start your career, my girl. That's what I like to see in Young people-spirit" (142) Amla prefer a life in which fulfilling emotional ties impart meaning and value to human existence. She, therefore, strives to achieve a warm, leaving relationship
with her brother and sister but unfortunately, both of them fear emotional involvement. She tells Nirode, "it's You, it is You, who are depraved, who make love into something ugly and degenerate" (191) Unluckily, however, since her arrival in Calcutta nothing has happened according to her expectations. Even the job she takes up, does not give her the desired happiness and satisfaction.

We shall ascertain, in these pages, the cause of her acquiescence and see whether Amla Dharma relation generated it or the influence of creativity chiselled it. Monisha’s suicide reveals to her the tragedy of the lost self which, according to Kierkegaard, is "sickness unto death" Amla resolves that she would not allow herself to get lost like her sister, "she knew that Monisha’s death had painted the way for her and would never allow her to lose herself"(248). This is indeed, the starting point of her awakening. The wound accelerates the process and gives her a final view of ultimate reality. Prior to this she passes through a period of bewilderment, grappling with self-idealization and self-realization.

In Amla’s personality one discerns a mingling of optimism and pessimism, joy and despair. The disparity in her idealized image and reality tosses her between two tendencies - regression and progression; and it enables us to see her internal conflicts and the external support she needs in order to grow. Basically a product of not-so-happy a home, she develops narcissistic attitude. She constantly requires reinforcement from others to counterbalance her intrinsic demands with her grandiose self. She is over confident of herself. She thinks she can win over everyone and everything around. Psychologists believe that often a person with such narcissistic tendencies achieve a sense of security in his own entirely subjective
conviction of his perfection, his superiority over others, his extraordinary qualities, and not through being related to others or through any real work or achievement of his own. He needs to hold on his narcissistic self-image, since his sense of worth as well as his sense of identity are based on it. What Amla gets in Calcutta does not satisfy her expansive drives, and her anxieties increase. She is agitated till she gets an abundant supple of love from Dharma. The change makes her euphorically happy. She steps out of a nightmare into a dream come true. A combination of art and love, profuse approbation from Dharma and a sense of triumph help her to realize her most cherished fantasies. However, very soon the author erects emotional blocks. Relationship with Dharma becomes simply a part of the fairy-tale atmosphere. In frustration she rebels, her anguish in this situation is the result partly of hurt pride, and partly of the discovery of her inability to control external reality. Real suffering, felt as a result of Monisha's death and self-analysis resolve her intra-psychic conflicts. In her reformation and chastened vision, the author assures us of Amla's continued growth.

Amla's basic solution is that of mastery of life. She idealizes herself as a superior being, able to fight her way through life without being morbid like Nirode or destructive like Monisha. She is conscious of the "cold, frosty love of power," (109) inherited from her mother, and she secretly embarks upon a search for glory in order to get the satisfaction of experiencing herself as her grandiose self. Indeed Amla's first exuberance and vivacity strike a contrast to her brother and sister who have lost all faith and are marching towards self-annihilation. Amla comes to Calcutta with a vision: an anticipation to become a commercial artist. She is determined to enjoy the city, her new job and her independence "Calcutta doesn't oppress me in the least..... It excites me," (142) she tells Aunt Lila with, self conscious buoyancy. Initially
after reading about Nirode and Monisha's corroded personalities, the third part of the novel, dealing with Amla, brings in freshness but very soon the reader detects her disillusion two contradictory forces work in her psyche side by side, On the one hand, she is drawn by the pleasure of the life in Calcutta and on the other, she is nauseated and feels that pleasure is the most rotten sensation in the city. When aunt Lila utters in dismay, "you are a morbid lot, you young ones." she include the entire generation of diseased, defiant youth, deprived of their vitality even before old age. Jit also notices something positively unique about Amla. Her quest for purpose and meaning in life and the desire to achieve something remarkably different, make her feel trapped in the same dilemma in which Nirode and Monisha have already been caught. Jit observes this and comments "I think you all involve yourself in the tragedies of your own making. I think you all drive yourself deliberately into that dead and where you imagine you will find some solution" (176).

Critics define Amla's despair in terms of the vitiating effect of the monstrous city on a sensitive soul. Anita Desai points out that she wrote this novel to portray, "the powerful impression the city created on me". The pleasant and the unpleasant associations are depicted in the novel denoting the beauty and the ugliness of Calcutta. Whereas the novelist agrees that she has tried to represent the duality of human activity, she is sure that there is much more in the book than mere analogy of this kind. Amla begins to react to the oppressive atmosphere soon enough, commuting to and from office, she begins to feel that the lot had begun to get into her working hours. The harshness of the city had destroyed her eager, adolescent enthusiasm (173) transforming it into cynicism. In the hot summer heat she asks herself a question, "why ever did I come to Calcutta? why didn't I stay away, in Bombay or go home to Kalimpong?". In bitter moments she admits that it is
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horrible city where one cannot be one's self. She is reluctant to show her drawings to Nirode, she acquires the habit of secrecy in order to survive. She tells Nirode:

I have to keep things secret in this horrible city you told me was so wonderful, such a challenge. If I were back in Kalimpong. I wouldn't have minded showing them to you. I should have liked to show them to you. But here, here...... Here one must hide such things, cover up their weaknesses protect their fragility, even destroy them if one doesn't want to see them get covered with filth and blood and rot nothing delicate can survive this. (182).

