

Feminist Canon and failure of Individualization in Doris Lessing's The Grass is Singing

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Abstract

The Term 'feminism' has its origin from the Latin word 'femina' meaning 'woman' (through French Feminisme). It takes about the defense of women's rights, status and power with men on the grounds of equality of sexes. In other words, It believes that women should have the same social, economic and political rights as men. The feminist movement is concerned with equality between males and females to end woman's suffering in the patriarchal society. This paper shows how Lessing is interested in portraying women's suffering especially in a World where women are being suppressed. The paper aims to discuss comprehensively the feminist canon and failure of individualization in Doris Lessing's novel; *The Grass is Singing*, 1950. In the *Grass is Singing*, Lessing presents the personal and psychological portrayal of its female protagonist, Mary Turner, from her childhood to death.

As an internationally acclaimed, Nobel Prize winner, Doris May Lessing is best known for her novels, short stories and essays, which are largely concerned with the peoples caught in the social and political upheavals of the twentieth century. Doris Lessing (1919 –2013), an influential novelist for all ages focus on social problem arising out of the disabled of women in the male dominated society. She is for all of us and for all times. She shows her keen observation on women personal problems, which convey the evidence of universal dealing and appeals. As a feminist writer, Lessing has enabled to portray women, social position in the middle-class family. Her literary works show in depth exploration of familiar social, economic, cultural, psychological, political, racial conflict and sexual harassment faced by women in male

dominated society. She has portrayed powerful female protagonists including Mary Turner of the Grass is Singing.

Keywords: Feminism, Oppression, Female Individualization.

Introduction

Women have to play an equal role in the progress of our country without an active participation of women, we cannot develop in this society. Although the place of woman in society had differed from culture to culture and from age to age, In a traditional Society, women were regarded as goddess and the source of all inspiration but in practically, they were deprived from every right to education, right on property, right to freedom etc. yet one fact similar to almost all societies is that woman has never been considered the equal of man. Gender roles are generally patriarchal in nature. In this Society, woman has been the victim of male domination and oppression and treated like an object of pleasure. They regard that women have been a weaker sex in Society.

The bible clearly tells the women “wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as to the Lord” women is regarding subordinate to man because it is believed that she was made out of man.

If you look at literature also, The Male writers have mostly seen women as inferior and weak. Gendering and some sort of misogyny are evident in the texts written by men. They see men as ‘superior sex’ or the stronger sex while women are seen as are the ‘inferior sex’ or the ‘weaker sex’. Men are regarded as logical, rational and objective and women are emotional, inconsistent, innate, subjective and lacking self confidence in nature. In the sixteenth century, William Shakespeare, great dramatist explained the characteristic of women in Hamlet.

‘Frailty thy name is woman’

(Act I Scene II)

In Hamlet, woman represents frailty, meaning women are breakable, weak, delicate in nature. He alludes to inherent weaknesses in women's character.

In Eighteenth century, neo classical writer Alexander pope gave the statement that the proper study of mankind is man not woman. In the Romantic age, Wordsworth gave the statement that "child is the father of man and not of female".

In the Victorian age, they thought that proper place for women in house. They said the female should be good in household. Tennyson tried to show woman's condition in society. He explained in his famous book 'The Princess' (1847) that

"Man for the field, woman for the hearth
Man for the sword, and for the needle she
Man to command, and woman to obey
All else confusion" (V, Lines-437)

They supposed that man is everything in the Victorian era. So male is superior to female, women are the trivial then men so female in the synonym of weakness.

This feminism was also a movement against these statements. It was a reaction against the patriarchal system of society. Male are responsible for this discrimination.

The seed of the movement was sown for the first time by Mary Wollstone Craft in vindication of the rights of women who supposed to be first female author. This book appeared in 1792. In her introduction to a vindication of the rights of women, Wollstone Craft demands that women should be treated as human beings. First, she nurtured certain feelings in the heart of females against the tyranny of males. This movement was started by Simon de Beauvoir. She wrote the second sex in 1949. She says that all the philosophers think that the secondary status of women has been willed in the heaven and it is profitable or beneficial on earth. Had the equal rights been given to female it might be destructive. Doris Lessing a British novelist depicts the social problems as women as well a social system of her times. Lessing searches for new models to communicate the experience of a woman writer, who spends her early life in Africa becomes an active and a disappointed communist who is a politically committed writer a wife, a mother or a mistress sometimes a woman. She presents the

hypocrisy, meanness and double standard of men; alienation of a single career woman; hollowness of marriage in the traditional, society. She deals her women in various social problems and with various views of male against female. She tries to awaken women community to protest against the male dominated society through her feminist writings. For this purpose, this research paper would like to examine the psychological conflicts and disturbing experience of powerful heroine-Including Mary Turner in *The Grass is Singing*. According to Myles,

