Chapter IV

The Abnormal vs Normal
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*Briefing for a Descent into the Hell, (1971)*

*The Fifth Child, (1988)*

*Ben, in the World (2000)*

The previous chapters talked about the power dynamics in the colonial and patriarchal structure of power, the present chapter deals with the plight of mentally and physically challenged who are at the margin of the power structure, and are labeled as different or abnormal in the society. Doris Lessing’s first encounter with the phenomenon of “difference” (Rowe, 1994:105) is coincident with her stay in Southern Rhodesia, where she grew up as a member of the white settler community, from 1923 to 1949, watching “the psychological and physical wounds” (Ingersoll, 1994:5) of the victims of the first world war, who suffered mental breakdown, and loss of bodily organs. She also witnessed the white women from the settler community, who lived on the African veld, in complete isolation, and suffered neurosis for want of human company.

Lessing grew up watching her father, Alfred Taylor suffer from mental and physical inadequacies, as a victim of the First World War. Lessing’s father had lost his leg and he had suffered a nervous breakdown. Lessing’s mother too had suffered a psychological crisis in private and social life in England, before and after the First World War. She had a bruised childhood, for she was brought up by an apathetic step mother; she lost her fiancé during the First World War; in Southern Rhodesia she suffered a state of nervous breakdown, since she lived in isolation on the African farm, away from the life of social anticipation. Mary Turner’s life of want and alienation, in Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing, (1950)* can be read as the scarred life of Lessing’s mother, Emily Taylor. Talking about Lessing’s involvement with the abnormal consciousness, Roberta Rubenstein writes in her critical work, *The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing* as follows:

Lessing has summarized her long involvement with abnormal consciousness in her own life…”I have spent nearly thirty years in close contact with mental illness, first through various brands of analyst and therapist and psychiatrist, and then through people who were “mad” in various ways,
and with whom I had very close contact. And still have. All this was not by any conscious choice on my part: it happened, presumably because of unconscious needs of my own. I have always been close to crazy people. My parents were, mildly, in their own ways. My father was done in by the First World War, from which he never really recovered, and my mother had what is known as an unfortunate upbringing, her mother dying when she was three or so, and she never got over it, both were acutely neurotic people.’(1986: 213)

Lessing’s empathy for the mentally ill can be witnessed in her very first novel, *The Grass is Singing*, 1950, where the woman protagonist, Mary Turner meets a violent death, in a state of mental breakdown, as a victim of the capitalist society, in white dominated Southern Rhodesia. Commenting on madness as a symptom of a sick society, Lessing cites an unknown author, at the beginning of the novel, *The Grass is Singing*, ‘It is by the failures and misfits of a civilization that one can best judge its weaknesses.’ (Lessing, 1950, preface) In *Martha Quest*, (1952) Martha’s father Mr. Quest, as a victim of the First World War, is obsessed with the memories of the battle of Somme, and battle of Paschendale. His every conversation, like a neurotic, always ends with the memories of the horrors of war, reminding one of the war victims, Septimus Smith who loses his sanity in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925).Lessing had witnessed people suffer from psychological fragmentation, in the capitalistic society, in Southern Rhodesia. When she came to London, after the Second World War, in 1949, she came across diverse forms of problems. Lessing mentions in *Walking in the Shade*, the second volume of her autobiography, that she witnessed a fractured, individualistic society, suffering from the fear of cold war, economic depression, insecurity due to maladjustment and threat of violence. The stifling atmosphere, that engendered a psychic divide among people, in the post war period in Britain, can be witnessed in the two prominent works by Lessing, *The Golden Notebook*, (1962) and *The Four-Gated City* (1969). The women characters from the aforesaid novels, Anna Wulf, Martha Quest and Lynda Coldridge, suffered a mental breakdown as they failed to cope with the suffocating chaos of the time.TapanGhosh synopsizes the events, that engendered the post war, splintered times and schizophrenic psyches, in the western world:

It was not a happy time in human history…the hope of building a peaceful and a stable society after the World War II, had receded in the distance… there was chaos and confusion all over the world, which was rocked by number of political crises: the trouble over the Suez; the Korean war; the Mau Mau Movement; the Soviet invasion of Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968); the witch-hunt in Soviet Russia and McCarthyism in capitalistic America. The escalating temperature of the Cold War, consequent upon the installation of Soviet missiles in Cuba,
brought back the nuclear holocaust and generated a fear of the total annihilation of mankind. The invention and proliferation of the weapons of mass destruction like the hydrogen bomb added much fuel to the fire. The dismal state of liberty, freedom and democracy… disillusionment with the available models of political ideologies, the failure of political solutions to the socio-economic problems… led to general disappointment and frustration.(2006: 19)

As an adolescent on the African veld, Lessing’s vision of a utopian city was born, as a solution to the problem of racial discrimination, which she explicitly articulated in her semi-autobiographical novel, *Martha Quest*, (1952) which fought against separatism and fragmentation of every kind in the society. Martha called it a “four gated city”, which was perfect in its geometric proportions, symbolizing man-made order, recalling Olive Schreiner’s sense of wholeness, created in her novel, *From Man to Man* (1926). As a writer with strong “commitment” (Gindin, 2003: 9) Lessing had turned to Marxism in Southern Rhodesia, in the wake of the Second World War, with an aim to finding a solution to the plight of the dispossessed black natives of Africa, and the white middle class colonial society, that lived a stagnant and stifling life, who were the victims of imperialism, which was seen as a direct fall out of the ideology of capitalism. Lessing had left her political engagement with the communist group in Rhodesia, in 1946, due to disjunction in the theory and practice of the ideology of Marxism, among the local group of progressives in Southern Rhodesia, which can be discerned in the novel, *A Ripple from the Storm* (1958). In the novel, Anton Hess, Martha’s husband stops conversation with Martha for addressing Soviet Union as Uncle Joe, and he fights for power within the group, which according to Martha, defeats the very principle of the Marxist ideology. Though Lessing had left the group of progressives, in Southern Rhodesia, her faith in the vision of unity and equality of mankind, underscored by Marxism did not diminish, for Lessing believed, that Marxism looks at the things as a whole. Therefore, when Lessing came to England, in 1949, and witnessed human misery in its diverse forms, she again joined the communist party. She grew cynical about the established Marxism, as a political solution to the human misery after Hungary, and the Twentieth Congress. Subsequently, she turned from social realism to the genre of inner space fiction, in quest of psychological solution to the problem of fragmentation under the influence of R. D Laing. Commenting on the genre of inner space fiction, Jeannette King writes, “The inner space fiction is a synthesis, an exploration of subjectivity which leads the reader into new spaces, new imagined worlds, which offer an alien perspective on the contemporary reality.”(King, 1989: 55) Briefing
for a Descent into the Hell, (1971) Memoirs of a Survivor, (1973) and Summer before the Dark, (1974) are the three novels, categorized as inner space fiction by Doris Lessing. Lessing identifies herself with the view of R.D Laing, who considers madness as self-healing. Marion Vlastos writes in her critical work, Doris Lessing and R. D Laing: Psycho politics and Prophecy:

While Lessing’s recent preoccupation is for a new alternative to political reform, the idea of madness as a potential salvation for the contemporary world is not hers alone. Not only in her emphasis on madness, but also in her articulation of its value, she shows a striking similarity to the views of R.D Laing, unorthodox psychiatrist and cultural theoretician. (Vlastos: 1986:127)

R.D Laing expresses two views about madness. Madness in an individual reflects the self-divide in the society and secondly, mental breakdown is a breakthrough; it is self-healing. In his critical work, The Divided Self, R.D Laing looks upon a mad person as a “symptom and victim of a sick society” and finally as a “prophet of a possible new world, a world governed by the forces of unity rather than of separation.”(cited in Vlastos, 128) In Lessing’s novel, The Golden Notebook, (1962) the woman protagonist, Anna Wulf experiences a breakdown, under the pressure of despair and failure, in the stifling atmosphere of the post-war Britain, it is only in the state of madness, that Anna discovers illuminating truths about her own nature, and her relation to the world, and she emerges from insanity to a state of wisdom, self-respect and independence. Lessing calls madness as mainstream. Madness is seen as an act of rebellion against the stifling and oppressively insecure, post-war Britain. In her interview with Jonah Raskin at Stony Brook, Lessing said:

Mental illness is part of the mainstream. People who are classified as sick are becoming more and more important in England, the USA, and in the socialist countries too. People who are mentally ill are often those who say to the society, ‘I am not going to live according to your rules. I am not going to conform.’ Madness can be a form of rebellion. (1970: 77)

Both Lessing and Laing are critical of the psychiatric establishment. It recalls a statement made by Michel Foucault, in Madness and Civilization, while talking about the birth of asylum, he says, “the modern concept of madness is a cultural invention of control.”(cited by Faggen, 2001:1) Lessing and Laing, a rebel against the authority of medical psychiatry, agree upon a point that the treatment given to the mental patients is detrimental and “hostile to the survival of the society itself.”(Vlastos, 140)
In the late fifties, Lessing turned to psycho-analysis, in her endeavour to achieve wholeness in the individual self that experienced a schism on account of rivalry, competition, disappointment and frustration, leading to alienation, in the capitalist society. She turned to the philosophy of Sufism for its humanism and universalism, under the influence of the Sufi teacher, Idries Shah, in early sixties, with a view to finding a solution to the problems faced by the western capitalist society, characterized by individualism and separatism. Lessing writes:

That East must ever be East and West must ever be West is not a belief which is subscribed by the Sufis… Sufis have always struggled against the dogmas of ‘establishments’…Sufism believes itself to be the substance of that current which can develop man to a higher stage in its evolution. It is not contemptuous of the world, ‘Be in the world, but not of it,’ is its aim. (Lessing 1957: 193)

To seek a unity of mankind by creating a sense of wholeness through the principle of harmony, which is the basic principle of the spiritual philosophy of Sufism, emerges as a solution to the practical problems faced by man in Lessing’s novels categorized as inner space fiction. The novels, written after the late sixties, Briefing for a Descent into the Hell, Memoirs of a Survivor and her science fictional work, Canopus in Argos- Archives: The Re-colonized Planet Shikasta written in late seventies, reflect the philosophy of Sufism. Lessing’s use of spirituality in her fight against the social evils, recalls saint Kabir, a fifteen century poet from India, who belonged to the religious movement, called Bhakti Movement, who used spirituality to fight the social evils of social discrimination and economic oppression. Saint Dyaneshwar is a path breaking poet from Marathi literature, who spearheaded the Warkari Sampradaya, and revolted against the corrupt social practices through spirituality. Talking about Sufism, Robert Graves writes in the introduction to The Sufis by Idries Shah:

Sufism has gained an oriental flavor for having been so long protected by Islam, but the natural Sufi may be as common in the West as in the East, and may come dressed as a general, a peasant, a merchant, a lawyer, a schoolmaster, a housewife, anything. To be “in the world but not of it,” free from ambition, greed intellectual pride, and blind obedience to the custom or awe of persons higher in rank- that is the Sufi ideal…in Sufism, Enlightenment comes through love, love in a poetic sense… (Graves, 1964: x, xi)

It is love and empathy, enshrined in the philosophy of Sufism, which emerged as a solution to the appalling human condition, described by an extra sensitive character, Lynda who is a victim
of abnormal consciousness and a social rebel, from Lessing’s novel, *The Four Gated City* as “being poisoned,” in Lessing’s fiction. Jeannette King comments on the role of Sufism in Lessing’s fiction as follows:

The prophetic shift in Lessing can be seen as the result of the influence of Sufism, a form of Islamic mysticism which provides a kind of answer to that splitting of self, which I have suggested, is central to the presentation of her central characters. The Sufis claim that ordinary people are capable of the higher working of the mind, transcending ordinary limitations, through which humanity can proceed to higher level of evolution. Because enlightenment is to be achieved by working with the material world, Sufism aims to reconcile the spiritual and the practical, the irrational and the rational, the unconscious and the conscious. It offers the possibility of the unified self. (1989: 28)

While dealing with the issue of difference, Lessing talks at length, about the abnormal consciousness, and she castigates the psychiatric establishment, as a detrimental institution. Lessing has been critical of the institution of family as an oppressive institution. Margaret Moan Rowe draws attention to domestic terrorism discussed by Lessing, in her fiction, while dealing with the issue of difference. Lessing questions the morality of the western, capitalist, profit oriented society, that exploits and oppresses the mentally and physically “different” or the abnormal in the society. In Lessing’s earlier novels, one finds her taking up cudgels against racial oppression and the suffocation experienced by the white middle class, who lived in prisons of their own images, under the imperialist structure in colonial Africa. In her later novels, Lessing fights for justice for the mentally and physically different, in the western capitalist society.

