



## **Lessing's The Golden Note Book - Feminist Perspective**

**Sakshi Sushil Ankush**

Shri Saraswati Bhuvan High School,  
Jalna (MS)

The term 'Feminism' is used for the women's which began in 18th Century and continues to campaign for complete political Social and economical equality between women and men. In other words, its is a social movement that seeks equal rights for women. Today, Feminism is both a concept and a movement. It would be useful to look at how women critics have tackled and depicted Feminism. According to Gerda Lerner,

"Feminism is not always a movement for it can be a level of consciousness, a staunch attitude as well as the basis for organized efforts"[The Creation of Patriarchy 22]

Going much beyond the right issues and employment problems, the woman's question gradually acquired the sophisticated and complex label of Feminism As for as the gender relations and gender equality are concerned, the position of women in the nation like the United states, UK Germany and France, which are economically most develop countries in the world, have worse condition in many other countries. According to Pam Morris. Feminism is "A Political perception based on two fundamental premises, first that gender difference is the foundation of a structural inequality between women and men by which women suffer systematic social injustice, and secondly, that the inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity but is a result produced by the cultural construction of gender difference."[ Literature and Feminism An Introduction]

Feminism is an essentially social force since the early 60's of British novelists, in general and women novelists in particular writing about Feminism. Mary wollstonecraft's A ' Vindication of the Right of women (1992) is considered a feminist manifesto even today she argues that women should be treated as ' human beings' she writes;

" Dismissing them those pretty Feminine phrases, which the men consideringly use to soften our slavish dependence, and despising that weak elegancy of mind , sensibility and sweet docility of manners, supposed to be the sexual characteristic of the weaker vessel, I wish to show that elegance is inferior to virtue that the first object of laudable ambition to obtain a character as a human In her book 'A Room of One's Own' she argues that women's writing should explore female experiences in its now right and for a comparative assessment of women's experiences in relation to men . Simon de Beauvoir – French feminist opines that the term ' masculine' and ' feminine' are man made. She rightly argues that the bond between man and woman should be based on common love and consent. Simon De Beauvoir writes in her book 'The Second Sex' that the secondary position of the woman is not important of necessity by natural 'Feminine'



characteristic but rather by strong environmental forces social traditions and education which have been under the control of men. Kate Millet's 'The sexual Politics' (1969) is an important feminist work. she points out that the relation between the sexes is basically political as it is an arrangement 'whereby one group of persons is controlled by another,' (23) Kate Millet asserts the importance of freeing the woman from "immemorial subordination" which in the process can bring us a great deal closer to humanity" Elaine showalter has centric approach to literary analysis. Her 'A Literature of Their Own' discusses the Female literary tradition. She conceptualize gynocentrism, which is a woman own' she argues that woman's writing should explore female experience in its own right and form a comparative assessment of women's experience in relation to men

The Second wave Feminism was increasing theoretical, based on fusion of new – Marxism and psycho analytical - theory and began to associate the subjugation of women with broader critiques of Patriarchy, capitalism, normative heterosexuality and the women's role as wife and mother. The feminist scholars such as Juliet Mitchell, Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millet claim that Patriarchy is inherent to urge society and that sexual difference is more fundamental than class and race differences. Kate Millet in the book 'Sexual Politics' insisted on women rights to their own bodies and a sexuality of their own, a sexuality that is connected from the oblige of marriage and motherhood. In Europe the authors like Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia kristevin articulated the different direction of Identity Feminism.

