



DORIS LESSING - A VISIONARY WRITER WITH ZEAL FOR SOCIAL REFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

Doris Lessing, a woman of vision who expressed her voice for the betterment of marginalised community through her writings which talk about African society and their culture. The aim of her novels is to comment on the things in motion. AS being a visionary writer she could see the hope in hopelessness that could bring out social reformation in an expressive manner in the lives of African people through her characters. Therefore the research paper highly focused on the perspective of Doris Lessing is not just a visionary writer but her writings bring out the social changes in a meaningful way.

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INTRODUCTION

Doris Lessing was born of British parents in Persia (now Iran) in 1919 and was taken to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Though she is a British writer she has faithfully explored the cultural elements of her works that is possible because she has personally experienced and witnessed as a settler of Southern Rhodesia. Though she is a white writer, she has proved herself as a writer away from prejudices on the African people, and she has been a person witnessing the lines lined by the natives. She matches herself with the views of Nadine Gordimer in defining the African writing. In *The Black Interpreters*, Nadine Gordimer endeavours to define African writing from her perspective as a White African writer in the following words: African writing is writing done in any language by Africans themselves and by others of whatever skin colour who share with Africans the experience of having shaped, mentally and spiritually, by Africa rather than anywhere else in the world. One must look at the world from Africa, to be an African writer, not look upon Africa, from the world. (5)

Visionary Writer of Social Reformation

Doris Lessing has the spirit which has evolved within her from her childhood and she has observed all the people in the country and walked with them. She has a lot of fragmented dreams that would propel her service towards the social reformation. She has taken the fables in her hand through them she wished to present the lines of natives harmonious with their feeling because most fables tell truth. It is proved from the words of Idries Shah in *The Sufis*, Fables often enable

people to absorb ideas which the ordinary patterns of their thinking would prevent them digesting. Fables have therefore been used, not least by the Sufi teachers, to present a picture of life more in harmony with their feeling than is possible by means of intellectual exercises.(1)

Many of Lessing's novels include teaching concepts drawn from the Sufi source. She also uses the basic format of certain stories, changing them slightly to make them suitable for her own purpose. The Sufi who may be a poet or a scientist, a trader or a house wife contends that the world should be viewed with a holistic perspective, wherein the abstract and the intuitive have as much validity as the logical and the liner.

Lessing, grew into a matured woman writer, on the Rhodesian farm, cut off from neighbors, different from most others due to her sympathetic leanings towards the natives experiences within herself dichotomies and paradoxes. In Lessing's introduction to *Nine African Stories* she writes, Novels, stories, plays, can convey the truth about personal relations, emotions, and attitudes of which the people subject to them are perhaps unaware, or only partly aware. Literature comes out of atmospheres, climates of opinion, everything that cannot be described by the economic, and the sociological approaches. (5)

Lessing is a writer deeply rooted in and consciously committed to the social and political milieu of her time, this fact is obvious from the thematic and narrative overtones of her fiction. Lessing has to be viewed as a writer in whom the personal and political merge impossible to separate, one leading to other, Dee Seligman states in *Listening to Lessing*, "Out of the personal develops the story which is a way of explaining to ourselves what is life"(8).

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Lessing has led her life in African farm that has helped her to frame major themes of her novels. Her past life has helped her to define both the present and the future; some influences have been the guiding force indirectly while the others serve as the direct guiding force. Dee Saligman says in *Listening to Lessing*, "Lessing says, 'I always see the things in motion. In life, in reality, nothing is ever static... the aim of the novel is to comment on things in motion'" (153). Lessing is a great writer who has touched all the aspects of life. Her fictions abound in autobiographical elements. Her works present self-authentication and self-discovery.

Doris Lessing spent her childhood in Kermanshah, Persia. Her English-born father, Alfred Cook Taylor lost his leg and health in World War I. He is a bank clerk with the imperial bank of Persia. At nineteen she married Frank Wisdom, a civil servant and they had two children. The marriage ended in 1943. For some years, Lessing served as an active member of the communist party, which was formally banned in south Rhodesia. This period of her life was reflected in *A Ripple From the Storm* (1958) of the five volume sequence children of the violence, the first four were set in a fictional African colony, Zimbabwe. Lorna Sage observes in her work *Doris Lessing* that Doris is a radical realist whose writings lie in a critical, political culture and in social facts. She refers to herself as a "demystifier, a critical observer of social processes and system, an outsider who could see through to the inside" (24).