Though, Lessing has dealt with difference in several of her works, like *The Grass is Singing*, *Land locked*, *The Golden Notebook*, *The Four gated City*, the short story *To Room Nineteen*, *Summer Before the Dark* etc, the present chapter proposes to deal with the novels written by Doris Lessing, that talk about the issue of difference namely *Briefing for the Descent into the Hell*, (1971) *The Fifth Child*, (1988), *and Ben in the world*, (2000). Lessing’s vision of love and empathy as a panacea to the problem of difference can be perceived in the aforesaid novels.

*Briefing for a Descent into the World*, (1971) is a fictional work categorized as inner space fiction. In the preface to the first edition published in 1971, Doris Lessing calls it an “inner space
fiction, for there is nowhere else to go but in.” Margaret Moan Rowe calls it a “hybrid form, for it is a blend of the third person narrative, a monologue and letters. (63)Briefing for a Descent into the Hell, talks about the plight of a patient, suffering from a temporary loss of memory or amnesia, who is labeled as insane by the medical institution, wherein he is admitted, in an “agitati ed”( King,56) state of mind. At the center of the structure of power, are the two anonymous doctors who declare the patient, who, later is identified as Charles Watkins, professor of classics at Cambridge University, as mad, for in his state of delirium, he embarks upon an exotic journey through the sea, land and space and attends a divine conference and acquires an alternative identity for himself, as the messenger of God, who has made a “descent” on the planet Earth, which is synonymous with hell, with his briefing or message of “Harmony with the laws of Existence” for mankind. The doctors, who fail to comprehend the subtle reality perceived by the dream self of the voyager treat him as “the other.” The voyager’s identity as a spiritual being, with a commitment on the earth, is brutally exterminated, using drugs and electric shock treatment, confining him to a mundane identity, as professor of classics at Cambridge. The fiction recalls Ken Ka sey’s novel, which serves as a poignant comment on the oppressive psychiatric institution, One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest,(1962) where, a character Rendell McMurphy, who stands up to the oppressive psychiatric institution, who is perfectly normal, is destroyed through electric shock treatment and lobotomy. Briefing for a Descent into the Hell parodies the blinkered view and the ideological tyranny of the psychiatric institution which exercises an oppressive “social control”. (Vlastos:126-140)

At the margin of the structure of power is the spiritual voyager, who is later identified as Charles Watkins, professor of Classics at Cambridge. He is admitted to the “Central Intake Hospital,” 11) in London by the Police, who find him “Wandering on the Embankment” (11) near the Waterloo Bridge” in a “rambling and a confused” (11) state of mind, with money and marks of identity missing. The nurse on duty, at the hospital, calls the mystic voyager, a patient and reports that the “patient was talking loudly, and he attempted several times to lie down on the desk thinking it to be a boat or a raft.” (11) The two anonymous doctors, doctor x and doctor y, soon after the voyager is admitted to the hospital, without probing the situation at length, only in keeping with their scientific theory, try to sedate him using drugs, declaring him mentally off- balance. Moreover, Doctor x, who is oppressive in his method of medical intervention, disagrees with Doctor
y, who believes in the use of milder drugs, on the line of treatment, administered to the patient, who, in their opinion, has lost his memory, since the patient fails to give any one single identity; doctor x without any qualms, very apathetically suggests electric shock therapy. The report offered, and the treatment suggested by the two doctors, is as follows:

Patient continues talking aloud, singing, swinging back and forth in bed. He is excessively fatigued. Tomorrow: Sodium Amytal…

Doctor y

I disagree. Suggest shock therapy

Doctor x (13)

In his state of delirium, the voyager’s “dream-self” (King, 1989: 55) talks about his spiritual experience. He struggles with his worldly and egocentric self that has been “at sea” (Rubenstein, 216) journeying “around and around” (13) in the sea of life for centuries. The voyager talks about his multiple identities as Jonah, Mariner, Sinbad, Odysseus and Judas. Jeannette King calls him an “everyman”(Rowe, 1994: 62)) in quest of his true identity. He talks about his present voyage, where he was the captain of the ship and eleven crewmen, his shipmates were absorbed by the mysterious Crystal abandoning him to languish in the shipwrecked state. His alienation from his shipmates and exclusion from the divine “Crystal” that stands as the metaphor of an “ideal city” (Celine, 1999: 103) envisioned by Martha in Lessing’s semi-autobiographical novel Martha Quest, (1952) upholding the principle of unity of all beings. The voyager attributes his exclusion from the spiritual grace to the propensity to see himself as an “individual”(Ibid, 103) in the capitalistic world. His marginalization is the consequence of the voyager’s failure to identify the unity of all beings. The voyager’s sin can be viewed in the light of the literary ballad written by S.T Coleridge, Rime of the Ancient Mariner. The Ancient Mariner, who violates the law of nature, and wantonly kills the albatross, suffers a state of metaphysical homelessness. The voyager too suffers the anguish of spiritual “foreignness”(25) when he laments “round and round and round I go, again and again forever and ever… a current is set in itself, inexorable as a bus route,”(13) till he has realized like the Mariner the cause of his “Fall” (Rubenstein:213) lies in man’s egocentrism. The voyager identifies the principle of unity and seeks an absolution from the guilt. “A salt, salt sea, the brine coming flecked off the horses jaws to mine. On my face, 152
thick crusts of salt. I can taste it. Tears, sea water. I can taste salt from the sea.” (13) The voyager empathizes with the porpoise, and castigates the havoc wrecked by man on maritime life.

When has a porpoise killed a man, and we have killed so many for curiosity, not even for food’s or killing’s sake… hold on there, porpoise, poor porpoise in your poisoned sea, filled with stinking effluent from the bowels of man, and waste from the murderous mind of man, don’t die yet, hold on, hold me…(37)

It is the dolphin, who physically and figuratively rescues him from the Northern current and transports him over to the land on the southern coast, where the voyager believes that he would meet the mythical “Crystal,” his liberator.

The “language,” (Maslen, 1994:27) spoken by the voyager, which is described as “rambling” and “incoherent” by the police and the doctors respectively and the reality seen by him, is misunderstood by the oppressive Medical institution that repetitively drugs him and treats him as “the other.” The voyager is treated as “the other” for he does not speak the language of the so-called normal. The post-colonial critic, Frantz Fanon in his critical work, *Black Skin, White Masks* comments that the Negro in France, who fails to speak the language of the white man, is treated as inferior. The Negro in France, who speaks the language of the white, becomes “whiter” (1967:9) in the eye of the white colonizer. Ngugi Wa Thiong’o writes in *Decolonizing the Mind*:

But the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against the collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. (1987:3)

Jeannette King says “the basic problem in the novel is the failure of the psychiatric institution to see the subjective perception of the voyager. What is seen as madness is the perfect state of sanity, potent enough to diagnose the ills of the mankind.” (1989:56)

The voyager, “purged and scour by the salt” (King, 60) who is transported over to the land by the friendly porpoise, experiences a state of spiritual bliss, in the tranquil and Eden-like natural landscape, where the benign felines live in harmony and peace with the humble deer and guide the voyager to negotiate a difficult upward climb. The land is free from the cruel and the wicked ways of humanity. The voyager explores the vast stretch of land, awaiting the advent of
the Crystal on the full moon night. In the course of his exploration, he encounters an unroofed
“dystopia” (Tiger, 1993: 60) city, where he participates in the bloody act of violence by killing
the milk white cattle with his bow and arrow, and he joins the three hysterical women, who are
seen roasting enormous pieces of meat in the fire, with mouths smeared with blood, trickling off
their chins. As he accuses the women, a piece of meat is pushed into his mouth by the blood
thirsty women, who did not spare even the new born baby from the bloody ritual, symbolic of
violence and bloodshed, which scars mankind in the form of armed conflict; the voyager de-
scribes it as follows:

I had joined the bloody feast and later saw that it was over, the women were walking away, leav-
ing the fire burning, and piles of stinking bloody meat lying to one side of it. I looked for the ba-
by, but it was not there. Then I saw that it was dead and had been thrown on the heap of meat
that was waiting there, quite openly in the glade, all purply – red and bleeding, for the coming
night’s feast. (64)

After the second fall, the mystic voyager bitterly laments his folly and tries to escape the pre-
cincts of the unroofed city, as he is about to leave the borders of the city, he witnesses the advent
of the strange creatures who resemble both the rats and dogs, whom he calls rat- dogs and who
appear to be over sexed beings. The rat- dogs ravage the city and attack the hordes of monkeys
who are shown as sensitive creatures. The rat –dogs treat the monkeys as inferior creatures and
enslave them; later rat- dogs kill the creatures of their own species, littering the city with hun-
dreds of corpses. The scene of mutual animosity and violence that fouls the city leaves the voy-
ager in a state of hopelessness. It is described as follows:

I saw a female Rat-dog, with its sleek brown hide all bloodied and gashed, sitting up with its
back to a wall, snapping at a couple of male Rat-dogs, and at the same time she was giving birth.
Puppies tumbled out of her scarlet slit in a spout of blood and tissue, while she fought for her
life. The two round mounds on her chest which were her breasts, were swollen and had been
torn, so that blood and milk poured out together. Her sharp muzzle had hairy flesh hanging from
her teeth, and as she snapped and bit at the two tall staggering males who menaced her, she be-
came so crazed with fear and the need to help her puppies’ birth, that even as she fought, she
would give a deadly snap in front, at an antagonist, and then snap downwards at her young, and
perhaps wound or kill one, and then another random desperate bite at an antagonist, and then
snap downwards again, and then back at the pressing enemies, so that it looked as if she were
fighting her puppies as much as the two males who were as mad with long fighting as she was,
for notwithstanding they were trying to kill her (or at least acting in such a way that she had to
defend herself) and indeed succeeding, for she sank down in her own blood as we swept past the
group, their sexual organs were swollen with excitement, and one of them attempted to mate with her even as she died. She died in a spasm that was as much a birth- as a death-spasm. (83)

Since the voyager’s soul is claimed by “the enemy within,” (Rubenstein: 217) which catalyses the foul act of violence and the consequent fall for the second time eluding his entry into the divine Crystal. The dystopic city that mesmerized the voyager and veered him off his destination for a stint teases the vision of the “four gated city” (Lessing, 1952:21) depicted in Lessing’s Martha Quest (1952). The voyager in his state of so-called “madness” expands his awareness about human follies. Lessing comments on the human instinct to be ensnared by the worldly desires that blinds him to the principle of Cosmic Harmony. Lessing, who had experienced the trauma of the World War I and II and the outbreak of the Cold War and Korean War in 1957 and the fear of nuclear disaster, that proved to be prophetic with Chernobyl, attributes it to the infinite stupidity of humanity who fails to learn from the pages of history like the mystic voyager who fails to access the divine Crystal for the second time on account of his foolish and narcissistic individualism.