Third wave feminists are motivated by the need to develop a feminist theory and politics American term for third wave feminism. Is 'girl' feminism and in Europe it is known as 'new feminism' The third wave feminists contribution is the notion of transversal politics. Nira Yuval – Davis in her book 'Gender and Nation' (1997) launched the 'transversal politics'. Donn Haraway's 'Cyborg' contributed significantly to third wave Feminism. All the Feminist writers Margaret Atwood, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Zedie Smith, Angela Carter created their own place in the History of feminism. And Doris Lessing is one of them, a Nobel Prize Winner [2007] is a great feminist writer in the history of feminism. Doris May Taylor (Lessing) was born in Persia on oct 22, 1919. Her father was a clerk in the imperial Bank of Persia. her mother had been a nurse for the sake of farming. The family moved to the British colony of southern Rhodesia. she could not complete her formal education but made herself into a self educated intellectual. Lessing developed herself by reading the books of Dickens, Scott, Stevenson and Kipling formerly and later D.H. Lawrence, Stendhal, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Lessing left home when she was fifteen and took a job as a nursemaid because of her mother. Lessing had bitter memories of her father's experience of World War 1. In 1937 she moved to Salisbury where she worked as a telephone operator for a year. At thirteen, she married Frank Wisdom and had two children. But after few years she left the family. soon she became member of Left Book Club, a group of communists. Gottfried Lessing was a central member of the communist group, shortly after, they married and had a son.



During the postwar years Lessing become increasingly disillusioned with the communist movement, so she moved to London in 1954 with her young son. Lessing's fiction is deeply autobiographical, her experiences in Africa. Lessing depicted her childhood memories and serious engagement with politics and social concerns, Lessing has written about the clash of cultures, the gross injustice of racial inequality. her novel depicts the struggle among opposing element within on individuals own personality and the conflict between the individual conscience and collective good.

## **Works of Doris Lessing**

### **Novels**

- The Grass is singing
- The Golden Notebook
- Briefing for a Decent into Hell
- The summer Before the Dark
- The memories of a survivor
- The Good Terrorist
- The Fifth Child
- Love, Again
- Mara and Donn
- Ben, In the world
- Canpous in Argo s : Archives Series
- Re.colonized Planet 5 Shikasta
- The marriages Between Zooness, three,
- Four and Five
- The Serian Experiments
- Agents in the Voven Empire
- Children of violence Series
- Math Quest.
- A proper Marriage
- A Ripple From the Storm
- Landlocked
- The Four Gated city

Doris Lessing wrote dramas and poetry also. The contemporary women's novel, except the works of Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark, Doris Lessing and Margaret Drabble, A.S.Byatt is a distinct entity in tune with the female phases search for identity . Doris Lessing has been held as one of the pioneers of feminism Lessing's writing covers many styles and approaches ranging from feminism and Marxist theory of feminism Lessing's novel 'Maratha Quest' is a milestone in her career. Lessing and Drabble see themselves as "trying to unify the fragments of female experience through the artistic vision , and they are concerned with the definition of autonomy for the woman writer".



The Golden Notebook, the most important work that has left its mark upon the ideas and feelings of a whole generation of women. The Golden Notebook is an exploration self, creativity and feminine identity. Because of this particularity of the book the critics later – day tract on feminist literature. In the words of Zerin Aklesaria about the book are.

The Golden Note book, her best – known work, brought her instant fame and a cult following as the high priestess of feminism. (The Hindu, 4)The Golden Notebook (1962) is a complex and layered text which is shaped around a series of note books. This skeletal work which frame main narrative is divided into five sections.and separated by the phases of four note book Golden Notebook is a milestone of Doris Lessing's career, written after world war II The Golden Notebook occurred in the period, Doris Lessing referred as,

A time when everything is cracking up it had been falling apart since the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima throughout my life I've had to support paties, causes, notions and movements which stink I feel as if the bomb has gone off inside my self and in people around me : That's what I mean by cracking up as if the structure of the mind being battered from inside some terrible thing is happening. (The Golden Note book 1972;19)

The central idea of the novel is Breakdown. But it has many themes associated with feminism like family, home and woman. The Golden Notebook is a story of a divorced single mother Anna Wulf who works as a novelist in 1950 London. Anna Wulf is afraid to be crazy because of the bad experience and relationships with wrong men. To get away from the danger, she records her life experiences in four different notebooks. The Black note book deals with her life as a writer, The Red notebook records her political views, The Yellow notebook is about her emotional life and the Blue notebook deals with her everyday life ,The Golden Notebook, the fifth and most important note book, records all the experiences to understand her own life and her search for a personal and political identity.

