CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY
In *Clear Light of Day* Anita Desai highlights the role, Time plays in the life of her characters. She calls this work of her's as a "four dimensional piece", where she talks about time as a destroyer, as a preserver and about what the bondage of time does to people". (Anita Desai, "Interview," *India Today*, December 1-15, 1980, 142) Time surrounds all her characters as time is what one merges into. Time is never an independent module but self-reflection. With the historical and chronological background of partition in 1947, Anita Desai sees "the transition from temporary to permanent" by portraying the changes that take place in the Das family. The political division of the country in the name of religion left deep social, economic and psychological implications. The focus on the lives of the families living in old Delhi demonstrates this rupture and anguish. The outside world with its rapid changes and unrest mark their effects on the changes in the lives within the confines of the house. There is a parallelism between the blood-shed and violence outside
and Raja's illness at home. With the country's need to start afresh there is a parallelism with the beginning of Bim's responsibility towards her younger brothers and sister and Aunt Mira. Tara is unable to bear the drudgery of her house. After the death of her father she escapes into a new world with Bakul. We find partition at the manifest level but what is more important is its effect on Bim and others at the conceptual level. This chronology is a backdrop that unfolds the final pattern of meaning that emerges from the apparent meaninglessness of life in a small family.

*Clear Light of Day* begins with a song of the *koel* and ends with the song of the old master, thus, suggesting a fusion of the rhythms of life, both natural and human. The *koel* belongs to the eternal world of nature, but the old master's voice belongs to age and time. The basic and true sources of an ageless and timeless experience are seen in the discovery of permanence within the change, made evident in the contrast between the young disciple and the old master. The novel is thus, about what makes the temporal and the ephermal, the everlasting, though the resolution that the novel offers is not unilinear. The creative tension between the polarities, between death-themes and life-themes, between creation and destruction, light and darkness, alienation and disintegration has a pattern in which the singer discovers the harmony that absorbs all that had appeared discordant in isolation. It is this mood of absorption, the moments of lull after a strong urge, the frustration, we find Bim listening to Mulk's song and reminiscing about Raja's copy of T.S. Eliot's
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Four Quartets:

'Time the destroyer is time the preserver'.

Its meaning seemed to fallout of the dark sky and settle upon her like a cloak, or like a great pair of feathered wings. She huddled in its comfort, its solace. She saw before her eyes how one ancient school of music contained both Mulk, still an immature disciple, and his aged, exhausted guru with all the disillusionments and defeats of his long experience. With her inner eye she saw how her own house and its particular history linked and contained her as well her whole family with all their separate histories and experiences - not binding them within some dead and airless cell but giving them the soil in which to send down their roots, and food to make them grow and spread, reach out to new experiences and new lives, but always drawing from the same soil, the same secret darkness. That soil contained all time, past and future, in it. It was dark with time, rich with time. It was where her deepest self lived, and the deepest selves of her sister and brothers and all those who shared that time with her. (Desai, Anita. Clear Light of Day, Penguin Books, 1980, p.182 Hereafter referred as CL).

This novel is the study the four children of the Das family, their problems, their behaviour, their attitudes, their reactions and their relationships. The four sections of the novel, suggesting 'the four dimensions' of time record the transitions that take place in their family.
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There is an attempt to see the events in time from the perspective of childhood and age. The household is a microcosm of an absurd world, which has little to offer by way of love, hope or inspiration in the apparently absurd and dull grey world.

Bim and Tara, the two young sisters, their growing up and their reactions to their indifferent and disinterested parents, their coping up with a diabetic mother, a father, nothing but 'a master of entrance and exit', and a mentally retarded brother, Baba. Raja, the young tubercular brother, and an alcoholic old aunt Mira, a physical and emotional liability. It gives a grim picture of the absurd world, overpowered with indifference, disease and irrationality. The death of the parents leave the children financially and emotionally destitute. Tara, the younger sister finds rescue from this atmosphere by marrying Bakul and going abroad. Raja on recovering leaves Delhi to go to their Muslim neighbour, his ideal, in Hyderabad and settles there by marrying his daughter, Benazir. Bim and Baba are the two left after Mira Masi's death. Bim expresses her frustrations about her relationship with Tara who is in India to attend Raja's daughter, Moyna's wedding.