For Amla, Calcutta is a "monstrous city that lived no healthy, red blooded life"(150). It is a city which "conspires against all who wish to enjoy it".

When she meets her sister Monisha, she finds "some changes" in her. She feels the monster city of Calcutta "had laid its hand" upon her sister Monisha. She feels that "this monster city that lived us normal, healthy, red-blooded life but one that was subterranean, under lit, stealthy and odorous of mortality, had captured an, enchanted or disenchanted both her sister and brother"(150). It is, nevertheless, a miscalculation to link all his troubles to the city. A liberated and intelligent woman, Amla wants, as Aunt Lila puts it, "something greater than pleasure alone, or the security of marriage alone-something more rare, more responsible"(145). Indeed, Amla's quest is directed towards aspiration. She strives to master all fears and anxieties of life, so as to give meaning to it.
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In contrast to Monisha and Nirode, Amla does not want to stand back, apart in the shadows. On the other hand she wants to enjoy life to the full. The self confidence and spirit with which Amla lands in Calcutta demonstrate his capacity to enjoy life and give it a semblance of a positive approach. She believes in the supremacy of the self, its need from freedom as well as response. Aunt Lila appreciates it, "That's the spirit in which to start your career, my girl. That's what like to see in young people- spirit." (142) This basic attitude gives Amla is resilience and an abundance of light-heartedness. That is why, perhaps, Jit once remarks that she has a destructive quality in her. "You destroy - you destroy yourselves, and you destroy that part of others that gets so fatally involved in you. There is this dreadful attractiveness in your dark ways of thinking and feeling through life towards death."(175) In Nirode, it is his arrogant vindictiveness, in Monisha, it is her remoteness. In Amla it is her own invincibility and her conviction that there is nothing she cannot win. She is secretly aware other charm, her youth and beauty. She can impress others and she does it successfully, It is obvious from the impressions she has created on Jit, Mr. Basu and even on the obstinate and aloof Dharma. Indeed, it satisfies her pride system to be the center of attraction, because it guarantees her uniqueness.

Amla has not been introduced in the novel merely to present a contract. She has neither her mother's indifference (though she tells Dharma otherwise) nor her fathers malice and her brother and sister's fear. She is a warm, open hearted and a highly impressionable person over whom "sub conscious had more power than sun and circumstances put together." She is more "transparent than the finest of leaves" The way she is introduced in the novel is suggestive. She is introduced nibbling happily at the sweets sent by her mother for Monisha. When reproved, she says contentedly "But
Monisha doesn't like sweets. Besides I did not eat on the train. She has neither her sister's reserve nor fear. Nor has she her brother's morbidity and anger. While Nirode is obsessed with the thought that their mother is having an affair with Major Chaddha, even Monisha refers to her mother's disgrace in her diary. Amla never looked up at her mother's friendship with Major Chadda in that way. She is shocked when Nirode refers to it in an obscene manner and tells her "You cannot live here in this foul hole imagining the world to be so depraved." Her mothers indifference to her daughters suicide stung her the way it stunns Nirode and aunt Lila. But she dose'nt react to it as violently as Nirode who projects his own disruptiveness at his mother and identifies her with Kali who must "deal us our deaths" since she has "given birth to us" Amla does'nt allow her vision to become morbid. She continues to see her mother as mother. "The monstrous city" saw to it that she had her lot of shocks and disappointment. She too has had her glimpse of the race where the horse which fell was shot down and carried away. But she is not incapacitated by it. We find her happily engaged in illustrating the stories Mr. Bose has written.

The meeting between Amla and Nirode at a river side cafe in Calcutta reveals the nature of their mother and the way she had brought them up. She had been unchanging, a "statue of consistency" perhaps because of her obstinacy, Nirode left home years ago and ventured to establish himself without any financial assistance from her. The free and frank exchange between Amla and Nirode makes the former aware of two essential matters concerning them - that Nirode had starved himself and had been reduced to half his size and that each was a stranger to the other. The exchange helps her to, to realize the essential meaninglessness and futility of wexistence and hence of the struggle for a high intellectual life:
Despite all the stimulation of new experiences new occupaitions, new acquaintances, and the mild sweet winter air, this sense of hollowness and futility persisted. Daily it pursued her to the office, hid quietly under the black mouthpiece of her telephone, shook - ever so slightly - The tip of her pencil as -she traced the severe lines of a well draped sari, then engulfed her in the evenings when she attended parties at which she still knew no one well, and at night when she tried to compose her unsteady thoughts for sleep. (157-158).

We get in these lines a psychological analysis of Amla's gradual realization of her mental isolation and her experience of a sense of meaningless of life, of human existence. We learn about her from her diary in which she has recorded her pensive thoughts and experiences.

However, the essence of the psychic reality of Amla is that after her meetings with Nirode she does not take long to discover that, like her brother, she too is an individual who is not favoured by fate or fortune. Her gaiety soon turns into melancholy (174). She realizes that she is merely existing or surviving and that there is no future for her to think of. Amla feels lonely and helpless in the metropolis which becomes a symbol of this sense of alienation, futility and meaningless of existence and promotes a tragic view of life, but she does not seek solution by compulsive activities. She is open to awareness. Her uneasiness and despair derive from her constant but unconscious quest to protect her inner life from impoverishment. His search is directed towards creativity.
In turning form commercial art to pure art, Amla displays her aesthetic inclination. Her profession an amalgam of commerce and art, and defeats the very sense of creativity and beauty. In it the aesthetic and the materialistic are juxtaposed in a simultaneity which forbids communication at the deeper planes of consciousness. Amla turns to paintings again and again trying to transmute her conflicts into art. This can well be substantiated by Maslow's discussion on the creative attitude. He makes a clear distinction between abstractions and aesthetic perceptions and observes that abstracting is an active process. It involves "selecting-rejecting" its end product is mathematical equation, a formula, a map or a model which is removed from the "raw reality" The end product of an aesthetic perceiving is the full richness of reality it gives:

The total inventory of the percept,
In which everything in it is apt
To be equally savoured and in which
Evaluations of more important and
less important tend to be given up.
Here greater richness of the percept
Is sought for rather than greater
Simplifying and skeletonising (172)

Amla's profession is the routine, normal, pedestrian activity. It does not afford her the enthusiasm and the insight of the glorious moments of creativity. Nauseated by it, she turns to painting trees, insects, birds, flowers; scribbling some "nonsense rhyme" in Bengali on them. She enjoys these moments of serenity. This can be termed a brief period of 'Peak experience" when she loses all self-consciousness and becomes totally absorbed in non-self. The novelist describes her state lyrically
She was frowning in an excess of care, hesitation and mother love over this gracile, patter-footed, whisper-voiced little world that seemed to have shot down the central channel of a smooth green plantain leaf, on a stream of rain water, to land with a splash on her window sill, when Nirode came in (181).

During these moments of self-forgetfulness Amla finds her authentic self, her real identity. Art becomes an exploration. Anita Desai in an interview asserts that she considers art an enquiry, a quest, a discovery not an escape. Amla plumbs the underlying psychic conflicts by moving away from the relentless pressure of the world around her. It is her refusal to be depersonalized by the dehumanizing effects of contemporary life. Her struggle is to connect herself with nature in order to feel whole. It is, indeed, interesting to note that while nature lends her equilibrium, it uncovers for Dharma a new meaning in perennial man, through her.

Amla Dharma love relationship is intriguing, revealing and instrumental in giving a renewed vision to Amla. Amla meets Dharma a couple of days after her arrival in Calcutta. There is almost a case of love at first sight. Dharma's formidable, aloofness is dissolved as he comes out of his shell, becomes "chivalrous, tender, subtle and prophetic" (188) and suggests that Amla be his model for portraits - a suggestion that surprises Nirode who has seen him impenetrably withdrawn. But, modeling for him makes Amla "Translucent with joy and overflowing with a sense of love and reward" (210) For her this first meeting becomes a miraculous force, lifting the pall of
despondency from her heavy spirits, giving way to a slow pain of love: "she felt herself being torn, torn with excruciating slowness and without anaesthesia from the Amla of a day, an afternoon ago." (186) Her real self, eclipsed so far by her grandiose self, tries to emerge. Anita Desai presents it symbiotically as the worm crawling out of Amla's ring in dreams. Dharma paints the ring in Amla's finger with the worm creeping out "of her nightmare to push its insidious head out of the painted stone and arouse, in the painted Amla, that very turbulence of disgust, revulsion and fear that so often assailed the dreaming Amla" (213). This indicates fear of the real self. Dharma’s love and art influence her. She correlates the self and the world and overcomes her anxiety. The novelist describes Amla's experiences a peak of her season of love, as a perfection in which "lay all the joy and sense of being the right person in the right place that love should have made diffuse and scattered gently through the season." (217).

Amla find in Dharma a responsive companion. Their meetings and attachment are based on psychological understanding. In Dharma she discovers a person with whom she can talk freely. She is happy that there is someone who shows genuine interest in her. However, while talking to him, unconsciously, she regresses to the past— the shared experience of the childhood at Kalimpong.

Although she travels back to her childhood, she does not believe it to be a blessed time with angelic beings around her. Her ability to analyse the happenings of those by gone days, in the clear light of adult reasoning, saves her from morbidity and despair. Dharma gets interested in Amla's family affairs when he learns about her parents' unhappy marital relationship. Her father being a cynic and mother a practical lady, never shared the love and likings of each other. Amla feels extremely refreshed and unburdened.
by narrating the events of the past. In her case, regression to the past helps her in getting rid of its hold on her mind.

Dharma knows that Amla has crossed the barriers of self idealization as she wishes to analyze her experiences in the light of reason. Dharma, like a psychiatrist, helps her come out with her suppressed feelings. Her ability to represent her experiences, including the feelings and ideas involved, is a higher achievement than merely toying with abstract concepts as Monisha and Nirode have been doing. Her ability to transcend the limits of time and organize past experiences with her present ones show positive traits in her personality.

Obviously, Amla Dharma love has no sexual over tones. It is not clear what each wants from the other in the matter of physical gratification, but it is evident from the strain they undergo that the relationship is not well defined for either of them. It is precariously balanced between reality and hallucination in which Dharma cannot give her the tangibility or permanence. This situation becomes an “interior volcano” and gives rise to conflicts. Dharma expresses his inner struggle through his paintings, “colouring the water of his existence and splashing on to his canvas the tints of the upheaval within him.” (212). Amla’s conflicts are symbolized in her dreams. She dreams of the white birds which stands for reality. For the dreaming Amla, reality is fascinating but it chides her and the arching plans stretching over the pond “never quite meeting its shimmering reflection” (211). Symbolically, she is the palm, unable to meet her sparkling reflection in the water, “the melancholy maiden, dying of unrequited love.” This denotes, by implication, the impossibility of being and living her grandiose self. It indicates that she has to find her real self, however horrified she may be of it. All this works at the unconscious level.
Even without entering physical terrain and despite being befogged by unclarity, love sustains both Amla and Dharma in their separate worlds there is, in fact, not love but in psychoanalytic terms what they feel for each other is "psychic symbiotic union" a pattern of relationship in which two persons come closer, their bodies remain independent, but psychologically they develop attachment. There are "active" and "passive" forms of symbiotic fusions. In Dharma's case it is active; he enjoys his sway over Amla and feels inflated and enhanced by her idolatry. He thus escapes his aloneness. In the case of Amla, it is passive; she derives pleasure by being an integral part of Dharma's art; he fulfills her need for admiration; in him she finds a responsive appreciating audience she endows him with mysterious faculties, he becomes the "magic helper" to prop her and guide her through life. These are the projections and externalisation of her own imagined qualities.