The voyager witnesses the violence for the third time, but miraculously, he is protected by the graceful white bird of “truth” who takes him for an excursion on its back. During this journey, the voyager diagnoses the cause of the illness of the planet earth, in the form of environmental disaster and war, as follows:

There was a taint of decay, bobbing on the waves I saw hundreds of corpses from the war on the plateau, which had been flung into the great chasm and had been carried by the stream over falls and cataracts to the sea’s edge. And everywhere I saw fishes and sea creatures floating, bellies up, and on the sea were patches of oil, dark and mineral-smelling. And over the sea, in patches, was pale phosphorescence like an insidious decay made visible, and these were poisonous gases that had released themselves from the containers man had sunk them in to the sea’s bottom… and elsewhere was the radioactivity from factories. (84)

When the scientific world of psychiatry treats the voyager as mentally “different,” and suggests an electric shock treatment, thumbing a nose at the scientific theory, he becomes extra sensitive and wise enough to diagnose the cause of the sickness of humanity. The realization of truth wins the voyager a berth in the Crystal that launches him into the space among the singing planets. As the voyager is raised up in the sky, through the mysterious substance of the Crystal, he witnesses a strange spectacle of all the elements in nature merging into a whole recalling the
epiphany, experienced by Martha on the African veld, where she finds the entire universe melting into one whole. This divine experience, reminds one of the invocation made to the almighty, in *Pasayadan*, by the great social reformist and a twelfth century poet from Maharashtra, saint Dyaneshwar, he writes:

Evil people should shed away their evilness complete, and develop liking for good deeds, and beings should develop amongst themselves fellowships Darkness of sins, should vanish From world, and sun of righteousness, should dawn… (Saraswati, 2002:784)

The voyager looks at the humanity during his celestial journey, which resembles the microbes, beset with the sickness of viewing themselves as individuals and not as “note in the cosmic dance” who fail to understand the principle of Harmony. It is the “death of the I,” (Sage, 1983:69) which has a potential to transcend into a state of enlightenment.

To celestial eyes, seen like a broth of microbes under a microscope, always at war and destruction, this scum of microbes thinks, it can see itself, it begins slowly to sense itself as one, a function, a note in the harmony, and this is its point and function, and where the scummy film transcends itself, here and here only, and never where these mad microbes say I, I, I, I, I, for saying I, I, I, I, is their madness, this is where they have been struck lunatic, made moon-mad, round the bend, crazy, for these microbes are a whole, they form a unity, they have a single mind, a single being, and never can they say I, I… (103)

In his evolutionary journey, the voyager realizes that the violence and blood lust is an integral part of the Cosmic Harmony. He understands that the three crazed women in the unroofed city were as important as the benign cats in the land of peace. He also understands that the micro-cosmic life is connected to the macrocosmic. The mystic voyager has a tryst with the spiritual experience, when he learns the truth, encapsulated in the quotation from the philosophical tract, *The Secret Garden* written by the Sufi poet Shabistari in the fourteenth century, illustrating the
point that the tiniest particle folds within it the seeds of largest particle, mentioned by Lessing, in the preface to the *Briefing for the descent into the Hell*

If yonder raindrop should its heart disclose,
Behold therein a hundred seas displayed.
In every atom, if thou gaze aright,
Thousands of reasoning beings are contained.
The gnat in limbs doth match the elephant.
In name is yonder drop as Nile’s broad flood.
In every grain a thousand harvests dwell… (1971, Preface)

Roberta Rubenstein comments on the process of evolution experienced by the voyager as both biological as well as spiritual, she refers to the process of evolution mention by the thirteenth century Sufi teacher, Jalaludin Rumi as follows:

He came, at first, into the inert world, and from minerality developed into the realm of vegetation. Years he lived thus. Then he passed into an animal state, bereft of memory of his having been vegetable—except for his attraction to Spring and flowers. This was like the innate desire of the infant for the mother’s breast…

From realm to realm man went, reaching his present reasoning, knowledgeable, robust state—forgetting earlier form of intelligence. So, too, shall he pass beyond the current forms of perception.... There are a thousand other forms of Mind... (1986:217)
Margaret Moan Rowe comments on the Sufi method used by the Teacher in instructing the disciples, the flaws committed by the voyager serve as a corrective to the humanity. The voyager acquires a new identity through the Sufi sense of wholeness. Rowe writes, “Briefing for a Descent into the Hell, like landlocked and The Four Gated City, reflects Lessing’s well documented interest in Sufi thought. What the Sufi Path describes as “the interplay of the minds of the teacher and the taught.”(64)

The voyager enters into the realm of the planets, who express a concern over the state of the diseased Earth, which constantly suffers from natural calamities and manmade crises. At the interplanetary conference which is convened with a special objective to correct the illness of the earth by offering a briefing of Harmony by the permanent staff for the most poisonous planet where Charlie, the spiritual voyager is present and who is brain printed with the divine message, the witty and intelligent representatives of the planets, Minna- Erve and Merk- Ury make telling observations on the nature of humanity who fail to see the universe as a Whole. Even the latest religion on the earth that is Science also fails to see the fundamental unity in the universe. They lament that the enlightened representatives who made their descent in the past fell into oblivion and “distorted” the truth of cosmic oneness.

… the main feature of these human beings as at present constituted being their inability to feel, or understand themselves, in any other way except through their own drives or functions. They have not yet evolved into an understanding of their individual selves as merely parts of a whole, first of all humanity, their own species, let alone achieving a conscious knowledge of humanity as part of Nature; plants, animals, birds, insects, reptiles, all these together making a small chord in the Cosmic Harmony… Each individual of this species is locked up inside his own skull, his own personal experience—or believes that he is, and while a great part of their ethical systems, religious systems, etc., state the Unity of Life, even the most recent religion, which, being the most recent is the most powerful, called Science, has only very fitful and inadequate gleams of insight into the fact that life is One. In fact, the distinguishing feature of this new religion, and why it has proved so inadequate, is its insistence on dividing of, compartmenting, pigeon-holing, and one of the most lamentable of these symptoms is its suspicion of, and clumsiness with, words… (120)

The voyager wakes up on the earth, as an enlightened being and at the same time the identity of the spiritual voyager is established by the police, and the doctors of the central intake hospital, as Charles Watkins, professor at Cambridge University, wife of Felicity, and father of their two children. The doctors, who rejected the reality perceived by the voyager, in the first part of the
narrative, till he remains un-named and called him “hallucinated and mad,” are now insistent on his accepting one single identity, as Charles Watkins. Doctor x, who was callously insistent on the cruel electric shock treatment, becomes more oppressive in his approach, towards Watkins. The voyager is firm on his identity, as the messenger of God, with the message of harmony for the bruised earth. He stands up to the medical establishment that tries to destroy his spiritual identity, with its ideological tyranny, and strongly opposes the identity foisted on him as professor, at the initial stage. Doctor x, who has been suggesting the electric shock treatment, becomes “invisible” as an act of rebellion by the voyager for want of “light” (137) in the form of the light of humanity. He tells doctor y that he cannot see doctor x because he has “no light.”

In Ralph Ellison novel, *Invisible Man* (1952) the marginalized Negro in America is treated as invisible, for the whites fail to see him. The voyager, who is at the margin of the power structure, turns the tables on the establishment by making it “invisible.”

It is in the state of breakdown that the voyager is able to see the “light.” Lessing like R.D Laing, the psychiatrist who opposed the conventional approach of psychiatry believes that the process of breakdown is self-healing. Charles Watkins, the voyager like the protagonist of R.D Laing’s *Politics of Experience*, (1967) Jesse Watkins gains self-knowledge in the state of a split in mind. Most of Lessing’s characters, who suffer a breakdown, become extra sensitive. The female protagonist from the novel *The Grass is Singing*, *Mary Turner*, empathizes with the black natives of Africa only when she loses her sanity in the conventional sense. Laing mentions in *The Divided Self* (1960), that breakdown is a break through. He believes that it is necessary to understand that “madman is a prophet of a possible new world, a world which is governed by the forces of unity rather than separation.

Marion Vlastos, in her critical work *Doris Lessing and R.D. Laing: Psycho politics and Prophecy* writes:

In the late fifties, Lessing conscientiously and carefully re-examines the Marxist solution and rejects it as unviable… with the collapse of hope in the political answer to the human misery, the struggle for viable existence becomes again the onus of the individual self and its capacities for moral development… in Lessing’s novel we can see a gradual movement … toward a new kind of belief in the possibility of affecting the inner man. (127)
The Medical establishment refuses to acknowledge the reality seen by the voyager, as nonsense or hallucination, the voyager whose sensitivity has expanded is able to see much more than an ordinary being, he shows flexibility and “inclusiveness” (Rubenstein, 213) “and … and… and,” he is willing to accept his identity as both, as the spiritual voyager and as Watkins, the professor, but the rigid and tyrannical psychiatrists want him to accept one single identity known to them. They refuse to accept him as the messenger of God. The doctors rope in friends and relations to assert their point of view. Friends who respond through letters add yet another dimension to the aspect of reality. The speculative fiction that consists of the third person narrative, the interior monologue, and the letters reflects the different dimensions of reality. The love and empathy shown by Rosemary Baines, a retired teacher from London, who had attended Charles’ lecture on education of children, before he lost his memory, confirms his identity, in her long letter to doctor y, regarding his extra sensitivity. She identifies Charles Watkins as the “messenger of God,” (Rowe: 64) who believes in the evolution of humanity by preserving curiosity. The voyager rebels and asserts his identity as the divine messenger with a briefing but the oppressive institution that has all the “power,” and “power is synonymous with truth in the consulting room,” (Vlastos: 130) which compels him to conform to the electric shock treatment. It is the medical institution that has the final say. Commenting on the control exercised by the psychiatrists Marion Vlastos writes:

Reflecting society’s tendency to protect itself by separating the unknown from the familiar, by compartmentalizing, the doctors label the malady. In doing so he both defines the boundaries for exploring the illness and establishes his control over the process… Drugs and shock relieve both the patient and the doctor of responsibility… (130)

At the end, very brutally Charles Watkins is restored to the prison of sanity, killing his extra sensitivity. Lessing writes in the Afterword to the novel, that “extra sensitivity in an individual is a handicap.” The oppressive tendency shown by the Medical institution recalls Aimé Césaire, proclaim “Hitler is not dead,” cited by Frantz Fanon, in Black Skin and White Masks (1967):

All forms of exploitation resemble one another. All forms of exploitation are identical for they are directed towards the same “object” – that is man… colonial racism is no different from any other racism. Anti-Semitism hits me head-on; I am bled white by an appalling battle… I am deprived of the possibility of being a man… I think I can hear Césaire:
When I turn on my radio, when I hear that Negroes have been lynched in America, I say we have been lied to: Hitler is not dead; when I hear that Jews have been insulted, mistreated, persecuted: I say we have been lied to; Hitler is not dead… (65)

The cruelty displayed by the psychiatric institution in slaughtering the beautiful identity of the voyager, recalls the callousness shown by the Medical institution, in treating the rebellious character in Ken Kasey’s novel, One Flew Over Cuckoo’s Nest, (1962) Randell McMurphy, with lobotomy, and destroying his life. At the microcosmic level it the unnamed doctors in the Briefing, or the nurse, Ms. Ratchet in One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, who marginalize the abnormal in hospitals, with the aid of scientific ideology; at the macrocosmic level, it is a brutal manifestation of power, by the people at the centre of the social structure who determine the truth, and govern the fate of the weak, the outcasts and the marginalized.