Bim does not belong to the category of women who sulked and sighed for love and recognition like Maya and Sita or the housewife like Nanda Kaul who detested her life and thought her life to be wasted on an unfaithful husband and demanding children, or like unhappy and childless Monisha. She is not an image of disquiet and of female repression like
Raka's weak and ailing mother or Bim's own mother or Sita's run-away mother. Nanda Kaul, Raka's and Bim's mothers are so deeply entrenched in the traditional value system that they do not have the power to question the relevance and importance of its assertion. Maya and Monisha get too involved but unable to cope up, end up in hysteria or suicide. Maya and Monisha are failures as wives. These childless women are in continuous search of existential refuge. In spite of being educated and married to affluent men they are unhappy. Sita and Nanda Kaul are failures not only as wives but mothers too. There could be some justification of their being failures as wives but their failure is of greater concern when they are unable to develop a harmonious relationship with their own children. Probably this failure could be attributed to lack of maternal guidance as their husbands always accused them of. The lack of confidence, self-esteem and pride makes them perpetual failures as wives, as women, as mothers.

They cannot respect themselves. They have no pride in being what they are. This lack of self-possession heightens their sense of victimhood which is left without any fulfillment, psychic or moral. These lives, without fulfillment are lives deprived, lives dissatisfied, lives unanswered. It is here that Bim emerges as an answer, an alternative, an image of a new woman. It is in her that we see a woman's landscape becoming a landscape of affirmation. Desire and refusal, magic and deceit in the woman's world had been dismissed as irrelevant in a man's domain. Public and private worlds did not meet. Lives were compartmentalized. Isolated and withdrawn, unloved and unhappy these women sulked in their
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bedrooms and peed out of their windows with a wretched pent up anger. It becomes apparent that women's anger and refusal to conform tends to challenge the existing patriarchal system.

It is neither easy nor desirable to sympathize with such behaviour. It evokes a certain distrust. They are neither lovable nor loved. Solipsistic and insecure they face a reader's curt dismissal. Further more, they have nothing positive to say about themselves. They are negative and negated. By focussing on the female outsider and her conflicting need for recognition Desai has opened ground for speculation. If refusal is one form of protest assertion is another. If dependence entails boredom then self­sufficiency is the answer. We find, then, that for Desai as much for her female protagonists, struggle leads to a recognition of one's limitations and a clearing up of those norms and conditions which impede women's progress. (UR. P.208)

Bim and Tara, though sisters make different choices in life. Tara moves out of the house marrying Bakul who offered her the so-called comfort and glamour, mobility that wealth could, but fully controlled by him. We see Tara replaying the role of Maya but in a much more successful manner. Yet, her not fully satisfied self abroad needs to come back home which has a permanent place in her psyche. This satisfaction of being in the past and seeing the past in the clear light is fulfilled by Bim who had made a more difficult choice of staying in the house permanently, keeping the memories of Mira-masi and her dead parents alive. There is a continous play of light and darkness as seen in the opposite roles the two
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sisters play and the different connotations the house holds for them. Tara has a much brighter and comfortable life with no binding towards the house, the house which is a liability for Bim. Bim has lived in the house with her mentally retarded brother, in the same dark and gloomy atmosphere, without any desire to change it or to escape from it. Even in the darkness she is able to construct a viable space. She visualises light in her role of both, as a sister and a lecturer. She is admired for her courage and tenacity by her college students and even the brother and sister who escaped did not overlook her courage and confidence. Bim in an unusual manner decides in a moment and escapes the heterosexual plot, and never repents on it. Bravely she turns down the institution of marriage and maternity and acquires the role of a maternal figure, taking up the responsibility with commitment towards her siblings, unlike her parents who neither cared and loved nor planned their future.