The significant question is: why does Amla, so young, independent, and spirited fall a prey to her passions, particularly for a man in Dharma's position? It is because, being a "narcissistic" subtype of the expansive drives, Amla's idealized self needs to be a center of attention and attraction Dharma fulfills it. Flabbergasted by her unbearable isolation amid the hubbub of Calcutta, she drifts towards Dharma, makes him an integral part of her life, renounces her integrity and depends on a force outside herself. This idolatry is significant for Dharma also. He achieves a graceful interaction between humility and pride of creativeness. We see him as an inspired artist whose art acquires depth because of Amla's intrinsic innocence and as an artist he is able to see the human possibilities and limitations. His portraits get depth and he feels gratified to see the archetypal man. Her transparent inner self gives him fresh insight. He admits that
she made him see "what the subconscious does to an impressionable creature, how much more power it has on them than sun and circumstances put together. And this is the revelation that made me.... begin on a new era."(233). Indeed, Amla's transparent inner being has a therapeutic effect on Dharma's growth as an artist. His paintings, "modeled on and inspired by Amla, represent in a surrealist style the psychological pulls and pressures of human life itself"(3). Dharma's development as an artist and his re-discovery of himself is due to the inspiration provided by Amla day after day in his studio.

Amla's growing passion for Dharma changes her perception also. She comes out of her frivolous approach to life and glories in her peak "season" of love, enjoying "that tautly strung moment" of perfection, with Dharma's "measured and serene appearance" by her side, "when all flowers are in bloom, and all fruit is ripe."(217). At this moment of perfection, she realizes that the ripe fruit has a "worm embedded in it," but she does not wish to give it a thought. The worm here means the reality that lies at the core of their relationship. She wishes to connive at Dharma's allegiance to his wife, the question of social propriety and impropriety of maintaining this relation, and his greater inclination towards art. But she cannot dissociate herself from these facts. As soon as he learns about Dharma's daughter, she reacts instantly and decides to break free from him.

Amla's breaking away from Dharma appears as enigmatic as her attachment for him. Readers often find Amla's reactions (to Dharma's cruelty to his daughter) too sharp and hence puzzling. According to some she feels hurt to learn of Dharma's callousness towards his only daughter and that she leaves him in disgust; others opine that Dharma's behaviour
is degrading, he lossess her respect and, unable to reconcile, she prefers to leave him. A close study of Amla's character reveals that the reasons for her decision to leave Dharma are not so simplistic and the quickness and sharpness shown by Amla in her reactions are due more to her own conflicts - her pride and irritability. Pride: because she is so significant in his life as to awaken his dormant talents. Irritability; because he is lost in his art and is distracted from her. These conflicts so far controlled, explode in the face of reality. reactions are both strong and instant. Her reactions are both strong and instant.

First, we try to understand Dharma's so-called cruelty to his daughter. When she wriggles out of his protective "chrysalis" he reacts with a feeling of helplessness and impotence. He tells Amla that he did not want his daughter to grow, "I wanted her the same, always the same, beside me."(227). When she struggled out of his hold to marry a cousin, he turns callous, disowns her and in an attempt to save himself from the assault of self-hate withdraws to his secluded suburb, away from the city. This feeds his ego. It is a manifestation of power over the girl and reminds us of Maya's father who sacrifices his daughter "at the altar of his own image". Same type of unsavory sensations trouble Dharma now, as Amla chooses to walk out of his life. This time he turns from his seclusion to the full hubub of life in Calcutta. His old friends, admirers, critics, buyers of his art-pieces, agents all serve to gratify his intrinsic need for triumph. As Nirode observes, "new self-centeredness was eclipsing Dharma's once brilliantly clear and detached vision"(224). Unfortunately, Dharma bargains for something mediocre when art opened the doors for self-realization. His compulsive need for power and expansion remains unchanged, and he pursues them to reaffirm his superiority.
Coming back to Amla again, she finds him as an erring mortal and the image she has of him as someone mysterious and forbidding, is shattered. If he could reject his daughter, he could well enough shut her out from his life. His distractions towards his creative work are a sufficient indication that she has outlived her utility for him. Amla dreads the truth because as Maslow points out truth carries with it responsibilities and that it is an anxiety-producing state. The easiest is to evade the consciousness of truth. In Amla’s case, truth dawns on her with impunity that she is treading dangerous grounds, that Dharma, is after all, committed to his wife and society, that he is a conformist, not possessing the strength to enrich her life by giving her the joy of love. Aunt Lila was probably right in her remark that Dharma was "using" something in Amla. This hurts her pride.