Anna Wulf ,the protagonist of the novel ,is a writer who wrote a short novel and became popular .that novel is 'Free Woman. Free women is centered around the friendship of Anna and Molly, two divorced women who bring up their children without men, and the conflictual tension build up by molly's relationship with her son Tommy. In the very beginning of the first section of free women, Anna introduces the major theme of the book Fragmentation as Anna said ' the points is that as far as I can see, every things cracking up' (25) As a writer Anna Wulf was so busy in her activities, but her family role become hindrance in her writing career. Her depression is aggravated by the abrupt end of her love affair with Michael a medical practictioner. Anna feels frightened, sick, when Michael, a married man broke the affair. Anna spends much time with psychoanalyst, Mrs. Marks.

Anna and Molly, both are separated from their husbands, both live together for their support to each other. But both ladies are different from each other. Molly is tall, big – boned, Anna is a talented, small, thin woman both are self – reliant woman after their separation also they maintain their relationship. Both of them developed number of love affairs after their separation but their affairs invariably ended with in a humiliating way. Anna and Molly both fail in their love- affairs. They want to live



'free' life but the men regarding them as sex – hungry, easily available to men. Both women's search for freedom give them the disappointment. The search for a separate identity outside marriage has turned them into unhappy, lonely a helpless creatures who, paradoxically ,hanker after love and companionship more desperately than before. Anna admits her mistake with the affair of Michael, but after his departure, she cannot forget him. Doris Lessing earns a lot of credits regarding her protagonist Anna Wulf, fails to live up her dream to live like truly emancipated woman, she compromised their essential being.

Molly's struggle continued after the separation of both women she get married with Richard, who left her, He gets married again to Marion. Molly is divorced from him but comes in the custody of tommy, her son Molly becomes actress and rears her son tommy. Tommy is in rebellious mood. He criticizes Anna and Molly's attitude to Richard, to their own children, and politics. Tommy blames Anna that she is a different person than her note books : 'why the four note books ? what would happen if you had one big book without all those divisions' 'I've told you choose'; (247). Richard shown as a womanizer, He left Marion and make affair with Jean, his secretary. Tommy attempts suicide dramatically, he shoots himself, but it affects his eyes. He becomes permanently blind. Molly's life is completely changed after this mishap. Molly's life become totally different and her son became at center for her.

Anna is also suffering from the same turn. Because after having grown up Janet, her daughter, disliked Anna. for educational purpose she leaves Anna goes in depression after her departure. Anna 'the free woman' who is obsessed with the idea of integrity, responsibility finally breaks down.

Thus free woman illustrate the impossibility of complete emancipation for a women, far from being a trac on sex ,war or a celebration of woman's liberation. it shows the complex of a free women's life and the in escapable need for the opposite sex, Anna and Molly were searching their own identify in a masculine world. Their search for freedom ultimately leaves them fragmented.

The title 'free woman' is ironic. Anna and Molly are the representative of a certain type of modern women and their problems have relevant beyond their surroundings. Their frustration and desires are the representation of the generation of mid. Twentieth century. Like poetry of Kamala das, on English poet the story of Anna can be considered in a confessional mode Lessing portrays the sense of alienation of the woman in the lives of molly and Anna. Lessing uses more a dramatic method to present the life the struggle of Anna Wulf. The search for self – identity is once again the major theme of the Golden Note book. like Martha Quest, Anna wulf also confronts the same problem of indentity crises.

The reading of four note book of Anna, with point of ferminist works reflect Anna's ambivalent experience of and war – ridden world. Black note book, first note book in the sequence, donets two aspects of Anna's life as a writer 'money' and 'source' discussed separately by allotting two division`s. The Black Notebook presents Anna's psychic reality. Anna compares her frigid marring to a German Jew, Max Wulf, with the fictitious Willi Rodde to her novel it reveals Anna's private politics together with the politics of the idealistic communist group in Sourthen Africa. Anna has the ability to recognize split within herself individual level, and yet





there were always two personalities in me, the communist and Anna, “ Anna judged the communist all the time and vice versa”. (66) the black note book concludes as a record of a profound disfunction. It registers the frustration of Anna’s political and literary ideals. The Red notebook, follows the Black and beings unlike entries about Anna’s political life. It deals with her expression as an intellectual member of the British Communist Party in the 1950’s and her disillusionment with Marxism in the later part Anna gets disillusioned and admits that Stalin, once her hero, is ‘mad and a murderer’ (259). Annas writes very little in the Red Notebook, because whatever she writes becomes critical of the communist party. The yellow note book is called the shadow of the third the note book is in fact a fictionalized account of Annas relationship with Micheal and Ella. Is Anna ulter ego. By creating an alter ego in the character of Ella she transforms Michael into Paul Tanner ,her friend Molly into Julia and her daughter Janet into a son Michael.

