Chapter II

The Colonial Structure of Power
The present chapter deals with the colonial structure of power as depicted in the novel, *The Grass is Singing* and the four short novels from the collection of stories *Five*. The short novels are, *The Ant Heap, A Home for Highland Cattle, Eldorado* and *Hunger*. Lessing’s vision of empathy can be pulsed keenly, in the said works.

Lessing’s first encounter with inequalities, that engender the situation of the centre and the margin, is coincident with her stay in Africa, from 1923 to 1949, where she grew up at the most impressionable and delicate period of adolescence, as a member of white settler community in colonial Africa. Lessing’s Africa that she calls as ‘Zambesia’ was the name given to the white dominated colony. In *A Note to The Four Gated City* Lessing makes it clear as follows:

I used the term Zambesia for the white dominated colony described in the volumes, *Children of Violence*, because I did not want it to be thought that what I described was peculiar to Southern Rhodesia, my Zambesia is a composite of various white dominated parts of Africa and as I’ve since discovered, some of the characteristics of its white people are those of any ruling minority whatever their color. (Quoted in Thorpe: 1978, 2)

The Africa of the inter-war period that Lessing grew up in was full of absurdities and contradictions. Lessing witnessed the most marginalized section of the contemporary colonial situation in the form of the dispossessed natives of Africa, who were subject to the shameful mistreatment by the white colonizers. The dispossessed natives, who were robbed of the legitimate right of their native soil, were pushed to the margins, both literally and figuratively. They were segregated from the white settlers and were forced to live in the congested native reserves. The white colonizer owned thousands of acres of fertile land, which he could hardly cultivate. Talking about her father, a white farmer in Southern Rhodesia, who owned about 3000 acres of land, Lessing writes:
He grazed cattle on it; he cultivated 300 acres of land. The rest was left unused. He employed 50 to 100 black men and their wages were 12 shillings a month, with rations of maize meals, beans and a little meat. The labour came from the reserves, Nyasaland, Portuguese territory. They built themselves a mud hut in the compound; they worked from six in the morning till six at night with an hour off at mid-day, seven days a week in a busy season. (p 5, 6)

Lessing also witnessed the plight of the white settlers, who were the victims of the World War I, with lost organs and maimed limbs, who came to Africa to make a profitable living but failed. There were white women of the settler community, who lived in isolation on the vast farmlands and suffered a social seclusion, who longed for social contact and gossips. These were the white women, who came from England, who brought curtains from Liberty and Harrods in London and came with their visiting cards in anticipation of fanciful social life in colony. The whites who lived in Africa, lived a claustrophobic, stifling world of Victorian ideals, they lived in the prisons of their self images. There were the Jews, the Greeks, and the Afrikaners, who too were away from the centre of the colonial structure of power.

At the centre of the colonial power structure was the exploitative, callous and capitalist colonizer, who came with the sole motive of earning profit and had no qualms inflicting atrocities on the dispossessed natives using a whip and a gun. To find a solution to the native problem of oppression, Lessing turned to the political ideology of Marxism because she felt that it was the only ideology that had moral energy in it. Lessing turned to Marxism, under the influence of the service men of Royal Air force, who came from Europe to Africa with the radical views on freedom and equality of mankind, far removed from the colonial ethos, at the beginning of the World War II. Lessing’s engagement with Marxism can be witnessed in the novels, *Martha Quest*, *(1952)* *A Proper Marriage, A Ripple from the storm, and Land locked*. But even before Lessing turned to Marxism, her vision of humanitarianism was shaped in the colonial Africa, as the conscience keeper of the white settler community. Lessing comments in the *Preface for 1964 Collection, Collected Short Stories Volume I*, “And while the cruelties of the white man towards the black man are among the heaviest counts in the indictment against humanity, colour prejudice is not our original fault, but only one aspect of atrophy of imagination that prevents us from seeing us in every creature that breathes under the sun.” *(Lessing, 1951: 2003, 8)*
Michael Thorpe comments, “Before her fiction began to deal explicitly with communism, it was already firmly grounded in strong humanitarianism, not a narrowly political concern with man’s inhumanity to man, as she had seen it in the white’s unjust dealing with the African.”(p 8)

Lessing’s vision of humanitarianism, equality, empathy and unity of all beings can be witnessed in her semi-autobiographical novel, *Martha Quest* (1952). Martha is a sensitive, intelligent adolescent white girl who lives with tremendous unease in a stifling, claustrophobic, prejudice-ridden, and an unequal colonial Africa. Martha fights a psychological battle against her rigid and domineering mother obsessed with the colour prejudice; she differs with her father, who firmly believes in the civilizing mission of the British Empire. Martha rebels against the colonial mindset of oppression. Martha who herself is marginalized as an adolescent white girl, witnesses the plight of the black natives, she sympathizes with the Jews, the Greeks and the Afrikaners, who are away from the British colonial structure of power. Martha articulates Lessing’s dream of unity of all living beings, white and black and yellow men living together in an ideal city, called as the “four gated city.” Martha creates a utopian world; it is a world away from the world of contemporary reality. This utopian world is a central metaphor of Lessing’s humanitarian vision. People who fail to identify with the empathetic world are excluded from Martha’s ideal world. Martha’s ideal world can be seen in the following lines:

There arose, glimmering white over the harsh scrub and the stunted trees, a noble city, set foursquare and colonnaded along its falling flower-bordered terraces. There were splashing fountains and the sound of the flutes; and its citizens moved, grave and beautiful, black and white and brown together, and these groups of elders paused, and smiled with pleasure at the sight of the children- the blue-eyed, fair-skinned, children of the North playing hand in hand with the bronze-skinned, dark-eyed children of the South. Yes, they smiled and approved these many-fathered children running and playing among the flowers and the terraces, through the white pillars and tall trees of this fabulous and ancient city… *(Lessing, 1952: p 21)*

Though, African landscape forms an essential part of Lessing’s creative works from her first novel, published in 1950, *The Grass is Singing* to the last novel *Alfred and Emily*, (2008), the colonial situation is depicted in her fiction written between 1950 to 1962, *The Grass is Singing, Five, Retreat to Innocence, Martha Quest, A Proper Marriage, Ripple from the storm, Landlocked, and The Golden Notebook.*
The present study aims to deal with the novel *The Grass is Singing* (1950) and four long stories from the collection of stories called *Five* (1953). The four stories are *The Ant Heap, Hunger, Eldorado, and Home for the Highland Cattle*. Echo of Lessing’s vision of empathy, as a technique of coping with marginality, is keenly felt in her creative works that deal with the African colonial situation.

