Executive Summary

The present study investigates the theme of marginality and techniques of coping with it in Doris Lessing’s fiction. Marginality is basically a socio-psychological term, and a Post-Colonial concern which talks about the plight of the people at the margin, away from the centre of the power structure. It existed in the past and it is a concern of the contemporary relevance and therefore, calls for a deeper investigation. The theme of marginality manifests the seamier side of the civilization, but coping with marginality brings dignity. The student desires to restrict the premises of the present study to the analysis of the marginalized categories identified in Doris Lessing’s fiction. The novels selected for the study include, The Grass is Singing (1950), The Golden Notebook (1962), The Cleft (2007), Briefing for a Descent into the Hell (1971), The Fifth Child (1988), Ben in the World (2000), Memoirs of a Survivor (1974), and The Good Terrorist (1985) for the theme of marginality, existing in the four dominant structures of power namely, Imperialism, Patriarchy, Abnormal and Capitalism and the techniques of coping with marginality can be discerned in its concentrated form in the said novels.

Chapter one talks about Lessing as a Post-Colonial writer, who was born in Kermanshah (Iran) of British parents, who were victims of the First World War, who came to Southern Rhodesia, in quest of a free life, where she grew up as a member of the white settler community, watching the plight of the dispossessed natives of Africa, who were meted out an unjust treatment. She also witnessed the plight of the white failed farmers and the anguish of the white women who suffered a nervous breakdown, on the vast African farm, for want of money and human company. Besides, the victims of the colonial structure, one can witness her empathy for the people who suffered a mental illness in the post-war Britain, where she lived from 1950, due to the fear of war and insecurity. Lessing’s empathy for women can be witnessed, though they are intellectually and financially independent, yet are victims of male domination. Lessing also talks about the silenced and the powerless victims of the class structure in Britain. Lessing who had suffered injustice within the family for being born as a girl child, and who had suffered oppression in the two marriages, fights against the oppressive institution of family and marriage. One can see her empathizing with her father who believed in the equality of all, but she fights
her class and race conscious mother. As an anti-establishment writer, she fights against authority, institutions and institutionalization. As a committed writer, who followed the European realist tradition, Lessing does not merely talk about the theme of marginality, but also tries to suggest solution to the problem, which is discerned in her ideological journey from the political ideology of Marxism, to R.D Laing’s concept of psychiatry and Sufism which is explored through her literary journey from social realism to inner space fiction, and science fiction. The chapter also investigates the theme of marginality and the techniques of coping with it, in depth, as a socio-psychological phenomenon and a Post-Colonial concept. The works of sociologists, Robert Park and Edwin Stonequist, Louis Dumont, Ervin Goffman, Martin Meltzer, Dickie-Clarke, have been examined for the sociological analysis of the theme of Marginality. The psychological impact of colonization is examined in the light of the critique made by the post-colonial critic, and the psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, who comments that victims of colonization suffer from psychological disorders. The definition of marginality offered by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith, and Helen Tiffin in the Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies is central to the discussion of the theme of marginality. The study includes the dominant structures of power, viz imperialism, race, class, patriarchy, the position of the abnormal or misfits in the society, and it is explored as a socio-psychological phenomena as well as through the literary works. Post-colonialism does not merely talk about the oppression of the silent and the powerless subalterns; it also talks about the creation of the alternative identity, which would pave a way to the new beginnings in human relationships. Gandhism, Marxism and Sufism are suggested as the techniques of coping with marginality.

Chapter II deals with the colonial structure of power, in the novels, The Grass is Singing, and the four short novels collected in Five: The Ant Heap, A Home for the Highland Cattle, Eldorado, Hunger. The victims of the colonial structure suffer social, economic, cultural and political exclusion. Universal brotherhood, education, Art, collectivization, non-cooperation, love and empathy are some of the coping techniques suggested. Lessing desires the colonial structure to be wiped out. The Grass is Singing is a complex novel that talks about the social, economic and cultural exclusion of the white woman, Mary Turner, her husband a failed farmer Dick Turner and the humiliation suffered by the black native, Moses, in colonial Africa after the Second World War. The end of the oppressive colonial structure is suggested in the nervous breakdown of Dick Turner and the murder of the woman protagonist, Mary Turner by the African native.
The Ant Heap talks about the socio- economic and cultural exclusion of the coloured boy, Dirk, in colonial Africa, who is unacknowledged by his father the white gold miner, Macintosh. It is the white boy Tommy Clarke who brings justice to Dirk very humanely, through love and empathy, education, Art, non- cooperation and universal brotherhood. A Home for the Highland Cattle talks about the failure of a white romantic and liberal woman, Marina Giles, to bring justice to the victims of colonial structure of power for want of responsibility and commitment. Eldorado talks about the sufferings of white farmer family owing to the white farmer’s lust for gold. All the three members of the family suffer in their private lives but bond seamlessly owing to love and empathy. The short novel Hunger talks about the social, economic and cultural exclusion of the self obsessed, blackboy from the native reserve in the white man’s town, in colonial Africa, who is neglected, both by the whites as well as the blacks. His hunger for carnal pleasure throws him into a notorious company. He is rescued by the African nationalist, who exhorts him to relinquish selfishness, in favour of the Marxist principle of collectivism.