Lessing's passion for exploring the true nature of the human life in the midst of predicaments and that she has touched all the aspects pertaining to humanity genuinely. And her writings are not for the particular group but for all. Kate Fullbrook in *Free Women: Ethics and Aesthetics in Twentieth Century Women's Fiction* states that, Liberty for Lessing, in not, and never can be, solely an individual matter... the burden of her fiction not only to identify the most dangerous infringements of liberty in every aspect of modern culture... but also to chart the limits beyond which we cannot go and which must be taken into account when devising notions of the good. Her unshakeable narrative voice speaks not for herself, nor for one group, or faction, or party, but for the human race as a whole (169).

Kate Fullbrook perceives Lessing as one of the most decisive writers of her time and she admit that there is a sense of some totality in Lessing's works. Lessing is a notable writer who has experienced the anguish of the natives. She is able to register authentically all the aspects of the natives. She is a woman writer with boldness in upbringing the problems of socially marginalized people. Her writings offer resistance to patriarchy. Though she is an outsider, she belongs to every home of Africa.

Lessing is a writer without any kind of prejudices since she has personally experienced the pangs of the sufferings of natives throughout the first phase of her life. The writings of Lessing are truly autobiographical in nature and she mixes her true feelings and desires in all her works. Lessing by her writing has insisted on the natives' duty towards exhibiting their culture by themselves. According to her, dependent attitude is no longer a good sign of improvement.

Lessing's first novel, *The Grass is Singing* came out in 1950. It was set in Rhodesia. The story focuses on a poor woman Mary Turner, and her weak husband. She has a relationship with her

African servant Moses, who eventually kills her. The novel was attacked in South Africa and Rhodesia because the writer has taken a bold step by relating a white woman with a black man. The novel, *Martha Quest* (1952) from the 'Children of Violence' series is a sequel to *The Grass is Singing* (1950). In this Lessing has portrayed Martha as a woman who cares very much of black people. Martha has witnessed the blacks treated very badly by the whites and she moulds her mind to be a supporter of their welfare. Since Lessing's novels reflect her personal life, the Children of Violence series have consisted of her mental growth in view of establishing the social equilibrium. In the novel *A Proper Marriage* (1954), Lessing has brought out the continuous thirst of Martha on the native people's betterment. This novel reflects on another important fact worth mentioning is politics and equality of races.

Martha strongly believes in herself in getting a new life at the same time she wishes for an African group should emerge to eradicate the present condition. She has a strong conviction for a man who would come from the African group to support for his own group. She often talks about Africans to Solly for their need and they should be ready to get their needs properly. She says in *Landlocked* (1965) that " 'the African group', like a small starving child, its hands held out for help, was being torn to pieces by a group of adults fighting for the right to help it" (56).

Whenever Martha and her friends meet as a group, they never fail to discuss on the welfare of the poor people. Anton, Martha, Thomas Stern and Athen decide to work for the betterment of the black people who are really suppressed in the colonial Africa. The comrades gather together for the welfare of the needy. Even though they have a lot of misunderstandings among them, they gradually start to understand for what they have been in the group. Johnny Lindsay helps Africans to have meetings in his house along with other friends Jack Dobie, Mrs Van der Bylt, Martha Hesse and Athen and they analyze the problems of Africans. They study the requirements of Africans and accordingly they are making some ways to attend their necessities. They insist on encouragements for the black people. The colonizers have collapsed the Africans' strength and they are the responsible persons of the present condition of the African people. It is evident from the words of Mrs. Van in *Landlocked* (1965) that First had to be asked, what did the Africans most lack? Clearly- it was perfectly clear to Mrs. Van- it was self-confidence. There could be no doubt about it. The Africans of this colony, physically shattered, their armies destroyed, their tribes scattered, had none of the self-confidence and pride of the countries up North which had never been conquered (150).

CONCLUSION

Lessing has pointed out the need for making the Blacks to act by themselves and it is possible when they are encouraged and appreciated with positive notes. Racism can be rooted out when the cruel side of racial discrimination is highlighted. Doris Lessing has attempted to enlighten the readers to be aware of the harsh nature of racism through her writings. The above mentioned four novels have created a platform for a remarkable growth in the life of the author in view of racial discrimination in Africa. Lessing has recorded all the inflections on the natives and women dichotomy in the society. Through presenting the predicaments of human beings,

Lessing creates a new world in which the people will be devoid of social injustice.

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