Commenting on the concept of “Power,” Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon write:

Power is at the centre of cultural politics… the power relations involve relations of domination and subordination. Power enables some individuals and groups to realize for themselves, particular possibilities, which it denies others… power to name and define is central to colonialism. (1997:13)

Claire Sprague and Virginia Tiger, cite the critical remark made by Herbert Marderin Critical Essays in Doris Lessing “In Briefing…Lessing’s attack on the bankruptcy of the psychiatric medical establishment is relentlessly single –minded.” (1986: 14) The researcher believes that Lessing is fully justified in being single-minded, in her attack on the psychiatric medical institution, for the antidote to the poison of ideological tyranny has to be commensurate with the deadliness of the poison.

In conclusion, one can say, that Lessing is fiercely critical of the psychiatric institution for being oppressive as an instrument of social control, which labels the divine voyager as insane and subjects him to uncalled for sedatives and the shock treatment to kill his true and beautiful identity as a messenger of God., and his unique power to identify and feel the element of universalism, in keeping with the laws of Harmony and Existence. He is rather cruelly compelled to accept one single identity as Charles Watkins, the professor of classics. Lessing is anti- institutions and anti-institutionalization. She writes in her autobiography, “all my life I have been with people who
have been against authority and against institutions.” (Lessing, 1991:15) Lessing’s critique of the medical and educational institution can be witnessed in the novel, *The Fifth Child*, (1988). She fights against the institution of Police and the governmental authority in her novels, *Memoirs of a Survivor*, (1974) *The Good Terrorist* (1985). State of insanity or madness emerges as a coping technique. It is in his state of breakdown that the spiritual voyager sheds his egocentrism, and perceives individuality as a curse and human folly. He moves from individualism to universalism, from I to We. Through Love and empathy, embedded in the philosophy of Sufism, the voyager experiences the unity of all beings. He also realizes the human folly of the mindless exploitation of nature by man. It is in his state of madness that Watkins resolves the crisis of the “trap of the ordinariness of existence,” which is hinted at in the letter of Rosemary Bains, who fervently believes in the divine identity of Charles Watkins. Thus madness serves as a coping technique.

In her novels, *The Grass is Singing*, *The Golden Notebook*, *The Four Gated City*, *Memoirs of a Survivor*, madness serves as a coping technique. Mary Turner sees the unity between the blacks and the whites in her state of madness. Anna Wulf and Martha in their state of extra sensitivity manifest a potential for evolution. One can also observe that women in Lessing’s fiction take up responsibility. It is Rosemary Bains who identifies the evolutionary potential in Watkins and writes to the doctors about his true identity. Felicity, Watkins wife is willing to bring him home irrespective of his mental state. Lessing is against institutionalization. In her novel, *The Fifth child*, it is the mother, Harriet, who brings the “different” child home from the institution. In the novel *The Good Terrorist* and *The Diary of Jane Sommers*, Lessing is critical of institutionalization as a solution. She eloquently mentions that “the damaged” should be looked after.

Just as the novel, *Briefing for the descent into Hell*, is critical of the psychiatric institution, *The Fifth child* critiques the institution of family as an oppressive institution.

The novel *The Fifth Child* (1988) talks about the oppression suffered by a genetic throwback, possibly, a Neanderthal child, Ben Lovatt, born in the upper middle class family in Britain, in the mid-seventies. Ben, who is born as mentally and physically “different” is seen as the destroyer of the “idyllic” family of the Lovatts since his conception. The birth of the “monster” casts a long shadow of gloom on the family, for Ben is seen as a source of shame and embarrassment by the Lovatts. The “atavistic” tendencies manifested by the genetically different child, Ben, exclude
him from the ordinariness of life. Ben is treated as “the other” by his elder siblings, who refuse to recognize him as their kin. Ben’s father, David Lovatt disowns him as his child and a ruthless decision is taken by the family to institutionalize the three year old “different” Ben, in a distant place in the North of England. It is the love and empathy of the mother, Harriet Lovatt who not only rescues Ben from the filth ridden institution, where Ben was consigned to perish but also strives hard to include him in the mainstream of life, by re-educating him into social skills. It is the marginalized, and the inassimilable in the society, who facilitate the socialization and accommodation of Ben Lovatt, in the society. The Fifth Child discerns the institution of family as an engine of torture and oppression.

At the margin of social structure of power is Ben, the misfit, who is born as the fifth child to David and Harriet Lovatt has been an “unwanted” (41) child, who is seen as poisoning the happiness of the family since his foetal state. Harriet and David Lovatt, the biological parents of Ben, themselves were seen as “oddballs” and a sort of “throwbacks” in terms of their ideas of sex in the sixties, Harriet chose to remain a virgin till she formally tied a knot and David never had any serious affair with any girl before marriage. When they get married they resolve to defy the use of contraceptives and have as many children as possible. As planned, they have four “delicious” children in five years of their married life; the large family is supported by the affluent father of David who is a yatch owner and Harriet’s mother volunteers to be the housekeeper for the Lovatts. The extended family of the Lovatts gather at the large Victorian house bought on mortgage by David and Harriet, at the drop of a hat. Harriet’s brother-in-law throws teasing barbs at Harriet for adding four children to the family in a span of five years and Harriet is made to look a criminal. David and Harriet resolve not to have any children the next three years; and very ironically, Harriet learns that she is pregnant. The conception of the fifth child is an “unwanted” one; consequently, Ben Lovatt is rejected as an “unwanted” child since his foetal state. Moreover, ever since Harriet conceived Ben, she began feeling uneasy and ill, for the size of the foetus was abnormally large. It becomes difficult for Harriet to sustain the pregnancy; the excruciating pain suffered by the mother brings tears to her eyes. “Harriet feels rejected by her husband,” (45) for according to the agreement made by the couple, there would be no room for any tears in their life. In addition to this, because of the difficult pregnancy, Harriet and David stop making love; children keep away from the mother, and the relatives and friends who eagerly awaited every
festival to join the Lovatts are hesitant to come for the celebrations, leading to an enforced estrangement among the members of the family. The fifth child casts a shadow of gloom on the Lovatts and therefore, the arrival of Ben is seen as “poisoning” (45) the happiness of the family.

During the gestation period, Harriet feels some “savage or a rough beast is clawing at her womb”. She talks to Dr Brett, the family physician who had supervised at the previous four deliveries, he callously, without making any investigations about the state of the foetus, sedates the unborn Ben. Thus, Ben is rejected as an unwanted baby; he is seen as destroyer of the happiness of the family, and the so-called, rough beast is sedated by the medical institution even before he is born. Lessing is critical of the medical institution.

Ben who is labeled as a beast and savage before his birth, is seen as a source of evil and horror, before as much as after his birth; his mother Harriet is seen as the bearer of the “evil” because of her enormous stomach and a voracious appetite. Harriet felt famished very often and would devour chocolates, cakes and pastries ravenously. David, Harriet’s husband narrates a frightening bed time story to his children about a young girl, who is lost in the woods, and who looks at her own image in the lake and is taken aback at the sight of the horrible girl, who uncannily tries to pull the lost girl towards her. He refers to the “evil materializing” in the form of the horrible girl, hinting at some buried evil in Harriet materializing in the form of the evil or horror. Even before the birth of Ben, he is labeled and rejected as a source of “evil” and “horror.”

After Ben Lovatt is born, he is rejected for being physically “different”. The first four children born to the Lovatts were healthy, but none weighed above seven pounds. Ben was whooping eleven pounds at birth with yellowish skin and green eyes. Lessing describes the fifth child as follows:

He was not a pretty baby. He did not look like a baby at all. He had a heavy-shouldered hunched look, as if he were crouching there as he lay. His forehead sloped from his eyes to his crown. His hair grew in an unusual pattern from the double crown where started a wedge or triangle that came low on the forehead, the hair lying forward in thick yellowish stubble, while the side and back hair grew downwards. His hands were thick and heavy, with pads of muscle in the palms. He opened his eyes and looked straight up into his mother's face. They were focused greeny-yellow eyes, like lumps of soapstone. She had been waiting to exchange looks with the creature who, she had been sure, had been trying to hurt her, but there was no recognition there. And her
heart contracted with pity for him: poor little beast, his mother disliking him so much ... But she heard herself say nervously, though... he is like a troll, or a goblin or something.' And she cuddled him, to make up but he was stiff and heavy. (60)

Ben is treated as different even at his birth. When the previous babies were born, they were welcomed with a sprinkling of wine and Champaign but after Ben is born there was “strain in the eyes, a sort of apprehension.”(61)

Ben is excluded from the world of love in the family. The children, as Harriet observes, looked at Ben as made of a “different substance”. They look upon him as “not one of us.” The relatives who came to see Ben saw him as a strange, confusing and puzzling phenomenon. Harriet heard her sister Sarah, who had a sickly and a weak child suffering from Down’s syndrome, say “Ben gives me creeps, I prefer my sick Amy to him.” (68) Ben’s father doesn’t touch him. Nobody cuddles him as one does an ordinary child.

Ben is isolated from the older children, when he sprains Paul’s hand, as he tries to touch him. The six month old child is seen as an object of shame and horror. He is caged in his room. Ben displays atavistic tendencies at an early stage. He kills a dog and a cat, Mr. McGregor, and ever since the relatives gradually stop visiting the Lovatts. Ben is seen as the destroyer of the happiness of the family. Ben is locked up in his room and is compelled to stay away from the members of the family.

Since Ben displays atavistic tendencies and he is seen as an object of terror; initially, he is isolated. Later, he fails to speak at the normal age; again he is identified as physically and mentally different. Dorothy, Harriet’s mother explicitly pinpoints the “different identity” of Ben “He may be normal for what he is, He is not normal for what we are.”(79) The grandparents very callously try to convince David and Harriet that Ben is an abnormal child, and in the interest of the other normal children of the house, and for the sake of the family, he should be institutionalized. The immoral and ruthless decision of institutionalization of Ben Lovatt is supported by the capitalistic and affluent James Lovatt, David’s father, who agrees to pay for the charges of the institution. David’s mother and his stepfather, who serves as the professor of history at Oxford also, are no exception. It is unanimously agreed upon to “scapegoat” (Brevet, 1) Ben, in the interest of the entire family by all the members except Harriet, Ben’s mother. Ben is consigned to an
stitution, meant for the freaks and the abnormal in the North of England to perish. The older siblings feel relieved and they give out “hysterical laugh” (92) at the departure of the “abnormal and threatening” (93) Ben. The gesture of getting rid of the unwanted, recalls the comment made by the post-colonial critic, Aimé Césaire, “Hitler is not dead.” (Fanon, 65) One agrees with the critics Anne Brevet and Celine D. who identify the gesture of getting rid of the “unproductive” Ben with the capitalist tendency of scapegoating the unwanted. Andrew Rosen remarks in his critical work that the British society after 1970 became a rapidly growing consumerist, capitalist society. (Rosen, 2003:28-29) Doris Lessing is critical of the capitalist policy of marginalizing the unutilizable, the inassimilable, and the haves-not, people like Ben, who are thrown out of the pale of the family, and dumped in the institution, meant for the freaks and the abnormal, to perish. Lessing identifies capitalism with war and violence. She herself had experienced the wounds of violence of the World War I, which was fuelled by the capitalist greed and rapacity. She identifies herself with the protagonist of her quintet Martha Quest in Children of violence, where Martha suffers a bruised childhood as the daughter of the ex-soldier of the First World War. In Prisons We Choose to Live Inside, (1988), Lessing castigates capitalism for perpetration of violence. In The Fifth Child, it is the same capitalist tendency, which can be discerned, wrecking violence at the domestic level.