Chapter III talks about the marginalization of women in the patriarchal structure of power in the novels, The Golden Note book (1962) and The Cleft (2007). In the novel, The Golden Notebook, the woman protagonist, though, is financially independent, educated and though she calls herself a free women, she is treated as the other, in the male dominated society. Anna Wulf, a divorcee and a single mother, a successful writer and a communist party activist suffers in the post war Britain, after being abandoned by her lover, Michael, a psychiatrist, from Eastern Europe. Anna suffers sexual privations, social exclusion, aesthetic and professional suffocation and ideological suppression, and she suffers a nervous breakdown. She is rescued by her American lover, Saul Green, who heals her sexually, emotionally ideologically and professionally by raising her consciousness and freeing her mind from false dichotomies. In The Cleft, women are denied their precedence over men as the primal human stock, in the earliest phase of civilization, when the progeny was born asexually, and subsequently, with the dawning of the phase of heterosexuality, women are oppressed in the man’s world. It is the Roman Senator, Transit, who serves as the author’s mouthpiece. The story set in the first century, at the birth of Christianity, Transit, too, learns about the collaborative nature of man woman relationship in his personal life. Heterosexuality, women helping women, love and empathy are suggested as the coping techniques, in man woman relationship.
Chapter IV deals with the plight of the mentally and physically different is depicted in the novels, *Briefing for a Descent into the Hell* (1971), *The Fifth Child* (1988), and *Ben in the World* (2000). The victims are thrown out of the mainstream of socio-economic and cultural life. Insanity, marginalized helping the marginalized emerge as coping techniques. Lessing expects the society to take up the responsibility of the damaged and the misfits in the society. Love and empathy emerges as the coping technique. *Briefing for a Descent into the Hell* talks about the denial of the rightful identity to the mystic voyager as god’s messenger, with a briefing of love and harmony for the Earth turned hell, by the oppressive psychiatric institution. It is the state of insanity or madness which brings wisdom and serves as an evolutionary potential. Madness emerges as a coping technique. *The Fifth Child* talks about family as an oppressive institution, where the abnormal fifth child, Ben Lovatt is excluded from the mainstream of life and is thrown in an institution to perish. It is the mother who not only rescues him from the institution but also tries to bring him dignity through education and socialization. Love and empathy emerges as the coping technique. *Ben, in the World* is a sequel to *The Fifth child*, which depicts the plight of the adult Ben in the world drifting from place to place, used and abandoned by the western capitalist society, who is rescued by chance by the women and the marginalized. The novel interrogates the western civilized society about morality, humanity, civilization and normalcy. Lessing’s message is loud and clear. The Abnormal must be looked after with love and empathy.

Chapter IV deals with the capitalist structure of power. *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) talks about the sufferings of the entire humanity that is pushed to the brink of destruction in the capitalist structure of power. *The Good Terrorist* (1985) depicts various categories of the marginalized, the lesbians, homosexuals, handicapped, women and the victims of the racial segregation, the blacks in the capitalist structure of power. Love and empathy, imaginative thinking, marginalized cooperating with the marginalized, communitarianism, questioning the establishment are some of the coping techniques that emerge from Lessing’s fiction. *The Memoirs of a Survivor* talks about the death of a capitalist city, in the North, due to some catastrophe, called “it.” It is the marginalized who cooperate with the marginalized to salvage the situation. Love and empathy emerges as a coping technique.

Conclusions: One can discern that in her creative works spanning over six decades, Lessing has shown a committed concern for the people at the margin away from the centre. Lessing doesn’t
merely talk about the problems confronted by the marginalized in her works; she also suggests solutions to the problems envisaged by the victims. Lessing is against institutions and institutionalization. She is against the institution of family and marriage for being oppressive institutions. She exposes the oppressive nature of psychiatric and medical institution. She talks about the cruelty of the academic institution. She questions authority and establishment. Lessing wants the corrupt institutions and social structures of power to be wiped out. Colonial and capitalist structures of power are written off, in her fiction. Collaborative nature of man woman relationship is prescribed. She emphatically desires the western civilized society to take responsibility of the mentally and physically challenged. Symbiosis, Universal brotherhood, Education, Art and music, Marxism, Madness, Love and empathy, embedded in the philosophy of Sufism are some of the coping techniques suggested by Lessing.