*The Grass is Singing* (1950), is a novel written in a realist mode, which depicts the economic failure, social isolation and mental breakdown of the white farmer couple, Mary and Dick Turner on the African farm in colonial Africa at the end of the Second World War. Mary Turner, a town -bred white girl, who had been enjoying an economically independent and socially well anticipated life in the colonial town is thrown into a hasty marriage with the white farmer, Dick Turner, due to an insulting remark flung at her by her friends at a social occasion. Mary Turner suffers economic deprivation, emotional and social starvation on the African farm. Her inability to adapt to the natural life of the African Veld and her deep rooted hatred of the African black natives ensnare her into a welter of emotional insecurity, leading to her psychological breakdown on the farm. Her complex relationship with Moses, the African native, leads to Mary’s murder on the farm, signifying an imminent violent change in political terms in 1950, on the African continent. In the present novel, all are sufferers and therefore at the margin in relation to the “centre of the British Empire” (King, 1989:1) Mary Turner, the white farmer’s wife, enjoyed an economically independent and socially well anticipated life as an unmarried girl of thirty in a colonial town in Southern Rhodesia. She worked as a personal secretary of her employer, lived in a hostel, played tennis at the club, and participated in an engaging social life with her numerous friends. Mary was thirty years old and hadn’t thought of marriage. The failed marriage of her parents had subconsciously dissuaded Mary from the very thought of getting married. Mary had witnessed her mother pine away her life due to economic crisis suffered in the shadow of the colonial store, where her father consumed liquor disrupting the monthly budget of the family as well as pushing the family in the state of emotional insecurity. The idea of marriage recalled the agony suffered by Mary’s mother in her mind.

Mary’s self esteem is shattered, and she experiences a complete loss of identity, when she overhears some of her friends throw insulting remark about her spinsterhood, at a social occasion.
Mary suffers as a woman in colonial Africa. The white settlers in Africa followed the Victorian ideals, where the social position of a woman was determined by her marital status. Mary is thrown at the margin of the colonial social structure for breaking the colonial code. Mary opts out of the social world of the colonial town. She also suffers in psychological terms as she undergoes a state of mental break down.

The way out of the situation is found when Dick Turner, the white farmer from the colonial Rhodesia plans to marry Mary, after a brief courtship. Mary believes that their marriage would bring happiness, and life on the farm would bring her closer to nature. But, the farm she came to live in turns out to be a debt ridden and an unsuccessful farm. A loan from the land bank was borrowed by Dick Turner, which he had failed to repay on account of successive failure of crops on the farm. The farm could not be turned into a profitable venture. Consequently, Dick and Mary suffer hardships on the farm. They continued to live in the same old box shaped small mud house, roofed with corrugated iron sheets, which Dick had constructed as a temporary accommodation, when he came to live on the farm some seven years ago. The successful white farmers looked upon the failure of the Turners as an embarrassment for the white community and especially the British, who ruled, the region of central Africa. In their opinion, some natives lived better than the Turners. Lessing writes:

People spoke of the Turners in the hard careless voices, reserved for the misfits, outlaws and the self exiled. The Turners were disliked; though few of their neighbours had ever met them, or even seen them in the distance… they were never seen at district dances, fetes and gymkhanas. They must have had something to be ashamed of… that little box of a house – it was forgivable as a temporary dwelling, but not to live in permanently. Why some natives (though not many thank heavens) had houses as good; and it would give them a bad impression to see white people living in such a way. (1950: 10)

Jeanette King comments, “in this society, financial success is a guarantee of the racial superiority. Without it, the white man or woman is reduced to the level of the native.”(1989:8)

Due to the dearth of monetary resources, the Turners failed to meet their basic necessities like getting enough water for bath, or to put ceilings in the house to protect one from the burning heat of central Africa. Dick failed to muster the funds to reconstruct the house to facilitate a decent
living. Water was an expensive commodity. It was carted up to the house that was located at a little raised altitude twice a week. Mary couldn’t get enough water for her bath, in the burning hot season on the veldt. Due to scarcity of funds, Dick put off the plan of putting ceiling in the house, which was roofed with the corrugated iron sheets that made the house stuffy and unbearably hot. Dick did not suffer on account of the heat for he spent his time on the open farm. Mary found it extremely difficult to adapt to the burning hot weather during the hot season. It not only drained her off her physical energy but also sapped her mental strength. The economic hardships suffered by Mary, reminds one of the woman protagonist Gertrude Morel, in D.H Lawrence’s Sons and Lovers (1913) suffering the anguish at the working class settlement at the coal mine. Mary suffers a trauma when she learns about the debt Dick owed to some of his fellow farmers. Gertrude Morel experiences a similar kind of shock, when she learns of her husband being in debt. It was not always due to bad luck that Dick and Mary suffered economic hardships. It was due to lack of business acumen that Dick failed to make money. Dick spent some fifty pounds on setting up beehives that failed to attract even a handful of bees. Similarly, he constructed pigsties in an open space which was exposed to the sun. The pigs perished before any profit could be yielded. Likewise, Dick invested over hundred pounds in the store. Mary felt tortured at the very thought of ‘the store’, an architectural phenomenon in the colony that she associated with an ill omenous consequence. The same money could have been used to put ceilings and to add two additional rooms to the existing structure that could have facilitated a decent living. Thus bad luck and imprudent business practices led to the sufferings of Mary and Dick in economic terms. Mary’s sufferings on the farm, give her an impression that it is a kind of will handed over by her father that warrants her doom.