Lessing throws an angry question, at the morality of the institution of family. It is David and Harriet, who have given birth to the different child; it is the institution of family, where the difference has originated, and very ironically, the place of its origin, the family itself, very ruthlessly repudiates the victim. The raw deal meted out to the victim of difference within the family, calls for an interrogation of the human values and the very morality of the civilization itself. Doris Lessing is critical of the institutional solution to the issue of difference. Margaret Moan Rowe observes:

Throughout her career, Lessing has been intensely skeptical of institutional solutions to the human problems, particularly problems of dealing with difference. Images of Lynda Coldridge, facing the in The Four Gated City and the neat solution suggested by the unnamed doctors in Briefing for the Descent into the Hell come immediately to mind. But in those novels and others Lessing’s skepticism is less directed toward asking questions than in directing the reader to the right answer… in The Fifth Child Lessing appears more intent on questioning than answering as she examines the family, the site of origin, and its capacity to cope with difference. (106)
It is the love and empathy of the mother, Harriet Lovatt, who suffers a deep sense of guilt and horror at the thought of exclusion of Ben from the fold of the family. Notwithstanding the resistance of her husband and the other members of the family, Harriet decides to bring Ben back from the “nightmare ward,” (99) where Ben was dumped to perish along with the other freak children. Lessing describes the appalling ward, where one could see the “unwanted” shoved out to perish, which questions the concept of *Humanity* and *Civilization*, and corroborates the de-humanizing propensity of the capitalistic society, which fails to include and create a room for the *unutilizable*, within the fold of the society. One can pulse the anger and resentment of the author, at the social ostracism of the different in the society:

She was at the end of a long ward, which had any number of cots and beds along the walls. In the cots were – monsters…every bed or cot held an infant or a small child in whom the human template had been wrenched out of pattern, sometimes horribly and sometimes slightly. A baby like a comma, great lolling head on a stock of a body, a small girl all blurred, her flesh guttering and melting, a lanky boy was skewed, one half of his body was sliding from the other… rows of freaks, nearly all asleep, and all silent. They were all literally drugged out of their mind. (98)

Harriet, who is determined to rescue Ben from the “nightmare ward” and to take him home, is overcome with a strong motherly sentiment, when she looks at Ben lying in the excrement in a sedated and straitjacketed state.

On the floor, on the green foam- rubber mattress lay Ben. He was unconscious. He was naked, inside a strait- jacket. His pale yellow tongue protruded from the mouth. His flesh was dead white, greenish. Everything—walls, the floor and Ben was smeared with excrement. A pool of dark yellow urine oozed from the pallet which was soaked… she did not know what to say. Her heart was hurting as it would for one of her own real children, for Ben looked more ordinary than she had ever seen him, with those hard cold alien eyes of his closed. Pathetic- she had never seen him as pathetic before. I think I’ll take him home. (100,101)

The wasteland in the north of England, and the appalling institution, that was chosen to dump “the colonized” Ben can be compared with the town of the colonized, full of filth, cold and starvation, which is described in Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*(1967:30)

It is the mother, Harriet, who takes upon herself the responsibility of Ben at the cost of the ‘miraculous kingdom’ that she had planned with David. Lessing comes up with solution to the
issue of difference. “The maternal choice becomes the universal.” (Rowe: 106) In her interview with Hans- Peter Rodenberg, Lessing says:

Well, what interests me most of all is that at the moment when the mother has to decide whether she is going to leave the child in the institution where he will die, or take him home, that is absolutely the heart of our civilization, because we are committed not to kill people who are born damaged or mental defectives or anything. This is our civilization and what we stand by. So there is no way, officially that Ben could have been got rid of. (1989:3)

It is evident that Lessing is a humanist and a committed writer. She is anti- institutionalization. She wants society to take up the responsibility of the mentally and physically challenged with love and empathy. It is women who are offered a special role in Lessing’s fiction. It is the survivor, Martha, Alice Mellings, Rita, Teresa and a host of women characters who feel responsible for the marginalized in the society. Margaret Moan Rowe comments on Lessing’s emphasis on the role of woman as care taker:

What Harriet chooses is the responsibility for Ben, a choice that takes her into an alien country as more and more of her responsibility is directed towards controlling Ben so that he can fit into the family that has no place for him. Once again Lessing dramatizes the role of woman as care taker. (131)

Harriet rescues him from the nightmare ward, and brings him home. The hostile attitude nurtured by the siblings and the father does not diminish. David is visibly peeved at the decision taken by Harriet, at the cost of the happiness, and wellbeing of the rest of the four normal children. He refuses to acknowledge Ben as his child, and the gesture of bringing back Ben within the fold of the family, is perceived as a criminal act. Nevertheless Harriet persists, with determination, in her endeavor of integrating Ben in the mainstream of life, without disrupting the rhythm of the house. It is a tight rope walk for Harriet, for the older siblings of Ben are unfavorably disposed towards the “abnormal” Ben, whose advent casts a dismal gloom on the familial chemistry.

Harriet Lovatt makes every effort to bring emotional security to Ben. She stopped drugging Ben completely; as a child, interned in the institution, he was heavily drugged, and was never fed any food. In addition to that, he had suffered a terrible trauma, of being imprisoned in an isolated place. Harriet feeds him well, and assures him, that he is at home, and not in the horrid place, and he need not cram in food as if every morsel he ate, was his last. Ever since Ben was back from
the institution, out of trauma and for having forgotten the normal toilet habits, he urinated and defecated anywhere in the house. Harriet re-educates him into socially acceptable habits. “Harriet talked quietly while he ate. ‘And now listen to me, Ben. You have to listen to me. You behave well and everything will be all right. You must eat properly. You must use the pot or go to the lavatory. And you mustn’t scream or fight, she was not sure, if he heard her. She repeated it. She went on repeating it” (101)

In the course of time, Ben does appear a bit calm, and he starts following the socially acceptable pattern of behavior. Lessing writes:

He at last understood he was at home and safe. Slowly he stops eating as if every mouthful was his last. Slowly, he starts using the pot, and then allowed himself to be taken by hand along the passage to the lavatory… Ben took his place at the big table, among the other children… Helen said, ‘Hello, Ben’. Then Luke: ‘Hello, Ben’. Then Jane ‘Hello, Ben’… Ben at last said, ‘Hello’… He ate watching them. When they went to watch television, he did, too, copying them for safety, and looked at the screen for they all did. (109)

Thus, Harriet builds Ben’s confidence by caring for him and she tries to train him into social skills. Harriet tries to include him in the mainstream by playing some games with him, using the building blocks and other devices, though Ben evinces no interest in it. As time moves on, before Ben could be sent to a school at the age of five, Harriet realizes that Ben is getting fond of the garden boy John, who came to tend the garden occasionally. John was a shaggy, big, and an amiable youth, who was good natured and showed a lot of patience in handling Ben. Ben, very often, “whined and grizzled” (113) when John left. Harriet gets in touch with John and his gang at the nearby café, where the boys hung about, to seek their help in keeping Ben engaged, without being hurt and excluded, for, a raw deal usually was meted out to Ben, by the real children and David, Ben’s father. John and the boys from his gang agreed. Harriet did pay them for their services. John is kind to Ben; he involves Ben in tending the garden by making him run errands like fetching water and assisting him with the garden work. Ben felt happy in a way the process of helping John, raised Ben’s self-esteem, for he liked being with John. The boys handled him with love and empathy. Sometimes, they did call him “Hobbit or Goblin” (114) but accepted and included him in the mainstream. Since morning to the supper time Ben happily ferried around with the boys on their motorbikes and got up the next morning expecting a delightful day ahead. Ben
became familiar with the traffic signals and what they meant; he also learnt how to order dishes like “fish and chips.” Thus, Harriet ensured that Ben socialized, and that he was drawn into the mainstream of life, using the services of the marginalized people like John for they were warm and humane in their approach towards Ben, and filled Ben with a sense of trust. It is the marginalized who help the marginalized in Lessing’s fiction. In Memoirs of a Survivor, it is Gerald and the adolescent girl Emily Cartwright who help the orphans in the dying city. In The Good terrorist, it is Philip, the weakling who tries to help the black boy Jim who is harassed by the police and the oppressive administration.

At the age of five, Ben is sent to the school, where the other four Lovatt children studied. Ben roared with protest, but agreed to go to school only when John convinced him that everybody has to go to school, and assured that he would pick him up from the school. In school, Ben fails to pick up anything, as expected by Harriet. Harriet expects the school to identify and acknowledge Ben’s mental and physical difference, explicitly. Though the academic institution grasps the mental and intellectual debility of Ben, it chooses to be non-committal and evasive. The issue of Ben’s difference is disposed of by underscoring the point that “he tries hard” (120) and he is should be rewarded for making an effort. Even when Ben attacks a fifth grade girl student at the age of six, the school authorities fail to comment on the incident. When Harriet tries to draw their attention by calling Ben an “unusual child” (121) the school acknowledges it in a feeble manner by calling him a “hyperactive child” (128) but fail to talk about the issue explicitly. Harriet feels rejected and lonely, in her suffering. She talks to Dr Brett, the medical expert, who evaded to talk about Ben’s identity as a “different.” He suggests her to meet Dr. Gilly, a child specialist in London. The lady doctor examines both, Ben and his mother separately, and together. She reaches a conclusion, that there is no problem with Ben, but there is a problem with Harriet. She does realize that Ben is mentally and physically unusual; she calls him “an alien, from the Outer Space.” (127) when Harriet emphasizes his unusual behavior, she refuses to acknowledge, that Ben has inherited the genes of a throwback in explicit terms. All the same, very callously the doctor throws an accusing glance at Harriet, for being a progenitor of the “horror” (128) child Ben. Lessing writes:
She went to the door, and glanced back. On the doctor’s face she saw what she expected: a dark fixed stare that reflected what the woman was feeling, which was horror at the alien, rejection by the normal for what was outside the human limit. Horror of Harriet, who had given birth to Ben. (128)

Harriet once again feels rejected and being lonely in battling her predicament of raising a different child. Harriet says “what am I hoping for… was that at last someone would use the right words, share the burden. Lessing says, “No, she did not expect to be rescued, or even that anything much could change. She wanted to be acknowledged, her predicament given its value.”(124) Lessing is critical of the medical and educational institution.