In an attempt to plunge into the dull routine of life which she had tried to beautify with love and art, she leaves him. She tears up the invitation to Dharma’s exhibition and goes with Jit for horse-race This is her regression choice. It is movement backward and suggests symbolically her sickening view of life as a gamble. Here, she sees the stark reality-death, she also visualizes the actuality of life - life is a race, one has to participate in it and strive to win. One who fumbles and falls remains an “outsider,” invaded by the forces of self-hate, alienation and self-destruction. In the shadow of death she discovers the value of life. She opts for progression This is a significant move towards self-actualization. Amla is tossed between the pressures of her neurotic drives and her affirmative will power. Her journey to and fro indicates her self-doubts. As Nirode observes in the novel, journey entails an expense of energy both of mind and body. Human potential lies in making the journey worth the expense. One only hopes that with Monisha’s death, Amla grapples with her authentic self and maintains the poise she displays.
at the end of the novel. Between Nirode’s neurotic outbursts and mothers withdrawal Amla stands as an emerging self.
1. Srivastava, "Interview".
2. The Art of Loving, 23.
CHAPTER 6.2

An analysis of BIM (Clear Light of Day, 1980) as a case of new resolutions and new vision

Bim, the chief protagonist of Clear Light of Day is an interesting study of the self in transition. Although she is often unsteady, oscillating between alienation and confirmation, almost losing herself in the struggle, in the end she discovers the structure of her own consciousness and achieve wholeness. The melancholia that shatters her balance for the twenty long years is a measure of her sense of failure of life to honour her aspirations. But nonetheless, her courage and intellectual strength remain unaffected.

Many readers refer to this positive streak in Bim's character. Meenakshi Mukherjee, for example, credits her with a change of heart, calmness and love. Another critic finds her a "failed quester" who desired to conquer the world but who ends up by conquering herself. Bim develops the "awareness of time and its importance in human life" and strives "to be whole, to be sane amidst all decay, destruction and death." R.S. Sharma alludes to Bim's "transcendence". He recognizes her efforts to evaluate her own self by rejecting all that had hindered her growth into a truly liberated soul. Thus, she goes towards the realization of a new self. It is, however, arguable that, though Bim is the victim of circumstances, she is basically a self actualizing person. Self alienating forces work on her psyche for long, assuming almost pathological proportions. In her weak moments she resorts to resignation, wishing to run away from life, but these forces do not completely overwhelm her. Our inner nature, though weak, never disappears: "even though denied, it persists underground for ever pressing
for actualization." Despite her frustration's failures and pains, Bim's vision increasingly embodies a transfiguration of her scene of alienation into a new consciousness of wholeness through psychic renewal.

The first glimpse we get of Bim is that of a pathetic heroine, an aging spinster, rotting in the decadent old house in Old Delhi, the city that does not change, that only decays, "a great cemetry, every house a tomb." (5) Her sister's yearly visits brings her little comfort, only scorching memory of a past she would feign forget. The author affirms that the family reunion "is only partly successful" as "there are many sour notes among the happy ones". What makes Bim so hysterically ascerbic is the situation she is placed in, not only by an unrelenting fate but by her brother Raja also. Raja absolves himself of his family responsibilities and, on top of it, has the audacity to write a self-righteous letter.

We meet a Bim irate and unforgiving, sarcastic and bitterly distraught. She tends to free herself from her past, to impose a cynical restriction on all her wishes and to close all chapters of childhood and youth as periods of "dullness, boredom and waiting." (4) This is a typical neurotic solution to turn away from people and it reveals her main concern to prevent any further disappointment in life. She erroneously discovers that safety and peace can be obtained by leading a life of a stoicism. This lack of passion, want of emotions and excitement, is also known as apathy. H.S. Sullivan observes that this is a strange situation: "It is a way used to survive defeat without material damage, although if it endures too long one is damaged by the passage of time. Apathy seems to me to be a miracle of protection by which a personality in utter fiasco rests until it can do something else". When this strategy dose not work, Bim slips into a vindictive - aggressive rage. These
intra-psychic conflicts produce alienation. Nevertheless, Bim dose not lose the basic charm and strength of her personality; she is maternally affectionate towards her students; she is still admired by Bakul, silently, for her “decision, firmness and resolve”; (18) loved by Dr. Biswas for courage and fortitude; and is adored by her readers for the unique ability to laugh off her pains. Slowly out of a vignette of a disgruntled spinster, emerges a woman of seraphic vision of the clear light of day, of clear sunshine.

It would be fruitful to look at the formative influences that make or mar Bim’s psyche. Raja, Bim, Tara and Baba are all victims of unwholesome “empty, hopeless atmosphere of childhood”⁴. They spend their childhood in a home which reeks of disease and decay. The parents are absorbed in their own affairs, least bothered about the emotional world of their children. Such an unhappy situation creates fear, insecurity, distrust and anxiety when the children grow up.

For a healthy growth, a child needs an orderly world for creating order, parent-children exchange of ideas is essential. Discussing the positive influence of a harmonious familial interaction upon the psyche of a growing child, Sudhir Kakkar comments: “An individual’s identity and merits are both enhanced if he or she has the good fortune to belong to a large, harmonious and close knit family”⁵. Bim, Raja and Tara have interaction amongst themselves. The servants are there to take care of them, but the parents keep busy playing in their Roshanara club and cards. The children are not allowed to enter into this mysterious world for their parents. Sometimes, out of sheer curiosity they peep into the room from behind the curtains, but fail to comprehend the activity going inside. This strange preoccupation of their parents leaves an indelible mark on their mind. Tears after, Tara on a visit to
her childhood home, is reminded of how “her parents had sat, day after day and year till their deaths, playing bridge with friends like themselves” (22) it remains a mystery to the children who were not allowed within the room “wondering at this strange, all absorbing occupation that kept their parents sucked down into the silent center of a deep shadowy vortex while they floated on the surface, starting down into the underworld, their eyes popping with incomprehension” (22).