The children of the Das family are found confronting the problematic world and the break up of their illusions. There is a perspective of childhood when we see reality in terms of the clarity of childhood full with innocence and a perspective of clarity of maturity and experience when we see the same reality as it has congealed in memory into biases, prejudices and fixed mental habits. The adult world for these children is an extension of their childhood. Their childhood was like a dream-world, most of the time covered with clouds and dust of time but with their clarity of mind they develop a matured ability to see this dream-world through dust of time.
Though having grown up in the diseased world of adults with continuous images of sickness, disease, violence and blood, these children balance them with their little joys, enthusiasm, curiosity and romantic aspiration. Living in the absurd, dark world, the children can see beyond, are able to articulate their unconscious longings. Bim, exposed to the world of knowledge, imbibes the heroic idealism of Joan of Arc and Florence Nightingale, Raja's poetic sensibility is given a concrete shape by Hyder Ali, who allows Raja to see into his poetic environment and his rich library. Tara, whose childhood was most traumatic, discovers a world of tenderness and love in her adolescent infatuation with her teacher. Baba who has not many inspirations in life makes his own inarticulate world articulate in the sounds of the gramophone that he collects from Hyder Ali's deserted house.

Bim is free from the traumas of her shattered childhood or an incompatible marriage as she decides, in the spur of a moment when sitting with Dr. Biswas and his mother, she will not marry Biswas. Instead she becomes a force that sustains the foundation of all family life. She becomes a archetypal mother to reaffirm and reassert the life-theme in the novel. She goes much beyond the existential anguish that torment Maya and Sita. In both ways, her negation and her affirmation, she is a true mother who denies herself for the sake of her children. When their mother is unable to take care of the children, Mira Masi, a widowed aunt, is called over to act as a foster mother who nurses them as her own children. When Mira Masi is reduced to the helplessness of a child, Bim takes up the role of a mother. *Clear Light of Day* has three aspects of the mother, the mother who bears,
the mother who cares and the mother who shares. Bim supports life against all destructive impulses and ensures permanence in change, continuity in discontinuity.

Mira Masi, an alienated and disintegrated women as a result of her husband's death followed by ill-treatment by in-laws, is elevated to the platform of a tree when she mothers the emotionally orphaned children and starts thinking of herself as a tree, the source of life and sustenance for them. To look at she had nothing impressive about herself:

Quick, nervy and jumpy - yet to the children she was as constant as a staff, a tree that can be counted on not to pull up its roots and shift in the night. She was the tree that grew in the centre of their lives and in whose shade they lived. Strange, when she was not their mother and did not rule the household. She really had not the qualities required by a mother or a wife. Even the children did not believe she had. Looking at her, they could not blame the husband for going away to England and dying. Aunt Mira would not have made a wife. What does make a wife? Why, they felt, a wife is someone like their mother who raised her eyes, when the father rose from the table and dropped them when he sat down; who spent long hours at a dressing-table before a mirror, amongst jars and bottles that smelt sweet and into which she dipped questing fingers and drew out the ingredients of a wife-sweet-smelling but soon rancid; who commanded servants and chastised children and was obeyed like a queen. Aunt Mira had none of these attributes. Stick-like, she whipped her sari about her, jammed a few long
steel pins into the little knot of hair on her head, and was dressed in an instant, ready to fly. She neither commanded nor chastised, and was certainly never obeyed. She was not soft or scented or sensual. She was bony and angular, wrinkled and desiccated-like a stick, or an ancient tree to which they adhered (CL, pp.110-11).

