



A “Journey Without Maps” : Inward Voyages In Anita Desai’s *Clear Light Of Day*

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ABSTRACT: *The familiar notion of travel is a movement from one location to another. It involves a journey from known to an unknown territory. It is a process of defining one’s own self identifying the others. But the discourse of travel has another aspect and that is an inward journey into one’s own self. As the title of the paper suggests; Anita Desai’s Clear Light of Day depicts this kind of inward journey and it appears to be a distinct form of travelogue to the readers. The kind of journey this novel depicts does not require maps or any geographical territory to explore, what it requires is inner consciousness to explore the uncharted territory which is there within every individual.*

KEYWORDS: *Inward, Journey, Self, Time, Travel etc.*

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Travel, both actual and metaphorical, is a form of journey from familiar territory to an unfamiliar one and an encounter with the differences and otherness. It can be called a two dimensional process of constructing one’s self identity by identifying the others. Travel is not a monolithic discourse. It has a heterogeneous character implying quests of different sorts like religious (pilgrimage), material (colonialism), cultural and political (imperialism) and all these constitute what is known as the physical journey, that is, a kind of displacement from one geographical location to another. But another new contour of the discourse of travel is self exploration, that is, an inward journey into one’s own self. Beginning with Homer’s Odyssey till date travel has been a predominant theme in literature. Dangers of exploring the uncharted lands, sea voyages, ship-wrecks, monstrous creatures, fairy lands, sexual longings are the aspects which constitute the discourse of literary journey. It is a cyclic process which relates a journey starting from known to the unknown, home to the world, self to the other and it also includes a return voyage, that is, a home coming to that known land and celebration of its victory.

A journey into the self is often identified as a modern aspect of travel. It is an exploration of that dark uncharted foreign territory which is there hidden within every individual. This journey requires inner consciousness instead of maps. It is a reverse journey from other to self, light to darkness and world to home. The most prominent example of the literary texts depicting this aspect of travel is Graham Greene’s *Journey Without Maps*. It is a journey into the primitive interior of Africa as well as the primitive parts of the human mind. Green writes how “Freud has made us conscious as we have never been before of those ancestral threads which still exist in our unconscious minds to lead us back. The need, of course, has always been felt, to go back and begin again”(Green, “A Journey Without Maps” 248). Anita Desai’s *Clear Light Of Day* portrays a journey without maps, a journey in the quest of inner light of the human psyche. It is a journey into the complex dynamics of human relationships. The characters in this novel never travel physically rather they get imprisoned within a time zone. This novel lacks any physical movement. But what seems to be interesting is that the novel itself is a movement within different time zones from present to past, past to further past and to present again. It highlights a journey back to that tangible space that everyone constructs in childhood. For Bim and her siblings it is their Old Delhi house and the garden that they love to return both physically and mentally. This novel explores the world of dual existence where time destroys to preserve, where Bim hates her brother Raja to love

him more, where Bim and Baba withdraw themselves from the outer world to explore their inner landscape. The novel begins with striking this tone of dual perspective of life:

The koel began to call before daylight. Their voices rang out from dark trees like an arrangement of bells ,calling and echoing each other's calls, mocking and enticing each into ever higher and shriller calls.(Desai, "Clear Light Of Day" 1)

This novel penetrates into the interior world of the four siblings: Bim, Raja, Tara and Baba. Their parents being dead it is left to Bim, the elder sister of the family, to manage the household and look after their autistic brother Baba. The other two siblings run away from sharing this responsibility. Bim and Baba create their own world in Old Delhi home where they never allow any change to take place. They get trapped within the psychological time always moving backward against the clock time. It is that strangely familiar world, of what Freud called the *unheimlich*; the uncanny that these two creatures encounter. Every day they travel into this uncanny world in search of their identity. Here Baba's means of sustenance is one old musical instrument, the gramophone and some old records that he keeps playing again and again. This gramophone is not an object of passion for him rather it is something which he needs to survive. Baba can only identify himself with the sound generated by this gramophone; no other sound is audible to him .His world loses its rhythm whenever the gramophone comes to a halt:

The silence of the room, usually so loud with the rollicking music of the '40s, seemed to admit those other sounds that did not soothe or protect him but on the contrary ,startled him and drove him into a panic- the koel calling, calling out in the tall trees, a child crying in the servants quarters, a bicycle dashing past, its bell jangling.(Desai, "Clear Light Of Day" 22)

Every human being constructs his identity out of a particular sound as it is essential to his existence. Baba can't create any sound. As Shakespeare says in *Macbeth* "Life is but a walking shadow... full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" this chaotic world of sounds of different sorts: koel calling, child crying, bicycle dashing signifies nothing to Baba. The sound of the gramophone is one that helps Baba to mark his existence in this world of cacophony. So every moment Baba travels to his familiar yet strange world of sound to ensure his existence, to unearth his own self. The outer world made of various sounds seems to him the unknown 'other' and that is very much threatening to him.

Bim ,a college lecturer, finds happiness in her small world created out of Baba's happy dependence upon her. She ignores the colorful desires of the outer world .She transgresses the boundary that society has created for women. She does not conform to the gender roles constructed by society for a middle class woman. She becomes a truly liberated woman by refusing to play the conventional role of an Indian woman that our patriarchal society has defined for her. For Bim her life is a journey into new alternatives of living life. Tara, married to a foreign diplomat named Bakul and settled in a foreign land, comes back to India to live with her elder sister and brother at their Old Delhi home. She is shocked to discover how time has been frozen in this silent yet chaotic zone created by Bim and Baba. She asks herself:

Why did Bim allow nothing to change ? Surely Baba ought to begin to grow and develop at last ,to unfold and reach out and stretch. But whenever she saw them, at intervals of three or five years ,all was exactly as before.(Desai, "Clear Light Of Day" 18)

She tries but fails to penetrate into their world to bring changes in it. Tara's world is a different one from that of Bim and Baba , it is there in a distant foreign land, full of wonderful objects. It is a brave new world which runs with time, full of challenges and always keeps changing its colour, sound and rhythm. Tara is not happy living in this strange yet familiar world but she always pretends to show herself happy. It is her husband Bakul who teaches Tara how to be happy in this world. As the narrator says " She felt she had followed him enough , it had been such an enormous strain, always pushing against her grain, it had drained her of too much strength, now she could only collapse, inevitably collapse"(Desai, "Clear Light Of Day" 27) .Tara has always acted against her own will to make others happy. She is also in quest of her true self. She travels silently every moment in search of that lost self.

This novel brings out the bitter aspect of the dynamics of human relationships. It is not a stable category as it keeps changing its colour and shape according to time and place. In their childhood Raja and Bim used to share a close emotional bonding with each other. Bim was an admirer of Raja and encouraged him in every act but it turns out something else when matured Raja tries to show off his false concern for Bim and Baba and fails

to realize Bim's feelings who sacrifices her life for their family. Bim can't accept the truth that there is no reason left not to hate her brother . But towards the end of this novel something is revealed to her as clear as the light of the day:

Although it was shadowy and dark, Bim could see well as by the clear Of day that she felt only love and yearning for them all, and if there 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 extent to all equally...All these would have to be mended, these rents and tears, she would suffice her in her passage through ocean.(Desai, "Clear Light Of Day" 251-252)

It is through this self exploration, an inward journey into her own self that she discovers this truth that she can't stop herself loving her brothers and sister. There is no ship wreck, no monstrous creatures yet she alone travels in her passage through the ocean of inner consciousness and finds out a new uncharted territory within herself which is only ruled by human love that reciprocates an attitude of forgiveness. In her act of self analysis she finds her own limitations of not loving each one of her family perfectly and she realizes that to be a whole what is required is filling up the holes of bitterness created within her family ties only with love. The truth of life is revealed to her in her journey from negation to affirmation and rejection to acceptance. The familiar notion of travel is that it broadens the mind and brings change in one's state of affairs. The inner voyages that this novel depicts also bring changes in lives of the characters especially in Bim's life. *Clear Light of Day* tells the readers the story of a journey which dismantles the received notion of travel as merely an act of physical and spatial movement.

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