There is hardly any exchange between the children and the parents. They could certainly go hay wire like the Ray-children in Voices in the City, for want of parental affection, but for the benign presence of Mira Masi a mother surrogate. Raja and Bim do not appear to be in need of a mother, too busy as they are in their robust outdoor activities. But, the presence is there, and they could turn to her as “the tree, she was the soil, she was the earth.” (11). She is saviour for Tara who clings to her for protection against the elder too, Raja and Bim. Much of the emotional crisis is warded off, just because Mira-Masi, a good mother is there. Baba, the retarded child gets emotional security; Tara, the weakling of the three changes over from the protective embrace of Mira-Masi to that of Bakul, and is happy with her life. The detrimental home affects Raja, He turns an escapist, a self-centred, dreamy romantic, shrugs off all responsibilities, like the parents and settles down to an ordinary life - the class, the banal of mundane reality. It is Bim who, with a vast treasure of read-literature stacked in her brain - Eliot, Byron, Swinburne, romantic books, adventure stories, history-shifts between past memories and present memories, shuttle-cocks between her self-alienating forces and her strength of spirit and mind. How she emerges out of these, is the question.
However, despite these emotional setbacks Bim's courage and intellect remains unchanged. She strives "to be whole, to be sane amidst all decay, destruction and death."(6) The forces of self-alienation are at work on her psyche. She wished to free herself from the past and to close all chapters of childhood and youth. She asks Tara, "do you know anyone who would secretly, sincerely, in his innermost self really prefer to return to childhood?" (4). But she has actually, got stuck in that old grey house which has debarred her from "growing up - leaving - going away - into the world - something wider, freer - brighter" (4) when she tells Tara how the British built New Delhi and moved everything, out she is unconsciously referring to what has happened to Bim and Baba: "here we are left rocking on the back waters, getting duller and greyer" (5) she does not want to think of the past as it is not a source of pleasure. The vision of life enfolds in itself various qualities attributable to a mentally healthy person. A growth-oriented individual has clear and efficient perceptions. It happens because "the effect of wish, desire, prejudice upon perceptions ..... should be very much less in healthy people than in sick."(154). Bim has the unique quality of vivid perception.

Bim's awareness and mental alertness are revealed in her decision not to enter into a marriage with a person like Dr. Biswas. A lucrative offer, particularly for a young girl in Bim's situation, it could be a romantic experience. She could have responded positively to the Doctor's courting. At first, she is swayed, yet she at once realizes that he is not a man made for her. She is flabbergasted at Biswas's remark:

Now I understand why you do not wish to marry. You have dedicated your life to others to your sick brother and your aged
aunt and, your little brother who will be dependent on you all his life. You have sacrificed your own life for them (97).

Angry at being so grossly misjudged. Bim reacts vehemently. She presses her hands together as if to break something. But soon she drowns "rage and frustration.... With laughter at such grotesque misunderstanding, and her tangled emotions twisted her face and shook her, shook the thought of Biswas out of her." (97). Her neurotic struggle to close all doors on the past and run away from conflict commences with this breaking up of self images.

Bim does not withdraw but stifles her own emotional needs. For her survival she adopts the strategy of repression. On the mental level, repression operates in a number of ways. Richard H. Price elaborates that repression may distort what we see or hear, thus protecting the ego from the perception of objects it regards as dangerous, or it may operate on the memory. Memories that have been associated with traumatic experiences or which remind us of threatening events may be repressed and simply made unavailable to awareness. "in either case the purpose of repression is to deal with moral, neurotic or real anxiety by removing from consciousness the internal or external threat to ego" 7. Bim's rejection of Dr. Biswas's proposal to enter into matrimony is prompted by the fact that she does not want to add more responsibilities to her life. She suppresses her instinctual urges for the sake of her family.

A spirited and talented student, Bim, is considerably imaginative and sensitive. Since her childhood, she has been the companion of Raja in his robust boyish activities. She finds herself in the image of a great heroine. In their childhood game of questions, her inevitable reply to what she would
be when she grows up, is always that she will become a heroine. Her real life heroic figures are Joan of Arc and Florence Nightingale. Both Raja and Bim make fun of Tara for her down to earth and unambitious attitude towards life. Bim entertains a very high opinion about herself, therefore her dreams are directed towards becoming free and independent. She does not want to be sympathized for being a woman. She imagines herself to be capable of greater things in life. She chides Tara when the latter avoids going to hospitals on charity Thursdays, "otherwise what good will you ever be? If you, can't even do this little bit for the poor, what will you ever be able to do when you grow up?"(126). Bim admires her heroines and wants to emulate them. "I won't marry.... shall work, shall do things,"(140) she tells Tara. Her resolution is two fringed: it shows her aggressive spirit to let down-Tara who has no ambition all; it also displays her sincere urge to be independent, to do something. The sincerity of her determination has the seed of self-actualizing tendencies but her aggressiveness changes, imperceptibly, into a glorified image.