Had the school authorities and the medical institution dealt with the issue of difference considerately, and compassionately, the sense of rejection, repudiation and loneliness of Harriet and Ben could have been addressed affirmatively. The mother would have felt endorsed in her view of Ben, as a mentally and physically different child. Ben, inheriting the genes of a Neanderthal, could be looked upon as a “misfortune” and Harriet could have been rescued from being treated as a “criminal.” Quite possibly, had the medical experts taken a lead and spoken about the issue of difference more explicitly, by taking the members of the family into confidence, Ben’s exclusion from the warmth of the family could have been prevented and the disintegration of the family averted. The callousness on the part of the academic and the medical institution is severely critiqued by Lessing. Margaret Moan Rowe observes, “The medical institution is no less a target in The Fifth Child along with the school system, Harriet correctly concludes that everyone in authority had not been seeing Ben ever since he was born.” (Rowe, 106)

Harriet feels more and more responsible for Ben as he grows up and the siblings get more and more hostile towards Ben and Harriet. When Ben is about five years of age, the two elder children leave the house for the boarding school to save them the shame and embarrassment of being identified as Ben’s brother. The grandparents, who, too, look upon Ben as destroyer of the family of Lovatts, readily agree to pay for the expensive fees of the boarding school. Thereafter, the older sibling seldom spent their vacations in the large house of the Lovatts. The younger siblings spent their time with their friends as soon as they returned from school.
The relatives, the grandparents, and friends, who were ever eager to join the Lovatts at every festival and celebration, now began finding excuses for their absence. They wrote long letters expressing their inability to join them. The house that was described as a big “fruit pudding” wore a deserted look.

In spite of the apathetic stand adopted by the father, the siblings and the extended family of relatives and friends, Harriet nevertheless, strives hard to integrate Ben into the mainstream of life. She also expects her younger son Paul to help her in the intellectual development of Ben. Harriet played games like Snakes and Ladder and Ludo with Paul in front of Ben. She anticipates that Ben would learn through imitation. But Ben does not learn anything. She tries to read out stories to Ben but he fails to evince any interest. Harriet realizes that Ben is interested in watching television, though he is able to recall only some stray images. Harriet expects Paul, her fourth child to help Ben in the narration of the story of films seen by both Ben and Paul. In the initial stage Ben fails in recalling the whole story but when Paul narrates the complete story, Ben too succeeds in narrating the entire story. Harriet feels only if Paul helps her in developing Ben’s mental faculty by spending more time with him. Paul disappoints Harriet. He hates Ben, jeers at him and calls him “stupid Ben.” It is only with the help of John the garden boy, that Harriet facilitates Ben’s socialization.

As time moves on, Ben joins the secondary school, though the previous school did not help him much. Ben appears to be happy in the new school. He still continues with the routine of spending his evenings with John and his gang. Ben shared a warm relationship with John who instilled lot of confidence in him through love and empathy. Ben expresses a deep sense of frustration when he learns that John is leaving him for good. Ben expressed his sense of loss through his body language. He banged his head against the tree in the garden, he also urges him to take him along with him to the place of his work in a distant place in England. After John’s departure, Ben hangs about in the café looking for familiar faces and venues, where he would enjoy with John and his mates. He fails to meet any body as kind as John.

Roberta Rubenstein in her critical work, *Doris Lessing’s Fantastic Children*, calls Ben, “the darkest child”(72) and Elizabeth Maslen calls him a “threat and a victim at once.” (47) One can
partly agree with Maslen, when she calls Ben a victim, but to call Ben the “darkest child” and a “threat” is as oppressive as the white men, calling the black man, a threat and monster. Roberta Rubenstein and Elizabeth Maslen can be compared with Joseph Conrad as critiqued by Chinua Achebe, for being insensitive; Chinua Achebe in his critique on Conrad, lambasts him for projecting the image of Africa, in *Heart of Darkness* as “the other world.” (252) Rubenstein and Maslen, both failed to observe the self-control exercised by Ben, when he learns that John would no longer be with him. As a monster he would have hurt John or even Harriet, in a fit of rage, but he hurts neither. He hurts himself. What “threatening monster” would hurt himself?

Quest for people like John, brings Ben in contact with a shaggy youth Derek who includes Ben in his gang of boys, who fail to make any grade in school. He starts playing truant and spends time away from school. Very often Ben would bring his friends home, who would spend time watching television and eat whatever food was there in the refrigerator. Sometimes they would get food from outside. The riotous atmosphere created by Ben and his friends in the large Victorian house becomes unbearable to David and a decision is about to be taken by David to sell off the place. Harriet, in anticipation of the decision, tells Ben that if he fails to find her in the large Victorian house, he should find her at the address which she hands over to him. Harriet hands over a paper to Ben, on which she writes the address of Molly and Fredrick, Ben’s grandparents, who live in Oxford, for Harriet speculates that Ben who is a misfit in the family of Lovatts, socializes well and fits into the gang of the have-nots, and therefore, is likely to leave the Lovatts, soon. The paper handed over by Harriet to Ben, on which the address was written, which would enable Ben to find the whereabouts of his parents, in case he left, and chose to come back, was left unregarded for, on the floor of the room. Harriet empathizes with Ben, and she tries to know what exactly Ben must be thinking about. Harriet’s sense of responsibility and commitment towards Ben’s welfare continues undiminished. She also wanted to confirm if Ben understood Harriet’s passion to know his mind. Lessing writes:

Did he feel his eyes on him, as a human would? He sometimes looked at her while she looked at him – not often, but it did happen that his eyes met hers. She would put into her gaze these speculations, these queries, her need, her passion to know more about him- whom after all she had given birth to, and carried for eight months, though it nearly killed her- he did not feel the questions she was asking. Indifferently, casually, he looked away again, and his eyes went to the faces of his mates (156)
Harriet, though did not completely understand Ben, she is certainly able to socialize him, on account of her love and empathy and a strong sense of commitment and responsibility towards Ben, the throwback born to Harriet. She observes Ben fitting into the company of the have-nots, the inassimilable, and the abandoned in the society. Lessing writes:

She would look at them, from the stairs perhaps, as she came down into the living room, a group of youths, large, or thin, or plump, dark, fair or round-headed and among them Ben, squat, powerful, heavy shouldered, with his bristly yellow hair growing in that strange pattern, with his watchful alien eyes—and she thought, But he’s not really younger than they are! He is much shorter, yes. But it almost seems that he dominates them. When they sat around the big family table, talking in their style, which was loud, raucous and jeering, jokey, they were looking at Ben. Yet he spoke very little… he was the boss of the gang, whether they knew it or not. They were a bunch of gangly, spotty, uncertain adolescents; he was a young adult. She had to conclude this finally, though for a while she believed that these poor children, who stayed together because they were found stupid, awkward and unable to match up to their contemporaries, liked Ben because he was even clumsier and more inarticulate than they. No! she discovered that ‘Ben Lovatt’s gang’ was the most envied in the school, and a lot of boys, not only the truants and drop-outs, wanted to be a part of it. (146)

Lessing depicts the atmosphere of social and economic breakdown in Britain in the nineties recalling the scenes of juvenile delinquency and riotous atmosphere in Anthony Burgess’ *A Clockwork Orange*. Lessing writes, “Wars and riots; killings and hijackings; murders and thefts and kidnappings…the eighties, the barbarous eighties… these days the local newspapers were full of news of muggings, hold-ups, break-ins” (129-147) Margaret Moan Rowe observes:

While never able fully to understand Ben, Harriet is able to ‘socialize’ him. In as trenchant a critique of society as she offers in any of her novels, Lessing shows Ben fitting into the society for the society is breaking down… the society itself becomes a throwback and Ben fits in, becoming the leader of the band of the schoolmates, ‘the uneducable, the unassimilable and the hopeless’… and finds his calling in casual urban violence. (Rowe: 108)

It is the mother, Harriet Lovatt, who defies the blatant opposition of her husband, the open dislike displayed by the siblings against the mentally and physically different Ben and rescues him from the institution. She connives at the subtle barbs and lacerating taunts of relatives and her mother—in-law who ruthlessly called her a criminal who destroyed the family of Lovatts, and brings up Ben, the misfit, singlehandedly and ensures that Ben fits into the society. It is with love and empathy that the mother takes up the responsibility of the different child. Love and empathy embedded in the philosophy of Sufism emerges as the coping technique.
*Ben, in the World, (2000)* is a sequel to the novel, *The Fifth Child*, where the institution of family can be discerned as an engine of oppression, which colonizes, the genetic throwback, the fifth child, born in the upper middle class family, in Britain, in the nineties, at the height of Capitalism. Ben Lovatt, the protagonist of the novel, *Ben, in the World*, is an adult, who is over eighteen years of age, and who is depicted as mentally inadequate, and physically different. Ben is labeled as abnormal and as a consequence, is “colonized” by the world of the normal, and is pushed to the margin of the social structure. Ben is seen as an outsider, as much as a black man is perceived, in the midst of the white colonial society, in the imperialist structure. At the centre of the structure of power, is the so called *normal, and civilized* western society, which is depicted as callous, oppressive, and manipulative.

Ben, who quits the secure fold of the Lovatt residence, which is located in the sub-urbs of London at the age of fourteen, along with the gang of truants from school, drifts from place to place, suffers physical and economic exploitation, experiencing sharp and subtle barbs of humiliation for being “different.” The lonely, homeless, insecure and penniless, Ben is frequently “used” (162) and then abandoned by the devious, selfish, and manipulative people, from the plethora of society, ranging from the class of the destitute turned criminals, to the talented film makers, to the highly intellectual, but cold and cruel scientists. It is only occasionally, and by chance, that Ben is rescued by the love and empathy of the people, who themselves have been victims of diverse forms of exclusion. The present novel is a sardonic comment on the discourse on difference.

Ben Lovatt, the genetic throwback, who is perceived as “mentally and physically “abnormal” (Robins, 2011:97) and as a consequence, is pushed to the margin of the power structure. He is left alone to fend for himself in the hostile world, after the truants from school are caught and sent back to the parents or remand home, with whom, Ben had indulged in shoplifting and gang fights for fun, after abandoning the Lovatt residence, where Ben had lived with his kind mother. As a homeless, lonely and penniless freak, Ben is taunted, humiliated, and sometimes jeered at for his “posh accent” (14) and his different looks. He is physically and economically exploited. Above all, he is used and then abandoned by the manipulative, capitalist minded people, who have no qualms, living off the helpless and differently-abled, Ben.
Ben is used by a gang of boys to guard the motorbikes, for food and some money. The boys from the rival gang beat him up for denying access, to the motorbikes; some machines are damaged in the row that follows. The boys from his own gang get upset over the damage done to the machines, and are about to beat him up. They look at the stupid look on his face and soon dismiss him from the job, leaving him in bleeding and sick state. Ben is rescued by a kindhearted girl, who works in a pub. She makes him sit in a corner, offers him water and food. A man, who happened to be present at the scene of fight asks Ben, if he wants to work, and subsequently, brings Ben to the Grindly farm, where Ben lived for almost two years.

The farm was a neglected place, looked upon with pity and embarrassment by the neighbours. It was looked after by an old, unmarried woman, Mary Grindly, who was encumbered with the responsibility of the two, feeble minded brothers, who hardly contributed to the farm work. Mary is helped by Ben, who worked very hard to facilitate Mary’s life on the farm. Ben is appreciated for the hard labour that he puts in, at the farm, by the neighbours. Though, they identify Ben as “different,” a kind of “Yeti,” (35) they recognize his abilities as a worker. Mary looks upon Ben as a god’s blessing, without whom, the work on the farm would suffer. Though, like her neighbours, Mary too is aware of the “different” status of Ben in physical and mental terms, sometimes she would see him communicating with animals and dancing in the night. Sometimes she heard “noises that needed investigation, it really made her scalp prickle and her flesh go cold.” (19) She was too careworn to think about Ben’s identity as “different”. She treated Ben with love and empathy. “She mended his clothes, bought him a thick new jersey for the winter and gave him plenty of meat to eat. She was never cross with him, as she was with her brothers.”(18, 19) In fact, Mary and Ben both are marginalized and excluded from the mainstream of life. They cooperate with each other and bring dignity to their existence. It is only after Mary’s demise, when Ben is questioned about “accounts” on the farm, he feels threatened and he abandons the farm. Ben returns to the Grindly farm, after some weeks, in search of the money, that was set aside by Mary as Ben’s wages. He feels betrayed, when he finds the chest of drawers empty. To keep off starvation, Ben works on two different farms only to be cheated by his co-workers, who steal his money and taunt him for being “different”.