Marriage in the case of Mira Masi acted as a destructive institution. Instead of giving her physical, emotional and financial support, she was considered, with an "unfortunate horoscope", responsible for the death of her husband, bestowed the title of a virgin widow forcing her live a life deprived of a sense of fulfillment, at the level of basic necessities and ill-treatment by the in-laws. Now when she is called to look after the Das children her instinct of a mother shows its true self. In spite of the looks, as even the children thought, she was their support which their own mother could not give them:

They grew around her knees, stubby and strong, some as high as her waist, some rising to her shoulders. She felt their limbs, brown and knobby with muscle, hot with the life force. They crowded about her so that they formed a ring, a protective railing about her. Now no one could approach, no threat, no menace. Their arms were tight around her, keeping her for themselves. They owned her and yes, she wanted to be owned. She owned them too, and they needed to be owned. Their opposing needs seemed to mingle and meet at the very roots, inside the soil in which they grew.
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Touching them, dressing them, lifting them, drawing them to her, she felt how their life streams met and flowed into each other. They drew from her and she gave readily - she could have not given. Would it weaken her? Would she be stronger if she put them away and stood by herself, alone? No, that was not her way anymore that it was the way of nature. She fed them with her own nutrients, she reared them in her own shade, she was the support on which they leaned as they grew. (CL, pp.111).

Aunt Mira takes up the responsibility of the children when they required it the most. The need of the children for her is as much as her need of their love and affection. They too provide her maternal body with a sense of belonging and love. She seemed to have totally deprived herself of her own needs and demands. She had not only accepted her widowhood but had also repressed her sexual desires by reducing herself to a "useful slave". This useful slave when with these kids no longer remains a slave but becomes a valuable person, for the children. Tara, the young, shy girl gets the security in Aunt Mira which her own parents could not give. Attributing her full self to the children, Mira Masi gets the satisfaction which she had never felt earlier.

With all the kids grown up and with their maternal requirements lessening, the kids in a natural manner withdraw from her company leaving Aunt Mira in a state of abandon once more. Now having experienced love, affection and involvement once, acute loneliness seems to penetrate her inner being. While going through the joys and travails of mothering the
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children, she had probably made some expectations in her imagination. She had no time or space to think of her own life but undoubtedly she had some picture of her old age painted in her mind. Her responsibility as a mother had made her the centre, but with change in situation, and with nothing much left for her to do, she finds life meaningless and recedes completely in her room. It is under the effect of alcohol that her suppressed emotions and frustrations find a release. She becomes fully obsessed with the well:

'Let me go - let me jump into the well - *let me!*' She screamed that intermittently all through the night, like an owl, or a nightjar starting out of the silence, waking Bim. She seemed obsessed by the idea of the well-the hidden, scummy pool in which the bride-like cow they had once had, had drowned and to which she seemed drawn. (CL, p.99).

We find a parallelism between the bride-like cow and Mira Masi. The cow was brought to the house with Aunt Mira's insistence as an important requirement for the kids. The drowning of the cow in the dark well leaves Mira Masi with a strange fascination for the well. It seems to have made her realize her predicament of having wasted her life because of the death of her young husband.

The symbolism of "enclosing darkness" has a metaphoric significance when seen according to the Fredudian theory. Aunt Mira's desire of getting closer to this darkness signifies her female predicament. This can be analysed in two ways, one is as a result of her frustrated sexual
desire, the other could be her desire to protect herself and lie safely in the maternal womb, which has the similar darkness of the well. Mira Masi not a disintegrated being thrives for the mother's comfort and like a child longing for mother's milk, she longs for the bottle. The well becomes so distressing for Bim that after Mira Masi's death, she imagines her drowning in the well and visualizes her drowning face and hair even in her cup of tea. In order to balance her inner fears with outer resilience, unlike Maya, she collects herself to encounter the world. She is sufficiently aware of not allowing these fears of death and destruction overpower her. Once decided not to enter the institution of marriage and children but be responsible and loving to her siblings, she has no regrets:

....she saw how she loves 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. They were really all parts of her, inseparable, so many aspects of her as she was of them, so that the anger or the disappointment she felt in them was only the anger and disappointment she felt at herself. Whatever hurt they felt, she felt. Whatever diminished them, diminished her. What attacked them, attacked her. Nor was there anyone else on earth whom she was willing to forgive more readily or completely, or defend more instinctively and instantly. She could hardly believe, at that moment, that she would live on after they did or they would continue after she had ended. If such an unimaginable
phenomenon could take place, then surely they would remain flawed, damaged for life. The wholeness of the pattern its perfection, would be gone.