Bims glorified self image is that of heroic figure who can achieve something in life. The striving to be really great like others indicate growth, but trouble arises when instead of the real self the idealized self-image is upheld. In this case, it is important to have a glimpse of their home atmosphere. With the mounting dissatisfaction in her family, the growing adolescents Tara and Bim - "become infected with some of Raja's restlessness" (130). Bim grows ambitious and Tara finds an escape in Bakul's love. Her desire to "be a mother and knit for her babies" is realized. Bakul's training and love save her from mental wreckage. Mira-Masi's words, said unwittingly though, seem to have prophetic proportions "There, there, you'll see you grow up to be exactly what you want to be, and I very much doubt if Bim and
Raja will be what they say they will be"(112). Raja achieves success in his romantic dreams by marrying Hyder Ali’s daughter and his shifting to Hyderabad takes him a long way from the reality of life to the world of fantasy of his adolescent age. Raja infact through out his adolescent and youth, before marriage lives in a world of fantasy. Bim also starts realizing that Raja is no more an ideal she has dreamt of, she finds "something in her cringed at a kind of heavy sentimentality of expression that was alien to her"(82) Bim, stuck with her abnormal brother, Baba is entangled and feels lost.

Bim feels inferior to Raja and Tara, who have achieved what they aspired for. She is not jealous, but the futility of her desires tortures her. Tara’s marriage makes her free from the responsibility of a younger sister. She takes great care of Baba. also. Even this positive trait in her does not help her to attain the wholeness of personality, to overcome the bitterness and anger which are seething inside her. Horney believes that each person "builds up his personal idealized image from the material of his own special experiences, his earlier fantasies, his peculiar needs and also his given faculties." Bim therefore develops a self-sacrificing personality to achieve a sense of superiority over others. Bim is different from the other protagonists of Anita Desai, because she has a sense of individuality which she maintains not in isolation by togetherness. Although she feels bitter and betrayed, she does not turn cynic. She prefers to live in the shadows but does not want to run away from her responsibilities. Like Sita or Nirode or her own brother Raja.

Bim's main tendency is to grab power and glory, whenever she fails to attain it, she turns to vindictive triumph. Her powerlessness and her ambition to overpower everybody around generate hostile behaviour in her. There is violence in the form of melancholia that chatters Bim's mental
balance for a long time. But it is different from what is found in other characters as "it has been subordinated to understanding, reason". Bim's childhood ideal has been Raja. Quite unconscious of the sex differences, Bim becomes as mischievous as a boy. When Raja grows up and withdraws, she does not comprehend the change that "his maleness and his years were forcing him to withdraw from the cocoon-coziness spun by his aunt and his sisters out of their femaleness and lack or surfeit of years, she grew resentful" (118). A change takes place in her temperament. Though she still engages herself in various activities of life, yet all this is done, "with a brooding air, resenting being left there, bored and inactive, by Raja."

Raja is beyond her reach, she cannot attack him in anyway. Tara becomes a scapegoat. By humiliating her or inflicting pain on her, she derives a sense of achievement since Raja has betrayed her, she wants to compensate for it hurting someone and she gets vicarious pleasure in destroying anything that Tara likes. Tara is happy to note that the rose walk is still there Bim at once bends to "shake a long spindly branch from which a fully bloomed rose dangled. It came apart instantly, revealing a small naked center and a few pathetic stamens clinging to the bald head" (2). The novelists describes in detail how Bim is led to "be cruel to Tara" she clips Tara's long hair because the latter longed for curls. This one cynical act speaks volumes of Bim's indirect violence and also unconscious impulse to defeat others in personal relations. One could let go it as childhood mischief if such acts were not repeated then and even later. Middle aged Bim's occasional remarks are cynical enough to inflict deep pain on Tara. She is cruel and sarcastic at times, and Tara recognizes, "the moment when Bim went too far with which all their encounters had ended throughout their childhood.... (7) Indeed, Bim is always thinking in terms of Triumph.
Triumph for young Bim means to be at par with Raja. To wear his clothes, to puff his cigarettes secretly, to fly kites with him are some of her passions in the field of physical activities. In the intellectual arena, their paths diverge as they grow up. Boy's books like Robin Hood and Beau Geste that set Raja's imagination on fire, have no fascination for Bim. Nor can she enjoy the light, romances dragging her "into the underworld of semi-consciousness" like Tara. Bim cultivates a higher taste in her reading Gibbon's Decline and fall inspired Raja's admiration and awe at the intellectual depth of his sister, But, apparently he ridicules her for her lack of imagination. Bim feels hurt and puzzled. This, naturally, creates "a gap between them, a trough or a channel that the books they shared did not bridge"(21).

According to the cultural norms of Indian society, Raja being a boy, should have shared the responsibility of taking care of Baba. But, it is Bim along who displays courage and strength and manages everything. Since her childhood Bim wants to masculine role; she wishes to imitate her brother. This decision, however, gives rise to cynicism and frustration when a masculine role is forced upon her. An attempt to emulate and equal masculinity is a tragedy of a woman's life. Ferdinand Landberg and Marginia Farnham believe that such a situation is a distortion of character which is "driving woman steadily deeper into personal conflicts - soluble only in psychotherapy"10.

Helen Deutsch, in her study The Psychology of woman, states that intellectuality is a betrayal of a woman's basic feminine nature. An intellectual women, according to her, is "masculinised as her warm intuitive knowledge has yielded to cold unproductive thinking."11. Anita Desai here is concerned with the different social opportunities for boys and girls in the early nineteen forties, of which she is writing in the novel : "certainly, one was aware that men had a different kind of life open to them which was entirely shut to girls. Girls, at the time, did'nt even visualize having any kind of independent will
be choose for themselves". Sociological factors regard Bim's high ideals of service only as a family sacrifice.