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A way out of the situation is found, when by chance, Ben is spotted by Mrs. Ellen Biggs at the supermarket, laying hands on a loaf of bread, to satiate his hunger. Mrs. Biggs identifies Ben as “not one of us, perhaps a Yeti,” (11) and brings him home. Mrs. Biggs is about eighty years old and ailing, she is a poor woman, who lives on a small pension received from the government. She treats Ben with love and empathy. She offers him food, clothing and shelter, and above all she provides him an emotional security. Ben was fond of meat and fruits, the natural food, in comparison to the manufactured food like bread. Though, meat was expensive, Mrs. Biggs buys him meat and offers him a larger share of it, and watches him eat with pleasure. She buys him a jacket from a cheap store, for the jacket Ben was wearing was torn and shabby. With motherly affection Mrs. Biggs bathes Ben and is convinced of the “different” physical and mental makeup of Ben. Lessing describes the different physical appearance of Ben as follows:

Under her hands was a strong broad back, with fringes of brown hair on either side of backbone, and on the shoulders a mat of wet fur: it felt like that, as if she was washing a dog. On the upper arms there was hair, but not so much, not more than could be on an ordinary man. His chest was hairy, but it wasn’t like fur, it was a man’s chest. She handed him the soap, but he let it slide into the water, and dug around furiously for it. She found it and lathered him vigorously, and the used a little hand-shower to get it all off. He bounded out of the bath, and she made him go back, and she washed his thighs, his backside, and then his genitals. He had no self-consciousness about these and so didn’t either. And then he could get out, which he did laughing, and shaking himself into the towel she held. She enjoyed hearing him laugh: it was like a bark. Long ago she had a dog who barked like that. (9)

Though Mrs. Biggs treats Ben with affection, she makes him aware of her financial limitations, and urges him to approach the employment office, to claim his unemployment allowance. “You see, Ben, I have to live on my pension. I have only so much money to live on. I want to help you. But if you got some money – that office would give you money- and that would help me.” (8) Ben responds affirmatively to the gentle suggestion, made by the old woman, for he grasps the importance of money, “without money you did not eat” (8) and at the same time, to respect her sentiments. Ben approaches the employment office, to claim his unemployment fund that he is entitled to, as a British citizen. The administrator at the office enquires after his age. When Ben tells him, that he is eighteen years old, the clerk refuses to believe him, looking at his physical appearance as “a source of amusement”(1) asking him to get back with his birth certificate, which Ben recalls being ravaged by him. Ben remembers that his mother had given him the birth
certificate before leaving the house, inclusive of the names of his elder siblings, who hated Ben and wished he was dead. Though Ben detests the idea of returning to his home in the sub-urb of London, for he never wanted to meet his cold and indifferent father and his blatantly hostile siblings, he feels happy at the thought of meeting his mother, who treated him with care and affection. Ben realizes the importance of the birth certificate, and to supplement the income of the kind hearted Mrs. Biggs, Ben approaches the Lovatt residence. He is put off by the presence of his elder siblings, who appear to have returned home after Ben’s departure from the house. He does want to meet his mother and obtain his birth certificate, which would empower him with a definite legal identity. But, Ben walks away silently. He suppresses his desire to meet his kind mother, lest it would break the “happy family” once again. Ben, who is treated as non-human and mentally inadequate, manifests humane emotions potent enough to embarrass any normal human being! Having abandoned his chance to retrieve his birth certificate, Ben works as a casual labour at a construction site, where initially he is paid the rightful sum, but subsequently, he is subject to humiliating taunts, and physical and financial exploitation. Ben returns with a small sum of twenty pounds to Mrs. Ellen Biggs, but finds her physically indisposed. Mrs. Biggs enquires about his experience at the employment office and also enquires about his birth certificate which Ben was supposed to obtain from his mother. When she learns that Ben has failed to fetch any amount from the employment office for want of birth certificate, she promises to take him to the record department to get his birth certificate, when she resumed normalcy of health. Ben, who had depended on the old lady for food and bath, rises to the occasion. He helps the old woman by cooking the food, going to the launderette, fetching the necessary items from the market. He doesn’t intimidate the cat, the old lady’s pet that would bristle with fear in his presence; in fact, he shares his portion of meat with the cat and mends fences. Ben makes Mrs. Biggs’ life comfortable. Ben feels empowered, for he is included in the ordinariness of life. Mrs. Biggs’ neighbor who had also been kind to Ben is warmed by the gesture of cooperation shown by Ben, and spreads the news in the housing society about the “Yeti” helping the old woman in her state of infirmity. But all the same, the neighbor urges Ben to look for an employment for the money received as pension by Mrs. Ellen Biggs cannot accommodate Ben. Though, the old lady assures Ben that they both would live, sharing a cup of tea. Realizing the monetary constraints envisaged by the kind-hearted Mrs. Ellen Biggs, Ben moves away from the secure world of Mrs. Biggs.
Ben is again thrown into the hostile world to fend for himself. His search for employment brings him to the forbidden pavement, where Ben had first met the kindhearted prostitute, Rita, who had enjoyed an “unusual sex” (37) with Ben and had realized his “different” identity. Rita, who has had a scarred childhood, and who wasn’t keeping well for some time, grasps his peculiar mental and physical state and empathizes with Ben. Like Mary Grindly, and Mrs. Ellen Biggs, Rita treats Ben with kindness, offers him a refuge. Rita desires Ben to be rehabilitated in a dignified way. When she learns that Ben is in need of his birth certificate, she earnestly requests her boyfriend, Johnston to help Ben retrieve the document from the Records Office. Johnston, like Rita, has had a warped childhood, he leads a dubious life as a cab driver, who fetches customers for Rita and earns his commission. Johnston, who has been dealing in futures, suffers a heavy loss. To bail himself out of the financial morass, and to make millions, Johnston conspires to “use” Ben to carry cocaine to France, in league with his accomplice, Richard. Instead of fetching Ben’s birth certificate from the Record office, which would empower Ben and enable him to forge his life with dignity, the devious and criminal minded Johnston taking advantage of his “different” identity, gets a passport made in the name of Ben, stating his profession as an actor, who is thirty five years of age, from Scotland. Without any dent on his conscience, Johnston manipulates Ben’s identity. Rita detests the cruel plan of using Ben for transporting the lethal drug to France. Rita wants Ben to be rehabilitated in London itself. She pleads before Johnston to give Ben lessons in driving to make his living. Johnston manipulates the driving sessions and proves Ben’s inability to learn car driving. Johnston tells Rita about the financial snarl that he has landed into, and the only way out is to deliver boxes of cocaine in France, and further tempts her by promising her a respectable life away from the disreputable life on the pavement, once money was acquired. Rita doesn’t give in to any selfish motive, but all the same, her empathy for Johnston, whom she has witnessed struggle hard, gets better off and her resistance to the idea of Ben being used, to make millions blunts. Against Ben’s wishes, Ben is dispatched to France with the cache of cocaine.

In France, Ben is completely at a loss on account of unfamiliar surroundings and strange sounds of the unfamiliar language. It is Richard, Johnston’s accomplice, who travelled with Ben on the plane from London to France, looks after Ben for a stint with kindness. Richard, who himself had suffered in his life tries to make Ben’s life as comfortable as possible by acquainting him
with technology, for he was afraid of gadgets. Richard plans his schedule to suit Ben’s needs. He takes care of his money and food. He ensures that the money given to him by Johnston reaches Ben. He takes him to the restaurants that supplied him with juice and meat rather than cooked meals. Richard takes to the oculist when he complains of the glare hurting his eyes. For over two weeks Richard looks after Ben with lot of kindness, but after Richard’s departure, Ben’s helplessness and his different identity, again is taken advantage of. This time it is not a destitute turned criminal, but a talented film maker from America, Alex Beyle, who is fascinated by the genetic throwbacks’ unusual looks. He tricks Ben into accompanying him to Brazil, where he wants to shoot his film based on the conflict of races, using Ben to play the lead role and make millions of dollars. Alex saw Ben in the lobby of the hotel and immediately thought of a film on the conflict of two races, where Ben who resembled a “Yeti” could be cast as the protagonist, he gleaned information from the girls at the reception about Ben. The girls at the reception empathized with Ben. They had evolved their own ideas about Ben. Ben is called as “a heavy weight wrestler”, sometimes called as “madman,” who was in the mental hospital, one of the girls believed Ben as a failed laboratory experiment. The girls, who were protective of Ben and who helped him by speaking to him in English, instead of French, which he failed to understand completely, tried to conceal his identity by responding cursorily that Ben is from London on a holiday in France etc, because they could sense exploitation on account of Ben’s helplessness. A girl who did not like Alex volunteered the information that Ben was a “film star”. Alex was excited and he started imagining several stories for his film. He felt relieved to learn that Ben had money in the safe, for Alex always was in need of large funds for his films. The moment he saw Ben, he soon started discussions of his story with his producer in Los Angeles, demanding money. Alex wouldn’t mind using Ben’s money either. Taking advantage of Ben’s helplessness, Ben is flown to Brazil, once again to be surrounded by a strange set of people, unfamiliar tongue and a new, hostile setting. Ben is excluded from the ordinariness of life that he had got accustomed to, though, to a limited extent in the coastal town of Nice, in France. As soon as Alex and Ben reach Rio de Janerio, Ben hears some strange fragments of sounds; he gets angry and asks Alex what exactly was being said. When he learns that it is a new language, Portuguese, he makes a dismal face, for he feels thrown into a hostile world. Though, Ben doesn’t feel out of place in the hotel, for he was accustomed to the idea of a hotel, he does feel thrown out, when Alex’s friends,
who came from a sophisticated background ask him some specific questions, to which, he responds in a vague manner. People do talk kindly with Ben, but he is excluded from the ordinary world of conversation. Ben is completely at a loss, he is reminded of London and the warmth he had basked in, in the company of Mrs. Biggs, Rita and his mother. Ben, who did not communicate much, expressed his anger and protest by banging his head against the wall. The sound of “Thud, Thud, Thud” could be heard from his room. Alex would turn a deaf ear to the same. Ben experiences a homecoming, a situation away from his exilic state in the company of Teresa, a minor theatre personality, who was employed by Alex Beyle, to act in his plays.

Teresa had led a miserable life of a destitute in a favela, a make-shift house, in the dusty and drought affected countryside in the south of Brazil. Teresa’s parents and siblings were forced to migrate for want of food. Being the eldest in the family, Teresa sold her body to keep the younger siblings off starvation. She extricated herself from the disgraceful life of a prostitute, with a lot of determination and struggle. Teresa empathizes with Ben. She treats him with warmth and kindness, like the old lady in London, Mrs. Ellen Biggs and Rita, the prostitute. Teresa served him plenty of meat and fruit, ensured that Ben maintained his hygiene. She included him in the ordinariness of life, by making him follow small commands. For example, asking Ben to make coffee and sandwiches. She also ensured that Ben is complimented for the small tasks that he performed. She made sure that Ben’s money was safe. Teresa provides Ben with a sense of emotional security. Ben is afraid of standing before the glare of camera lights for he feels tortured, it is Teresa who prevents Ben from getting exposed to the glare of camera, against his wish. Cal- lous and Capitalist minded cinema maker from New York, Alex Beyle, drops Ben from his film, the moment he finds a suitable substitute to work in his film. He informs Teresa from the site of shooting in the mountains, about Ben’s expulsion without any compunction, and leaves him, with no plan or deliberation about his future. Ben is excluded and he is marginalized in terms of money, for he would not be on the pay roll of Alex.