The central of the novel currently written by Ella is suicide,a significant theme of the novels of Virginia Woolf ,whose protagonists are also woman in ‘A Rooms Of Ones Own’ is a milestone in feminist criticism. Anna,by creating Ella’s character wants to get rid of her psychic disturbance by using fiction within fiction principle .Like Shakespear’s play Hamlet The confusion in the psyche of the contemporary woman who seeks for an identity is reflected in the woman characters of Anna’s novel .Lessing dramatizes the misreading of Ella who finds woman as the soul causalities of the patriarchy and never realizes the man power . The Blue Notebook ,is a diary of day to day events .It depicts Anna’s mental breakdown and her efforts to come to terms with a fractured relation and a fragmented psyche. Lessing writes in preface that mental breakdown or cracking up is away of self healthy of the inner self’s dismissing false divisions. The Blue Notebook provides an insightful analysis of Anna’s relationship with her multiple lovers. It exposes not only male hypocrisy ,cruelty and aggression but also women’s self deception .The Blue Notebook depicts the relation of Saul and Anna , its horrible experiences.

The Golden Note book , all the four note books Anna writer culminates into Golden Notebook and it is nothing but an attempt of Anna’s psyche to gain a positive valence. Lessing used dreams to show the characters disturbance. Anna sees images of hostile animals like a tiger in a dream, she proclaims the tiger is Saul, “I don’t want him to be caught, I want him to be running wild through the world” (527). Graham Green, who used the dreams to suggest inclination of the whisky priest, the power and the glory, Lessing portrays Anna’s dreams as her acceptance of her sexuality. The Golden Notebook connects Annas experiences of the past, present and future to unite fragmented parts of the self. finally Anna identifies the need of Saul in her life. In the Golden Notebook, Lessing emphasizes and focused on the self – division of a typical modern woman who is torn between and artistic objectivity and emotional subjectivity. It is the struggle between ideas and reality ambition and pitfalls that a modern woman is more porn to psychic disturbances. Lessing is not only a feminist writer but also a writer concerned with psychology, sociology and politics. Lessing refuses to be counted among feminist writers, one of the fundamental issues is the analysed feminist approach.



The new kind of woman represented in Lessing's novels. Lessing's fiction presents a woman's point of view which has led some critics to label her a feminist writer. Lessing herself admits in a conversation with Florence Howe, that she does write from inside a woman's viewpoint as a right of individual. Doris Lessing is known for having been a beacon of inspiration to the generations of feminist. All the female protagonists quest for self identity, their wishes to live 'free', their suffering in society, presented as the feminist point of view. Female commentators Jean Smith, Lynne Segal, Catherine Bennett, Helen Wilkinson, even Jeanette Winterson popped up that Lessing is not a feminize writer. But some of them dismissed that Lessing's work and life have always shown her to a feminist, she is one of an unusual kind of feminist.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **Primary Sources**

Doris, Lessing. *Children of Violence*. London: Fleming Herper Collins Pub. Ltd: 1993  
Doris, Lessing. *The Golden Notebook*. London: Fourth Estate. 1972.

### **Secondary Sources**

Bassenett, Susan. *Feminist Experiences the Women's Moment in four cultures*. London. Allen and Unw in: 1986  
Charvet, John. *Feminism. London. J.M. Dend and Sons*, 1983  
Coward. Rosalind, 'are Women's Novels Feminist Novels?'  
*The New Feminist Criticism*, ed. Elaine Shawalter: London: Virago: 1980.  
*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research papers*- Seventh Edition.  
New Delhi. Affiliated east-west press pvt. Ltd: 2009