Mary suffers even more because of the ideological differences with Dick. Mary looks upon the farm as a means to yield profit, a money minting machine like the stereotypical, exploitative colonizer. She always thought of getting off the farm as soon as the debt was paid and the farm yielded profit. Opposed to Mary’s views, Dick loved his farm intensely; he planted some hundred acres of land with tall trees to conserve the soil. He detested the idea of planting tobacco, because it wasted the fabric of the soil. He didn’t mind suffering financial loss rather than scathe the soil that he loved in spiritual terms. Another point of ideological difference between the
couple was about having children. Mary was never much interested in having children, but when she felt terribly empty and lonely in life, she desires to have children. Dick actually wanted to have children and was fond of them but he was quite stubborn about having children only when he could afford to look after them without receiving any support from the government as charity. He refuses to have children unless the debt is cleared. Thus economic deprivation leads to emotional sterility and aridity. Mary experiences isolation in social and emotional terms. Because of poverty she could hardly establish any relations with any of her neighbours, she avoided any kind of social contact by refusing to join any club, dance or fetes, and she became even lonelier and emotionally insecure. Economic insecurity leads to a self imposed social seclusion. Economic failure deprives Mary of meeting the necessities like water and ceilings and two additional rooms to make a decent living. It excludes her from social engagements of any kind. Since the Turners could not afford a telephone, they lived a completely secluded life. Economic deprivation robbed her of the possibility of having children leading to emotional aridity. Presence of children on the farm would have brought cheer, hope and life on the farm which could have guaranteed a perpetuation in the future. But economic doom stood for nothing but hardships, defeat and a wasteland in terms of emotional inscape, justifying the title 'The Grass is Singing' adapted from the well-known poem The Wasteland (1922) written by T.S Eliot which stands as a metaphor for spiritual and emotional sterility.

Mary does not give up her struggle to battle against economic malaise. She had enjoyed financial independence in the town before marriage. To find a solution to the economic problem she thinks of leaving the farm and taking up a job with her previous employer. Mary does make an attempt to escape the farm life by running away to the town. She finds herself a misfit in the city culture. She comes back to the farm in a state of hopelessness and misery. Mary feels trapped in an inescapable situation on the farm.

One of the other reasons that account for Mary’s sufferings on the farm besides economic and social exclusion is Mary’s inability to adapt to the farm life, the rhythm of nature on the open veld and especially the burning heat of central Africa. Mary had lived in the town before coming to the farm. In the city the intensity of natural seasons is seldom felt as one feels it in the countryside. Mary enjoyed the rainy season and waited eagerly for the onset of the winter which she
could bear with ease but, the hot season tortured her beyond imagination. She felt sticky, suffocated and claustrophobic during the hot season in a small box shaped house, roofed with corrugated iron sheets without the ceilings. The smouldering heat in the African Veldt sapped her physical and mental energy. Besides the heat, the vast African landscape covered with bush filled her with a sense of fear. She found it terribly hostile. The shrill cry of the cicadas spooked her as much as the bush. Mary’s sufferings are aggravated because she fails to live in sync with nature.

Mary suffers because of her colonial mindset deeply entrenched in hatred and fear for the black natives of Africa. Since her childhood, Mary was trained to hate the natives. She harboured the prejudices instilled in her by her mother as a white settler. Mary was warned against talking to the daughter of the Greek, who ran the shop. Her mother called the Greeks Dagoes, or people of inferior race. She was never allowed to have any contact with the native servants. They were generally labeled as thieves and rapists. In the town she seldom came in contact with the natives, but on the farm, the native Africans worked on the farm as labour and also served as houseboys. Dick treated his black houseboy and the labour on the farm with humanity. He gave enough food to the houseboy and chatted with him as a human being, to keep him in good humour. Mary has a jaundiced eye, she tries to find fault with the native, by suspecting him of stealing food. Her nagging attitude adds to her dissatisfaction at the same time, the goodwill of Turners in treating the native with humanity slumps. No native is willing to work for Mary as houseboy. During Dick’s illness Mary takes a temporary charge of the farm. She treats the farm labour with cruelty. She extracts work out of them without giving them a respite even for five minutes after an interval of an hour as was the practice followed by Dick. Mary refuses to treat the natives as human beings. She believed them to be nothing short of cattle or sub-human creatures, who must work incessantly. She beats up the native called Moses across his face, who takes a small pause in his work at the farm for a drink of water, and speaks to her in English instead of kitchen kaffir, a language used by the Whiteman to talk to the black man. Mary is outraged at the thought of a black man using the language of the Master race. The good will earned by Dick as a kind master is destroyed, and some twenty of his good natives leave the farm.