It is Teresa who offers Ben an emotional support at the state of his abandonment from Alex Beyle’s world of cinema. Teresa further rescues Ben from the biggest hammering to his self-esteem. Though Ben was afraid of technology and knew that he could not cope with it, he also knew that he was exploited economically, for he understood the importance of money. Ben had
learnt to put up with it for he knew that he possessed superior physical strength. Ben suffers the worst dent on his physical prowess, when he is beaten up mercilessly, by the deceptive adolescents, who disguised themselves as shoe polishers, on the beach at Rio, in an unequal battle. Ben was proud of his physical strength, and he knew he was supposed to control it and not let it go berserk. Ben experiences a complete loss of self; Ben feels “colonized” by the world of the so-called civilized people. Ben’s confidence is at its nadir. He feels completely abandoned and exiled. The “innate darkness and savagery” (Pillai, 1991: 218) that resides in the inner recesses of civilization, which is discerned in William Golding’s, *The Lord of the Flies*, can be perceived in Ben’s victimization. Teresa tries to protect Ben from the hostile darts of the cruel world; it is her friend Inez, daughter of a university professor, who works in the laboratory in Rio, who is fascinated by the genetically different Ben. It is through Inez, that Ben is introduced to the intellectual but cold and cruel world of science. Scientists from the United States, Professor Gaumlach and Luiz Machado look upon Ben as a unique prize, and want him to be tested in the laboratory to probe the secret of human race. Ben is used by the callous world of science. It is Alfredo, Teresa’s friend, who works at the institute as a driver, and who like Teresa has had a scarred past, baits Ben to be lab tested for it would facilitate him to know about “his kind” of people. Ben who yearns to belong to his kind of people readily agrees to be tested in the laboratory in a state of excitement. Teresa tries to alleviate Ben’s fear in the laboratory by getting herself tested before him. Ben, as a child had undergone several types of tests at the medical institute, therefore he is not intimidated by the routine tests, but when the lab technicians want to test his brain, Ben panics at the formidable machinery and refuses to be tested. Teresa and Alfredo support Ben, and take him back to their residence. It is the cruel world of science that has no qualms employing street criminals to kidnap Ben for further laboratory tests. Ben is kept in the cage in the institute, reminding one of the cages made by Dr. Moreau, for performing, genetic experiments on men as well as animals in the science fiction novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau*(1896) written by H. G. Wells. Critique on the oppressive nature of the world of science can be seen in the novels of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, (1932) that castigates the concept of test tube babies for the first time in the world of fiction. The cruelty of the world of science can be pulsed in the novel written by Toni Morrison, *Home*, (2012) where a poor helpless, black girl’s uterus is removed by a white Doctor who is experimenting in the field of medical science, to find solution to the prob-
lem of a mysterious disease that his own children are beset with. Here, it is the helplessness of the mentally inadequate and physically different, Ben, that is rather shamelessly and mercilessly taken advantage of, by the brazen, intellectual world of science. Lessing depicts the picture of cages at the medical institute, in which men and animals are thrown together to languish in the filthy state.

In tiers of cages were monkeys, small and large, arranged so that excrement from the top cages must fall down on animals below. A bank of rabbits, immobilized at the neck had chemicals dripping into their eyes. A big mongrel dog, which had been carved open from the shoulder to the hip bone and then clumsily sown up again, was lying moaning on dirty straw, its backside clogged with excrement… from cages, monkeys stretched out their hands, and their human eyes begged for help. She saw nothing of all this. She was looking at Ben, kneeling on the floor of the cage, band – banging his head on the on the wire. He had not been drugged… he was unclothed …In the corner of the cage was a pile of dung. (146)

It is illiterate and poor Teresa, who rescues Ben, with the help of her boyfriend, Alfredo, from the cage, by stealthily reaching the cage, and getting the wire of the cage snapped, with the help of wire cutters. As soon as Ben is freed from the cage, in a terrified state, he runs away from the place. It is Teresa’s empathy for Ben that brings him back in her warm fold. Prof Gaumlach once again tries to take custody of Ben and tries to convince Teresa that Ben is important to the world of science. He apologizes for using street criminals for capturing Ben by breaking the house in Teresa’s absence. Teresa stands up to the learned authorities from the world of science to protect Ben. “I know you want him for your experiments. I know. I have seen with my own eyes…’ and she indicated her eyes with her two forefingers.” It is Lessing’s anger against the ruthless institution of medical science and its authorities which is ventilated first through Teresa’s body language and later through words.

And now Teresa felt attacked direct into her great respect, her reverence, for knowledge and education; that area, like a window into an unknown sky, where she could have bowed and worshipped that was why she was crying, but she knew the truth… in her mind’s eye she saw Ben howling naked in the cage, she saw the white cat with fæaces dripping down on her fur from the cage above. She said in Portuguese ‘Voce e gent ruim’. The hatred in her voice did reach her antagonist, she said in English ‘You are bad. You are a bad person.’ (153,154)

Teresa who is convinced that Ben’s life is in danger, for the American scientist had the power of his country behind him and she also knew that now the adversaries would not resort to criminal
methods but seek a legal custody of Ben by ensnaring him in some illegal act and therefore decides to rescue him by taking him away from Rio. It is at Alfredo’s suggestion and on Ben’s insistence that Ben is taken to the Mountains where his kind of people live. Teresa is keen to dispel the illusion fabricated by Alfredo regarding his people. Teresa feels afflicted with the cruelty of the lie. She tries to dissuade Alfredo from choosing the mountain site as a refuge. But Alfredo convinces her that Ben would come to terms with the reality, after witnessing the rock pictures of the people who live in the distant past and secondly, Prof Stephan Gaumlach’s would not be able to reach the unknown caves in the Andes Mountains, where Alfredo had seen the rock pictures of people who resembled Ben. Teresa gives in to the decision, but looks after Ben with full attention. As Teresa, Alfredo, his friend, Jose’ and Ben start negotiating the high altitude, they all start feeling uncomfortable due to breathlessness, it is Ben alone who doesn’t get affected because of his capacious lungs and he feels convinced that his people alone can survive in the mountains. In a state of excitement and with great expectations, Ben approaches the caves, where he believed his kind of people lived. But when Ben actually witnesses the rock pictures, and tries to touch the women carved out in rocks, the truth dawns upon him. Ben feels cheated and completely excluded from the “civilized” society that has no space for the “different.” Without accusing anybody, completely disillusioned with the humanity, the ever unaccomodated Ben, makes a choice, and it is a bold and a brave choice, potent enough to assert his identity as a “different” individual who refuses to be manipulated, and it is the choice to end his life as a mark of eloquent protest against the civilized society, reminding one of Chinua Achebe’s protagonist, Okonkwo from Things Fall Apart, who opts out of life at the advent of the white man in Black Africa for he could not put up with the distortion of values. Lessing writes:

Ben straightened himself, his back still to them: he was taking his time turning to face them. He had been betrayed so dreadfully by these afraid of what they would see. But he didn’t turn, seemed to hang there by the rock face, one fist resting on it. Then he did turn himself about, with an effort: They could see it was hard for him. He seemed smaller than he had been, a poor beast. His eyes did not accuse them: he was not looking at them… he did not see them. Then it was so sudden, they at first could not move- then he left them and went bounding back along the path they had just come from. A silence… they heard a cry and a slide of small stones, and a silence (176)

In the present novel which is described as a discourse on difference by Joan Smith, (2001, blurb)one can observe that the mentally inadequate and physically different is taunted, teased and
humiliated, and is excluded from the ordinariness of life. He is used or taken advantage of by the capitalist, western society. A way out of the situation is found only by chance. And the people who empathize with Ben are themselves victims of diverse forms of exclusion. It is the marginalized, and especially women, who are entrusted with the responsibility of care taking. “Care taking is gendered in Lessing’s novels.” (Rowe, 106) Mrs. Ellen Biggs is an old woman who is suffering from chest pain, and her life is constrained by poverty. But Ellen Bigg had her own limitations; due to paucity of money, Ben is urged to leave the warm and secure world of Mrs. Ellen Biggs. One can also witness the limitations of love. Rita, the prostitute, tries to help Ben and but her sympathy for Johnston gets better off, in comparison to her empathy for Ben once he moves out of sight. Teresa, who provided Ben with tremendous emotional security in Brazil and who mustered the courage to stand up to the authorities of the research establishment, and its dehumanizing and brutal research practices, handled by the intellectual but cold and cruel research authorities like Prof Gaumlach, helplessly watches Ben opting out of life, in the Andes mountains, at the same times feels relieved for she knew that people like Ben had no future in the world governed by rapacity and selfishness. It is not merely the criminals like Johnston, who used Ben for transporting cocaine and didn’t mind scape-goating him, for making millions of pounds. Even a talented and sensitive, film maker, like Alex Beyle did not mind manipulating Ben to make a fortune by toying with the idea of casting him on the celluloid and subsequently dropping him after a substitute is found. The most inhuman method of using the helpless and the disadvantaged is employed by the most respected world of the intellectuals, the scientists who desire to accelerate the progress of civilization, and facilitate the life of normal at the expense of the helpless animals and disadvantaged people. The scientists want to carve out the skull of Ben to probe the secrets of human past. Margaret Rowe, commenting on Lessing says, “Lessing is critical of institutions and establishments.”(107)In Briefing for a descent into the Hell, it is the psychiatric institution, which is targeted; in The Fifth Child, Lessing is critical of medical and academic establishments and authorities, along with her powerful attack on the institution of family, in Ben, in the World; it is the research institute that performs experiments on live animals, which is put under scanner, but above all, it holds up a mirror to the cruelty of the entire western capitalist, hypocritical civilization, which is autopsied with clinical precision.
The helpless and the different are seen as a commodity by the capitalist world that are used and abandoned in the progressive western civilized society. Lessing had witnessed the cruelty of capitalism in southern Rhodesia, where she grew up watching the shameful mistreatment meted out to the black natives of Africa. The treatment meted out to Ben is no different from the manner in which the blacks were treated by the greedy, white capitalist. Lessing also knew that it was capitalism, which was responsible for violence and barbarism manifested through the two world wars. In Prisons We Choose to Live Inside, (1988) Lessing talks about the European capitalist community in South Africa turning to “barbarism and violence.” (Lessing, 1988: 3) Roberta Rubenstein calls Lessing, a “cautionary writer” (1979: 228). Margaret Drabble compares Lessing with mythical “Cassandra,”( (1972:50),who warns the world of the impending horrors and threats, but unlike the prophet of doom, who is cursed to be unheeded, in the present novel, Lessing compels one to take cognizance of the capitalist driven violence by invoking uneasy and uncomfortable questions, what is civilization? What is humanity? What is progress? What is morality? What is being normal?

To sum the argument, one can say, that in Lessing’s fiction, the mentally and physically challenged are thrown out of the socio, economic and cultural mainstream of life. It is through responsibility and commitment shown by the women, that the marginalized are restored to a measure of dignity. Lessing offers an unambiguous verdict on the treatment of the abnormal, which is explicitly articulated when she says that the misfits and the damaged are to be looked after with love and empathy. Lessing sees it as the value which is at the heart of our civilization.