She lay absolutely still, almost ceasing to breathe, afraid to diminish by even a breath the wholeness of that love (LC, p.165).

The apparently absurd world of Bim and her brothers and sister, like most of the human beings, acquires meaning once they see themselves not in isolation but in togetherness, not as isolated pieces but as part of a design. There is complete harmony in togetherness and in this state of blessedness even the inarticulate Baba becomes articulate.

In *Clear Light of Day* the past is visible through the minds of the two sisters. They are "overcome again by the spirit of the house" (CL, p.20) Tara's return to attend Raja's daughter's wedding evokes nostalgia and regret, but most important is the affirmation and continuation of the past, present and future. The reconciliation with time by the sisters who speculate the past but live in the present but Baba lives in the past, listening to old records unwilling to emerge out of his imagination. He makes no contribution or contradiction as he has nothing to speak or communicate. He seems to have accepted his suffering without anger. For him there is no difference between the time past and the time present. When Bim vents out all her anger and frustration, a result of Raja's indifference and lack of responsibility: "With my salary, I'll be able to pay the rent, keep on the house, I'll manage - but I might have to send you to live with Raja. I came
to ask you - what would you think of that? She was hitting the target now - hitting and hitting it. 'Are you willing to go and live with Raja in Hyderabad?' (CL, p.163). Saying so much, she moves towards Baba to cut down his defence as she expected some kind of response, some kind of justification for herself and for her ways and attitudes as what she had said was unexpected from her. 'But he only sat on the edge of his bed as he always did, his long hands dangling loosely over his knees, but he seemed to draw back from her, as far as he could, and his mouth was drawn awry as if he had been slapped, hard'. (CL, p.164). Bim's sense of guilt of punishing Baba on Raja's account was immense. Raja was the one who had frustrated and humiliated her. During Raja's illness Bim nursed him day and night. There is a parallism between Freud's example of Elisabeth who could not walk due to acute pain in her legs which followed her father's death. She was the youngest of the three daughters and was tenderly attached to her parents. Due to her mother's ill health she had especially intimate contact with her father. She took the place of a son for him and a friend with whom he could exchange thoughts. The father did not fail to observe that the girl's mind, though found intellectual stimulation from their relationship, her mental constitution was departing from the ideal which people like to see realized in a girl. He often said she would find it hard to get a husband as she was greatly discontented with being a girl. She grew ambitious and nourished herself on her pride in her father. All this came to an end when one day her father was brought home unconscious suffering from a pulmonary oedema as he had either concealed or had overlooked a chronic heart disease.
Elisabeth played the leading part at his bed-side for eighteen months. She slept in his room, ready to wake up if he called her, took care during the day, trying to appear cheerful. The beginning of her illness was during this period of nursing, for she remembered that during the last six months she had taken to her bed for a day and a half, on account of these pains. It was not until two years after her father's death that she felt ill and was incapable of walking. Bim too had nursed Raja day and night but his sudden decision of leaving her with her liabilities and going to Hyderabad was frustrating for her. The worst came with the letter he sent her of granting her permission from Hyder Ali to retain the house at the same rent. She could not reconcile to Raja's attitude because of the close relationship and expectation she had developed during his illness. Quoting Freud in his ‘1. Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis’ we can find a reason of Bim's frustration?