Mary’s hatred proves to be self-destructive. Mary suffers further when the native whom she had slapped which had left a scar on his face comes to serve as a houseboy. Mary harbours a sense of
hatred and fear at once, while dealing with the native. Her economic deprivation, social seclusion, emotional aridity, her inability to cope with the raw African bush and the killing heat on the veldt and a sense of hopelessness, and absence of any glimmer of light at the end of the black hole accounts for the mental breakdown of Mary Turner on the African farm. During the state of madness, Moses serves Mary uncomplainingly. Mary enters into a complex relationship with Moses. In her state of mental imbalance, she relies more and more on Moses and starts looking upon him as a human being. Moses begins to assert himself as an awakened African, by entering into a discussion on Jesus and Christianity and equality of all. Mary’s state of disintegration and her relations with Moses, where he tries to control her are seen as breach of the colonial code. In keeping with the code, a black native was never to be treated as human being, and he would never overreach himself. When the neighbouring rich farmer Charlie Slatter views the situation, he eyes Mary as a code breaker, and an ‘unclean person’ (11) and tells Dick Turner to leave the farm and take Mary away to the coast on a holiday that might heal her mentally. The Capitalist, Charlie Slatter, is an exploitative colonizer, who amassed plenty of wealth at the cost of soil, and by using all the possible means to exploit the land. For long he had been toying with the idea of the ownership of Dick’s farm as a pasture for his cattle. Without mincing matters he appoints Tony Marston as the caretaker till Dick returns on the farm. At the arrival of the white young man, Mary’s suppressed sense of fear and hatred against Moses surfaces. Her mind oscillates to the past where she was insulted for not being ‘like that’ questioning her sexuality and womanhood in the town. Tony, though is a ‘progressive’ and a liberal from England, cannot tolerate a white woman being touched by the black man and shoos him off insultingly, upsetting the matrix of relationship on the African farm. Moses is an awakened African native, who studied at the mission school and is well equipped with the knowledge of English and he expects to be treated as a human being, takes a revenge on the white race by murdering Mary. Mary becomes a source of embarrassment for the whites who speak of her with contempt for being unclean. Tony Marston, who wants to throw more light on the complexity of Mary’s psychological disintegration to highlight the unsettled position on Mary relationship with the native, is snubbed by the White colonial mindset that refused to break the rigidity of the colonial ideology. Mary suffers a state of homelessness, in the town and on the farm, and a kind of social and economic exile, when she is alive and she suffers a social disgrace, when she is dead.
Dick unlike Mary feels at home on the African farm. He came to the farm with an aim to live a free life. He is deeply in love with the land. He shows more concern for the quality of the soil rather than his profit. Dick has planted more than hundred acres of land on the farm with gum trees, which serves as a morale booster. In keeping with the farming practices adopted by the white farmers, tobacco plantations were looked upon as money minters. The colonial mindset had no qualms planting tobacco at the cost of the soil. Dick never thought of planting tobacco. He was respected by Mary for following ethical farming practices. For want of luck, Dick suffered failure of crops for over six successive seasons. Consequently, he could not make any improvements in his house or his farm. Dick was a kind hearted man, who dreamt of “spoiling” his wife on the farm, by presenting her with luxuries of life. But he fails to provide her with the bare minimum necessities, like ceilings for the roof, and water for daily bath during the hot season. He wanted to have children of his own so that he could have a large family. But for want of success on the farm, Dick cannot think of having children who will have to depend on the government charity, since he is unable to pay off the loan, he suffers a sense of frustration, and he curses himself for bringing Mary’s life to ruin. He thinks that he had no “right to marry” It fills him with a sense of agony to see his wife pine away due to scarcity of funds. Dick is chased by misfortune, though he makes several efforts to improve his financial position, he doesn’t succeed. He invested heavily in beehives, he failed. He invested in constructing the pigsties, there again he could not succeed. He suffered a heavy loss making the store yield profit. He suffers due to bad luck as well as for want of being practical. Dick suffers most when Charlie Slatter tells him to give up his land, which Dick considered as his life. When Mary is seen in the state of mental breakdown, who was being controlled by the black native, in Dick’s house, where the old ram shackled house is seen in its ruined condition for want of a proper upkeep; the clothes and jewellery worn by Mary smacked of native taste, for Mary used the cloth which could not be sold at the store. Slatter concluded that the white couple has gone native in their position, which was a matter of shame for the white man. Under the pretext of helping the Turners, Charlie Slatter ousted him from his farm, by appointing Tony Marston as a caretaker of the farm, in Dick’s absence. The arrival of the white man on Dick’s farm adds to the politics of race. Mary, in her state of madness shows a preference to the white man thinking that he will be able to save her from her mad state as well as from the black man. Mary is killed by the black native Moses, who
is enlightened enough to understand his position in relation to the White man in colonial Africain 1950. He takes revenge on the white race by murdering Mary. Mary’s violent end on the farm seals Dick’s state of mental breakdown.

The black native, who is at the extreme margin, is hardly drawn as a well-developed character. He suffers at the hands of the white race. He is insulted and beaten up by Mary at the farm for speaking in English, instead of kitchen Kaffir, which is used by the uneducated natives while speaking to the white master. Moses puts up with the insult by laughing it out. When he starts working at Dick’s house, he conducts himself with patience; he tries to work as conscientiously as possible. He helps Mary in her difficult state of mental disturbance. He tries to assert himself as a human being and tries to enter into a conversation over the World War, religion and equality of mankind as suggested by Christianity. He tries to assert himself by speaking with conviction which is not tolerated by White men like Charlie Slatter, who insult him and dismiss him. Even Tony Marston, the young man from England, cannot bear to see him talking in a friendly way with Mary and touch the white woman; he also insults him and asks him to leave. Since Moses is an educated man, who studied at the mission school, he is equipped enough to understand his position in relation to the white man, he refuses to put up with an insulting treatment. He helps the white woman, Mary in her difficult mental state, but when he is insulted for behaving in a human way with the white couple, he expresses his anger, very symbolically by murdering the White woman on the farm. All the same, he doesn’t abscond from the place of crime, but surrenders himself to the police soon after the murder, where he is sure of his fate of being hanged.

Charlie Slatter is the rich farmer in colonial Africa who is at the centre of the colonial power structure. He ousted Dick Turner the poor farmer who failed to make any profit out of his farm. Charlie adopted every ethical and unethical means to prosper on the African farm. He exploited the land by growing tobacco to earn money. He mindlessly cut down trees to maximize his profit. He exploited the farm labour to make his farm pay. He did not mind whipping his farm labour, once he had used gun to kill the black native. Profit at any cost was Slatter’s motto. When he came from England as a poor man, he harassed his wife and ill-treated his children. As a shrewd capitalist, Charlie looked upon Dick’s farm with avarice. He desperately wanted to own Dick’s farm as a grazing ground for his cattle. He looked at the well maintained, plot of trees on Dick’s
farm with covetousness. Slatter as a ruthless capitalist leaves no opportunity to turn him off from his land. Under the pretext of helping him restore his wife’s mental and physical health, he buys his land dispossessing him of his rights on the land.