“The novel unfolds Lessing’s anxiety about social, economic, and political structures, the problem of women existing in a male – dominated world”. (P.25)

The Grass is Singing is written by Doris Lessing published in 1950. *The Grass is Singing* is the tale of personal and psychological portrayal of Mary Turner, from childhood to death. In her childhood, Mary is shaped under the influence of an oppressive father who wastes her money on drinking and gambling while her family is living in misery and poverty. Her mother is the first model of gender oppression. She is a passive and helpless woman dominated by the male power in Society which is represented by her father. The writer states this situation about the male authority and female suffering or living freely through the following quotation:

“It had never occurred to her father, too, might have suffered. “about what?” She would have retorted, had anyone suggested it. “He can do as he likes.” She was leading the comfortable carefree existence of a single woman in South Africa, and she did not know how fortunate she was. How could she know? She knows? She understood nothing of conditions in other countries, had no measuring rod to assess herself with”. (P.32).

By seeing her mother as a victim of miserable marriage, Mary decides to make for herself a life different from that of her mother not depending on a man emotionally and economically. She does not “care for men”, and has “a profound distaste for sex”. (p.39) Her men friends treat her “just like a good pal, with none of this silly sex business” (p.40) because whenever she thinks of

home, she remembers “her father coming home red-eyed and fuddled...other mother’s face at her children’s funeral. (P.39).

But very soon, Mary is brought face to face with

“that impalpable but steel-strong pressure to get married”

Which her cultures impose on all women. (P.40)

Moreover, since she is living in a patriarchal society. In this society, woman cannot live without marriage. This disintegration begins when one day she overhears her friends on her marriage that there is “something missing some where” (P.42). In contrast, It is normal for males in a society into be single because they can marry at any age while women should marry while they are young and beautiful. The writer says:

“South Africa is a wonderful place: for the unmarried white woman.

But she was not playing her part, for she did not get married” (P.35).

In order to prove herself Mary decides to marry with Dick. But he is not able to her. Their marriage, not based on love or mutual understanding, is a mutual exploitation and self – deficiency, and deceive themselves about the other one’s nature. Mary uses Dick to prove herself not “a ridiculous creature whom no one wanted” (P.49) and Dick uses her as a way to escape from his loneliness. The marriage however turns out to be a failure. She sees Dick as loser, dreamer, a weak person. Once Mary runs out from his home and thinks of resuming her life as a single woman, but in her office she is not taken aback because now she has lost the graces and attractiveness which are professional requirement. This view shows that the typical attitude from boss toward working woman according to the woman’s physical appearance. The narrator discusses this condition in the following quotation:

“The man opposite to her was staring at her, looking closely at her face.

Then he glanced at her shoes, which were still red with dust, because she

had forgotten to wipe them. Looking grieved, but at the same time shocked,

even scandalized, he said that the job had been filled already, and that he was sorry. She felt, again, outraged; for all that time she had worked her, it had been part of herself, this office, and how he would not take her back. "I am sorry, Mary" he said avoiding her eyes; and she saw that the job had not filled and that he was putting her off". (P.111)

Later on, she is attracted towards her black servants Moses. He fulfills her needs which Dick has failed to provide. Due to loneliness, suffering and frustration in marriage, Mary suffers and finally ends up chaotically.

The novelist shows a more partial and biased treatment of woman's marginalization begins before and after her marriage. She is never recognized as an equal, individual and a human being with her own desires and needs. The novelist exposes the hypocrisy, meanness and double standards of men in her novels. Woman is usually seen as an object providing sexual pleasure to man a property as a decoration piece and a nurse maid to bring up the children and to shoulder all the responsibilities of the household. Her feelings and desires are completely ignored in marriage. While for man marriage means complete gratification on all fronts. He is also free to indulge in extra material relations without experiencing any sense of guilt while he can persecute his wife to any extent or more suspicion of infidelity. As a result, woman be it in the east or in the west, often feels suffocated and deprived in marriage.

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