Bim's peculiar circumstances and her inability to know what she wants from life impede her growth and diffuse her energies. Her spirited volition to do something collides with the social set up, igniting conflicts. She is aware of her inadequacies and the confusion these have created for her. She realizes that world does not recognize her as Florence Nightingale or Joan of Arc; and that life is full of reality. She remarks to Tara "How my students would laugh at me.... if they knew how badly handicapped I still am, how I myself haven't been able to manage on my own ... They'd despise me" (155). She turns bitter and resentful towards all, shuts all social interaction which in turn results in losing contact with reality, and a heightened awareness of loneliness and rejection. Bim's predicament reminds one of Mary Datchet in Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day*. Like, Bim, Mary is a woman of free spirit who can fight with society to maintain an independent existence.

Bim's psyche movement from self alienation to self realization is the journey of a self temporarily befogged by compulsive drives. Growth is a continuous process, and the real self of man is not completely lost. It is always present and struggles to come up at the slightest opportunity. Bim's character, all through the novel shows positive qualities circumstances and her inability to see what she really wants from life impede her growth and diffuse her energies. Slowly as the narrative enfolds, we see her changed vision. She attains internal freedom; she is liberated from her twisted vision and her confused values. By unifying the diverse fragments of her world into a unified whole she achieves wholeness.
Bim had everything that Tara had not - intelligence, drive, ambition and confidence. And because she has all this and not what the society expected her to be, she was mostly misunderstood. Bim is the simplest protagonist of Anita Desai. Her life is not emotionally or psychologically tangled like Sita’s or Maya’s very limpid about her aims and ambitions right from her childhood. Bim grows up to be straight-forward and firm. 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 won’t marry, .... I shall earn my own living - and look after Mira Masi and Baba and be independent." (140). The course of her life was already set for her - she would not depend on anyone, not even on her father. Had she depended 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 had to teach myself history and teach myself to teach.” (155) she educates herself in history, a subject which has immense significance for her. The past is important as the progenitor of the present. Bim believes much like her creator that “Both the past and the future exists always in the time present” it is her perception of present as the important segment of past and future that makes her pursue her ambitions, despite the dismal atmosphere at home, and the burden of responsibility.

It is because she has will and confidence in herself that she could withstand the shock of the sudden death of her parents, the steadily growing alcoholic Mira Masi, the tubercular Raja and the mentally retarded Baba without flinching at any stage. Bim alone is left to steer the family away from its sickly atmosphere. Tara is no help at all - being meek and weak willed. In this context the incident of the Bee sting in highly symbolic and significant in the understanding of these two protagonist. Tara stung just once, escapes and
is scared, leaving Bim suddenly surrounded and stung all over by the bees. Tara had no courage to face the innumerable problems that the family suddenly begins to face. The very onslaught of problems and her own preoccupation with insecurity and fear drive her towards Bakul. And with marriage she succeeds in getting away from the family which had suddenly gone out of control. Bim on the contrary is too astounded even to reflect about the course of action. She chooses to stay back, lick in all the wounds of the family. Bim doesn't grudge Tara or Raja their freedom and happiness. It is not that she is forced to stay a spinster. Her refusal to Dr. Bose's marriage proposal goes to show how important her independence is to her. And yet she takes the total responsibility of the family with a dedication which could well put Raja or Bakul to shame. She made and achieved what she wanted with the courage devotion and self esteem which Tara lacked so deplorably.

However, the bitterness which seems to corrode the innermost goodness in Bim, is created by the feeling of being used by her own kith and kin. She resented Tara and Raja for their selfishness, for ignoring her, for leaving her to cope with everything why should she alone be used? Yet at one point she realizes that they were all a part of her. The love within her surfaces to make her forgive and forget: ....... 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, gashes and wounds in her side that bled than 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. (165)

It is in her confession of laws that Bim rises above the other characters created by Anita Desai. Bim is very clear about her aspirations, urges and expectations, yet she is not the one to wallow in pity about her loneliness. If she felt cheated and stranded and thought Raja and Tara to be selfish, perhaps
that was an indication of her imperfection. She was ready to forgive them. She
was ready to see every flaw of others 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. The crises of her
adolescence and the problems of her adulthood that had staggered her, are
now substituted by a coherent self. This experience does not make Bim
paragon of rare field visions. She is a character in the process of fulfilling herself,
rising above the limitations of pettiness.

Bim’s love and the desire to empathize with the weakness of others
sets her apart from both the the liberated and the traditional women. Her love
has a unique spirit of overflowing tolerance for others and a capacity for self
criticism. Bim is able to acquire everything in life without the help of masculine
forces due to her confidence in herself. It is in Bim that we recognize the emerging
new and independant woman that Simon de Beauvior envisaged: “Once she
ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependence crumbles;
between her and the universe these is no longer any need for a masculine
mediator”14. For, Bim, therefore, despite her limitations, there is no need for
masculine help or protection. She is unlike the two Misra sisters - Sarla and
Jaya, who slog the whole day to fend for the family and yet are insecure, are in
need of protection, be it from an alcoholic brother or the slightly insane father.
Thus in Bim’s case, all dualities vanish, separation between the observer and
the observed comes to an end and conflicts end. Bim connects the artistic
observation of life with its reality. It is her progression towards the uniqueness
of personality to which Deven is a robust heir.