The person at the extreme margin is Moses; he succeeds in seeking his revenge by symbolically murdering the woman of the white race. It is the triumph of the black man, though apparently the capitalist colonizer seems to have won, the symbolic violent end of the white man speaks of the future of Africa, one can read it as the writing on the wall. The White race will not survive on the African soil. It is a very suggestive gesture, on the part of the black man, Moses. Therefore, the white settlers remained reticent about Mary’s murder, “for their families, their business their farm was at stake.”(11) It was the white man’s existence, which is at stake in Africa in 1950. The means used by the black native to cope with his humiliation is violent. Post-colonial critic, Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* comments that the process of colonization is violent and bloody, therefore, the process of decolonization is essentially violent. He says, “The first encounter was marked by violence and their existence together- that is to say the exploitation of the native by the settler- was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannon…in decolonization… the native… is ready for violence all the time.” (Fanon, 1965: 27, 28)

The failure of Mary Turner on the African farm is to be seen from various angles. The chief reason for her failure is her lack of empathy and want of imagination. If one compares Martha, the woman protagonist from Lessing’s novel, *Martha Quest* with Mary, the two characters, who lived on the African farm, Martha is gifted with independent thinking that Mary lacks, she doesn’t question her mother about the colour prejudice, whereas Martha fights her mother and puts forth her conviction that the white man is more oppressive and menacing than the black man. Martha is a fighter, Mary is a silent sufferer like her own mother and when she is unable to bear the pain of sufferings, she suffers a nervous breakdown. Martha is gifted with brilliant imagination, she finds a solution for the colour bar by creating an ideal city where white and black people would live together. Mary is a conformist, when her mother tells her not to play with the daughter of the Greek, who ran the shop; she obeys without putting forth her own opinion. She is told to look upon the natives as inferior and menacing, she believes it dogmatically, and hates them all her life. Martha learns from the vast African landscape, about the speck like existence of
man which broadens her vision of life, she struggles to support people, find solution to the man-
made barriers. Mary’s outlook is limited to her own self. The key to her failure can be traced in
her squalid childhood. She witnessed her mother suffer economic insecurity and pine away her
life due to poverty. Mary had lost her mother at an early age, she hated her father, looked upon
him as a menacing character. She failed to get any kind of emotional security, which accounts for
her diffidence, and a low self esteem. She did try to cope with the situation by getting education
and by becoming economically independent. But the moment she hears an adverse remark, she
fails to rationalize. Her nervous temperament gives in. She looks for an immediate escape route
without thinking much about the consequences. Even at the farm, Mary’s thinking revolves
round herself, her insecurity, her discomfort, she is too self -obsessed.

Dick, however, tries to cope with his failure in a more matured way. He loves trees; he loves the
soil, the land. He treats his land and soil in a very humane way. He does not desecrate it, by re-
sorting to wasteful practices. Love for Nature emerges as a coping technique, in Lessing’s fi-
c tion. In the novel, Ben, in the World, (2000) the male protagonist, Ben Lovatt, who is mentally
and physically different, seeks a solace amidst the elements in nature. Dick Turner treats the na-
tives in a humane manner. He tries to humour them, by talking to them as human beings. He may
not be successful at present but, he hasn’t lost hope. He is preyed upon by the capitalist’s avarice.
His only weakness is that, that he is a dreamer, a romantic, who toys with several ideas, but fails
to fight for success. Michael Thorpe, in his critical work, Doris Lessing’s Africa, comments on
the marginal status of the Turners.

Lessing’s character Mary Turner is a non- heroine. She is commonplace, almost characterless, a
weak- willed, insecure, creature. The man she desirelessly links herself with is another broken reed…We see the Turners from the outset as despicable and pathetic members of a spurious mas-
ter race. They are ordinary, ignorant, fearful, self – centered people. With Mary Turner, it is al-
ways the personal or the emotional element that comes first, Dick Turner is the flimsy reed, who is a fated dreamer in an uncompromising country that yields only to the fighters.”(1978:12)

One partly agrees with Michael Thorpe, when he calls Mary and Dick, weak-willed and fear
ridden couple, who are non- heroic and non- fighters; one also agrees, that, at the farm Mary
could have lived with some peace, in spite of poverty and hardships, had she shown some pa-
tience with the black natives. If only Mary could have had Dick’s empathy for the black natives,
she could have forged a better quality of emotional and spiritual existence. Mary’s failure to cope with the situation on the African farm, and her lack of empathy for the blacks makes Lessing suggest, that people or races who fail to adapt perish. But all the same, the researcher believes that Mary is too sinned against than sinning. Mary Turner is the product and the victim of the colonial society. Mary is a victim of the colonial code in the colonial township, where she is humiliated for breaking the code by remaining unmarried up to the age of thirty. She is forced into an unequal marriage, where she suffers social isolation and economic scarcity and emotional deprivation. When in her state of insanity, she empathizes with the native, as a woman, her relationship is seen as an assault on the honour of the white race. Mary lives a stifled life and dies much before her death, and even after her death the white settler community treats her as the “other.” Mary remains an object of disgrace. Just as the black native suffers humiliation, Mary as a white colonial woman who wants to breathe easy is cruelly murdered, physically by the black native, Moses, and figuratively by the white colonial society. One observes that, before Mary’s violent death on the farm, at the end of the novel, in her state of insanity, she empathizes with the black natives of Africa. It is in her state of madness that Mary sees “the light.” Lessing writes:

At last, from a height, she looked down on the building set among the bush- and was filled with a regretful, peaceable tenderness. It seemed as if she were holding that immensely pitiful thing, the farm with its inhabitants, in the hollow of her hand, which curved round it to shut out the gaze of the cruelly critical world. (1950:190)

Lessing like R.D Laing believed in the evolutionary potential of the state of mental breakdown. Breakdown is “break- through.” (quoted in Maslen, 1994: 23 ) The humane face of Mary could be witnessed in her state of insanity. Madness in Lessing can be seen as a coping technique. In her later novels, and especially the novels written after 1962, one finds Lessing talking about the state of insanity as the state of wisdom. In the novel, *Briefing for the Descent into the Hell, (1971)* she has elaborately discussed the unorthodox ideology of madness being an evolutionary process, under the influence of R.D Laing, the “unorthodox psychiatrist and cultural theoretician.” (Vlastos: 1976, 246) The novel has been discussed at length in the fourth chapter of the thesis.