You may now have an impression that deprivation has been reduced to insignificance owing to all methods of tolerating it. But no, it retains its pathogenic power. The counter measures are on the whole insufficient. There is a limit to the amount of unsatisfied libido that human beings on the average can put up with. The plasticity or free mobility of the libido is by no means fully preserved in everyone and sublimation is never able to deal with more than a certain fraction of libido, quite apart from the fact that many people are gifted with only a small amount of capacity to sublimate. The most important of these limitations is evidently that upon the mobility of the libido, since it makes a
person's satisfaction depend on the attainment of only a very small number of aims and objects. You have only to recall that an imperfect development of the libido leaves behind it very fertile and perhaps, too, very numeral libidinal fixation to early phases of the organization and of the finding of objects, which are for the most part incapable of real satisfaction, and you will recognize in libidinal fixation the second powerful factor which combines with frustration as the cause of illness. You can declare, as a schematic abbreviation, that libidinal fixation represents the predisposing, internal factor in the aetiology of the neuroses, while frustration represents the accidental, external one (SF-I, p.391).

Raja is temperamentally very different from Bim. He is like Tara who in their childhood seek recourse to romanticism and as adults emulate a romantic escape. Tara falls in love with Bakul, which she realised after years, was required to leave the suffocating, sick atmosphere of the house and to avoid being bound in the high walls of the Indraprastha College, whereas the foreign lands were too alluring to be resisted. Raja leaves his family and follows Hyder Alis family to Hyderabad in order to make himself acceptable to their system, he marries his daughter Benazir. As a young school girl, Bim is strong instinctive personality who can take decisions, as an adult, Bim asserts her desire for independence and self-mastery and adhers to it. She decides to be a bridge to all those who have left the house and gone and who all are left in the house, including the abandoned dog of the Hyder Alis. She takes up the responsibilities contrary to the irresponsible attitude of her parents. She aspires not for a mere
happiness in marriage and children but in choosing to be an individual with knowledge, enriched values and vocation. She is clear that marriage is not a feasible alternative nor sufficient enough to fulfil her being. What she does for her family is not out of sense of mere duty but out of true love for her family:

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 not extend to all equally. She did not feel enough for her dead parents, her understanding of them was incomplete and she would have to work and labour to acquire it. 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, that it had never recovered and become the tall, shining thing it had been once. Her love for Baba was too inarticulate, too unthinking: she had not given him enough thought, her concern had not been keen, acute enough. All these would have to be mended, these rents and tears, she would have to mend and make her net whole so that it would suffice her in her passage through the ocean [CL.p.165].

This strong attachment to her siblings now pressurizes her to forgive Raja for that unforgivable letter. She wanted to beg forgiveness from Baba. Reconciling with the past she wants to start afresh. Her mind
was burdened with what she had told Baba and found the evening very quiet without Baba’s gramophone sound but the gramophone was not quiet because Baba was sulking or wishing to punish – as he knew neither grudge nor punishment but simply because he was asleep:

She felt an immense, almost irresistible yearning to lie down beside him on the bed, stretch 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.

[CL.p. 166].

In order to overcome this Oedipus desire of incest she goes out in the garden. The koel reinforces the serenity of her soul by the announcement of the evening. She experiences a desire to re-establish the chord and complete the pattern, which could be made a full whole only in love. Her thoughts are full with affection. She wants to attain a continuity between the past and present, that was disrupted with Raja’s escape.

Tara in her conversations with Bim realises the fragility and sensitiveness of her nature. She attributes her distinction from others to her decisiveness and her simmering dissatisfaction. She finds herself wrong in considering the two of them to be different, to be embodiments of opposing principles. She had thought of Bim as active and stubborn and herself as
passive and relenting. The world at large also finds the two different, Bim with her own mind and Tara a dependent. Tara thinks of their past sufferings and finds Bim having suffered equally and this shared past gives them shared values. She tells Jaya:

‘We’re not really,’ she said. ‘We may seem to be – but we have everything in common. That makes us one. No one else knows all we share, Bim and I [CL.p. 162].

Bim’s love for her family stipulates the past and future of all the members of the family. She does not want to imagine a life without love. It is this love for them, the acceptance for them and understanding for them, that made her tired and worn out. It is in the saintly and spiritual dimension of Baba’s nature that she needs to become ‘whole and perfect’. ‘She dreaded seeing his sleeping shape, unresponsive as a god, guilt-arousing as a saint’ [CL.p. 167].