Though, madness serves as a coping technique in Lessing’s fiction, here, in the novel, *The Grass is Singing*, her empathy serves to build Mary’s humane image for a while, but in the face of the
oppressive colonial structure, her empathy becomes meaningless in social terms. It becomes the
cry of a weak, feeble soul that fails to connect. The novel is a poignant comment on the cruelty
of the colonial situation, where the weak and the misfits are perpetually exiled. Like the dispo-
sessed natives of Africa, the white women too experienced an exilic status. One agrees with, Mi-
chael Thorpe, who very perceptively, points out that through the death of the white woman, Less-
ing hints at the death of the white civilization, and the death of the hopeless imperialist struc-
ture in colonial Africa. Her verdict on colonialism is clear and loud, that it must end, it must be
wiped out. *The Grass is Singing*, is a strong “protest” novel, which clinically autopsies “the dis-
eased heart of imperialism,” (Thorpe, 48) where solution to the problem lies in the annihilation
of the imperialist power structure.

The novel, *The Grass is Singing*, talks about the cruelty of the colonial system, it depicts the
plight of the dispossessed black native of Africa; it also depicts the marginalization of the white
woman, Mary Turner, in colonial Africa as well as it depicts the misery of a failed farmer on the
African veld. In the novella, *The Ant Heap* (1951) she talks about the plight of the coloured boy,
Dirk, who experiences an exclusion from the mainstream of the black as well as the white colo-
nial society, in colonial Africa in the inter-war period.

*The Ant Heap* is a long story from a collection of short stories, titled *Five* (1953). It is set in co-
lonial Africa of the inter-war period. The story revolves round three main characters, reflecting
three distinctly different positions of power. The centre of the colonial power structure is occu-
pied by Mr. Macintosh, the shrewd, callous, exploitative, capitalist gold miner. Dirk is at the
margin of the colonial set up. He is the unacknowledged half-caste son of Mr. Macintosh, born
of the black native woman. The space between the margin and the centre is occupied by an ex-
remely sensitive and conscientious white engineer’s son, Tommy Clarke. The white boy, Tom-
my Clarke acts as a bridge between the two worlds of the oppressor and the oppressed, and
brings justice to Dirk, the half-caste son of Mr. Macintosh, the gold miner, who is completely
excluded from the world of socio-economic and educational privileges. He is a half-caste, col-
oured boy, whose existence was to be unanimously ignored, in the white dominated world.
Macintosh was a shrewd capitalist, who took up mining rights in the remotest regions of Africa. He is described as a “gold-eating monster” (357) recalling Mr. Kurtz and his exploitative Ivory trade in Joseph Conrad’s novel, Heart of Darkness. His mining practices are hazardous to the African soil, its landscape as well as to the black natives, who work in the mines. Lessing comments:

He simply hired hundreds of African labourers, and set them to shovel up the soil in the centre of that high, enclosed hollow in the mountains, so that there was soon a deeper hollow, then a vast pit, and then a gulf like an inverted mountain. Macintosh was taking great swallows of the earth, like a gold eating monster. (Lessing, 1964: 357)

The black natives, who worked as mine labour in the gold mine, worked in precarious conditions. Many workers would lose their lives. Macintosh did not regret the loss of the black workers. Commenting on his callousness, Lessing says, “If someone’s head got in the way of falling buckets or trucks, then there were plenty of black heads and hands for the hiring. Well, one cannot make an omelette without breaking an egg. This was Macintosh’s favorite motto.” (358)

Dirk is the marginalized half-caste, unacknowledged son of the gold-miner, who lives on the other side of the compound, away from the white-man’s dwellings, with his black native mother, other half-caste siblings and other kaffir boys. Lessing writes, “Dirk’s very existence was something to be ignored by everyone and none of the workers and none of the overseers would dare to mention Dirk’s name.” (374) Talking about the status of half-caste in the colonial Africa, Dirk says in The Ant Heap, “White people don’t like us half-castes, neither do the black like us, no one does…” (378)

Dirk’s marginalization is to be attributed to the colonial structure of power, where the white man is at the centre, and the native is systematically pushed to the deprived world of margins. Dirk’s position is peculiar because he is an half-caste, he is neither accepted by the white nor the black natives, and he experiences an exclusion from the socio-cultural world of both white as well as black. He has no access to education, when he grows up; he is treated as an ordinary native worker, who is subjected to economic exploitation on the mine. Since Dirk was Macintosh’s son, who was the employer and owner of the gold mine and who very shrewdly, paid the overseers
and the engineers very well, to maintain silence about the cruelty of Dirk’s existence and there-
fore it was assumed by all, who were in position of power, to ignore Dirk’s existence, which was
a conspiracy of a sort.

Tommy Clarke is the white boy who is treated with affection by Macintosh. The gold-miner tries
to bring all the possible comforts and privileges to the white boy, which is curtly rejected by
Tommy. He is extremely sensitive and is empathetic towards all living beings. As a child his
empathy for the new born duiker can be seen in the following lines:

Dirk stood back, watching, unwilling to see the last of the buck.

Then he said: it is just born, it can die.

Mrs. Clarke said dismissingly: Tommy will look after it.

Dirk walked away slowly, fingering the shilling in his pocket, but looking at where Tommy and
his mother were making a nest for the little buck in the packing case… Tommy knelt by the buck
and tried to drip milk into its mouth… That night Tommy took the little buck into his room and
secretly in the dark, lifted it, folded in a blanket, into his bed… He cried into dark because he
knew was going to die. (367)

It is a colour - ridden Africa. As a child Tommy was allowed to play with the half- castses and
the Kaffir boys who lived on the other side of the compound, since the Clarkes lived in total iso-
lution, and had no white family for company. As he grows up, he is forbidden to be in the com-
pany of Dirk and the other African children in keeping with the colonial code of black segrega-
tion. Tommy has a keen sense of justice. The unequal treatment meted out to the African boys
fills Tommy, with a sense of indignation. He asks uneasy questions to his mother, “Why, why
can’t I play with the natives? Why is Dirk yellow and not dark brown like the other Kaffirs?
What is a half- caste?” He receives only silence for an answer. When Tommy learns that Mr.
Macintosh is Dirk’s father, it fills him with anger and he makes up his mind to fight injustice.
Lessing describes it as follows:

Dirk was seven, like Tommy. He was strong and tall like Tommy. His eyes were dark and full,
but his mouth was not full and soft, but long and narrow, clenched in the middle. His hair was
very black and soft and long, falling uncut around his face, and his skin was smooth, yellowish
copper…Tommy watched him laugh, and he thought: “Well, now I know who his father is. Then
he looked at Dirk. He was full of anger, which he did not understand, but he did understand that he was also defiant, and this was a moment of decision. (369)

Tommy Clarke copes with injustice meted out to Dirk, by fighting the war on two fronts. On one hand, he establishes a strong bond of friendship with Dirk. Tommy fully empathizes with Dirk. He follows the policy of inclusion, he shares, initially the toys, and a little later his books with Dirk. Tommy is good at making clay models, he makes a small, crude model of Dirk, and he offers it to him. Dirk is pleased with the gesture. Dirk and Tommy meet at the ant heap every day. The bonding shared by the boys, offers an emotional security to Dirk. Empathy shown by Tommy to Dirk and their mutual bond enables Dirk to grasp his deprived status. He experiences a dispossession of shock.

When Tommy came home on a holiday from his boarding school, Dirk grumbled, “You are getting educated, but I have nothing to learn. Tommy soothed him by saying, “I will bring back books and teach you.” Dirk says with sarcasm, “that is what you say white boy.” One can see an urge in Dirk, to create an identity for himself, in a way to assert his presence through education. Tommy uses the money that came as a gift from Mr. Macintosh to buy books for Dirk. Lessing writes:

When Mr. Macintosh gave him the usual ten shillings, he put them in his pocket, thinking he would buy a football, but he did not… then he went to the shop and bought, the reader, some exercise books and pencils and an arithmetic. He hid these at the bottom of his trunk and whipped them out before his mother could see them. (373)

Tommy spent all his time teaching Dirk, during the holidays. Tommy’s policy of sharing his books and knowledge acquired at school enables him to raise Dirks consciousness about his position in the contemporary set up. Education is looked upon as a key to the creation of his identity. Dirk enlightens the African natives about their deprived status by reading out Reports and Acts of Parliament. Though the black native never looked upon Dirk as their own, he was seen as “a cuckoo in their nest” since he was a half caste, they recognize him, for his knowledge and are drawn to him because of their common interest of obtaining information about legal documents like the Acts and Reports. Thus, education facilitates Dirk to create an identity for himself as well as enables him to assert his rights. When Macintosh wants Dirk to work in the mine, he simply refuses to obey him. Very defiantly, he points out the law that prevents child labour.
Tommy empowers Dirk through education, and kindles a new hope in Dirk. Dirk expresses a desire to become an engineer. Education emerges as a coping technique.

Just as Tommy raises Dirk’s self esteem, he attacks Macintosh’s unjust treatment meted out to Dirk and his mother. He turns defiant and refuses to accept the privileges extended to him by Macintosh. He refuses to join merchant navy, he refuses to be an engineer.

Tommy uses his Art of wood carving and clay modeling, as a weapon in the battle against injustice. Since childhood, Tommy has been making clay and wood models. To prod the conscience of Macintosh “who so blackly betrayed his own flesh and blood” Tommy carves out a wooden model of Dirk, his sister, and his mother, that serves as a reminder of injustice and shameful treatment of the African woman and her half caste children to Macintosh. Art serves as a weapon to fight injustice; it can be discerned as a coping technique. Michael Thorpe writes in support of the statement:

We find the problems of articulating complex feelings and avoiding excessive commentary admirably solved. .. The sheer incapacity to enter fully into the thought s and feelings of others is solved by casting Tommy as an artist. His art expresses more than he can say or consciously know; it communicates his knowledge to others, who like him are locked in pride, hatred and distrust.(Thorpe, 38, 39)

At the end when Macintosh is insistent on Tommy taking up further education in Art, since the expert on Art, Mr. Tomlinson has spoken highly about Tommy’s potential as an artist; Tommy obstinately refuses to study Art until Dirk is sent to the city to study engineering. Defeated by the pact between the two boys Macintosh concedes to the demand. Lessing writes, “The victory was entirely theirs, but now they had to begin again in the long and difficult struggle to understand what they had won and how they would use it.”(413)

It is empathy, man’s love for man, which is seen as the solution to the man- made barriers of injustice and inequality. Lessing’s vision of universal brotherhood can be pulsed through the following lines:

Well then, well then what was friendship, and why were they bound so closely, and by what? Slowly the little boy, sitting alone on his ant heap, came to an understanding, which is proper, to middle aged people, that resignation in knowledge, which is called irony. Such a person may
know for instance, that he is bound most deeply to another person, although he does not like that person… and yet they would be friends and will always be friends… even though they may be in different continents, or may never see each other again.(379)

It is the sense of commitment and responsibility evinced by Tommy Clarke, which finds a way out of the marginalized situation, confronted by Dirk. Lessing expects her protagonist, male or female to show commitment to the social cause to achieve an affirmative change in the social situation. Agitation, Education and United struggle put up by Tommy and Dirk brings about a turnaround in the situation. Art is used as a weapon to fight injustice. It is love and empathy which serves as a coping technique. Universal Brotherhood emerges as a coping technique in the present nouvella. It is the Gandhian principle of non-cooperation demonstrated by both Tommy Clarke and Dirk, which serves as a corrective measure to the oppressor’s recalcitrant attitude and thaws the situation.

In the story, The Ant Heap, Lessing demonstrates the power of the sense of commitment and responsibility, which brings about a turnaround in the situation. In the novella, A Home for the Highland Cattle, she hints at the failure of the romantic and liberal reformist Marina Giles, whose half-hearted efforts fail to bring justice to the victims of colonization in Southern Rhodesia.

In the long story A Home for Highland Cattle,( 1953) Marina Giles, wife of a civil servant, is a British citizen, who comes to Southern Rhodesia with her husband, a soil scientist, soon after the Second World War, in search of a “roof.” They had been living in post war Britain, sharing flats and baths and kitchens whichever way possible. She is described as romantic and liberal, “who wanted to live in the group of amiable people, pleasantly interested in the arts, who read the New Statesman, week by week, and held that discreditable phenomenon like the colour bar and the black white struggle could be solved by sufficient good will.” (246) Lessing says with a touch of irony that such liberals were produced in plenty during the thirties in Britain.

Marina Giles’ search for home brings her for a temporary stay in the old locality in the city to 138 Cecil Rhodes Vista, a name she associates with oppressive British Empire and its ethos. The old houses, in this housing scheme, are quite inconvenient, small and ill-lit. The tenants who have been living in the old houses are pre-war white settlers in Africa, who belong to the lower
middle class, who are working as engine drivers and assistant haberdashers. On one hand, they envy the privileges enjoyed by the civil servants, and on the other hand, they treat the African black natives with contempt. Marina Giles tries to bring justice to the marginalized natives by treating the natives with dignity and by snubbing the whites by defusing their irrational protest against her reformist move, of ameliorating the living condition of the natives, who work as houseboys in the white men’s houses, by invoking the rules and regulations that support the interest of the natives. Marina Giles succeeds to some extent in bringing justice to the natives, but fails in the end. She fails to identify the native, Charlie and his wife Theresa who were handcuffed and were being paraded to the police station. The tone of the story is comic and ironic.

At the centre of the colonial set up, are the pre-war white settlers, who treat the black natives as the ‘other.’ They share the conventional notions about their immorality and inferiority. Mrs. Skinner, the land lady, who rents out her flat to Marina and her husband for three months, warns her of Charlie, the black native boy’s dishonesty. Mrs. Skinner says:

You must keep an eye on Charlie, anyway; He never does a stroke more than he has to. He is bred bone lazy. You’d better keep an eye on the food too. He steals. I had to have the police to him last month, when I lost my Garnet brooch, Of course he had sworn he had n’t taken it, but I haven’t laid my hands on it since. My husband gave him a good hiding but Master Charlie came up smiling as usual.(257)

The white settlers, who consider themselves racially superior to the natives, actually belong to the lower middle class. They work as drivers and as assistant to haberdashers, they live in the most inconvenient houses. They too are marginalized. Lessing writes:

Almost every morning, in 138, one might see a group of women, standing outside one or the other of the flats, debating how to rearrange the rooms. The plan of the building being so eccentric, no solution could possibly be satisfactory, and as soon as everything had been moved around, it was bound to be as uncomfortable as before. ‘If I move the bookcase behind the door, then perhaps… Or: It might be better if I put it into the bathroom… (259)

One of the white women, Mrs. Pond had entered into a squabble over a small quantity of sugar that was borrowed by the other white woman tenant; it speaks of their poor economic status. The pre-war settlers are envious of Marina’s elite status, as the wife of a civil servant who has recently come from Britain, her sophisticated manners, rich vocabulary and her superior
knowledge of rules and regulations. Marina’s gesture of improving the living condition of her black native house boy is met with a furious protest. The settlers feel offended and humiliated and they look upon the reforms introduced by Marina in the form of pay hike for Charlie as an act of instigation and destabilization of the colonial code of treating the natives as inferior. They resort to collectivism to register their protest against Marina when she offers a deferential treatment to Charlie, the black native houseboy, who works for Marina and who is at the margin of the colonial structure of power.

Charlie suffers economic marginalization, like other natives working as house boys in white men’s houses. They receive a salary of not more than seventeen to nineteen shillings, which is a ridiculously small amount. He never got anything more than maize flour for food, vegetables and meat were unheard of as a part of rations. The natives are a victim of white man’s prejudices. They are called lazy, inefficient and thieves. They are treated as sub-human beings. Sometimes, Charlie was subject to physical violence. He is beaten up by Mr. Black for making noise in the afternoon and for back answering him. Marina tries to improve the living conditions of the native by providing him with an iron bed when Marina finds the servant’s quarter shabby and full of squalor. Lessing writes:

When Marina looked inside the room which her servant shared with the servants from next door she exclaimed helplessly. ‘Dear me, how awful’! The room was very small. The brick walls were unplastered the tin of the roof bare, focusing the sun’s intensity inwards all day. The floor was cement, and the blankets that served as beds lay directly on it… In the space between the lavatories and the servant’s rooms stood eight rubbish cans, each covered by its cloud of flies, and exuding a stale sour smell.(248)

She tries to improve Charlie’s financial position by raising his salary by five shillings, instead of paying him the usual twenty shillings; she raises it to twenty five shillings. The sudden rise in Charlie’s salary sends Marina’s white neighbours into a rage of exasperation, for the servants of the pre-war settlers start demanding more salary. They form a union and protest against her gesture of doing justice to the native. Marina ignores their protest and, offers Charlie an improved ration of vegetables and meat. Mrs. Pond, the pre-war white settler, who is chagrined at Marina’s decision approaches her as the representative of the all the white settlers, and tells her that the natives aren’t used to eating vegetables and that their stomachs can’t digest vegetables and
that Marina is trying to provoke rebellion by injecting new ideas in the minds of the natives. Marina tells Mrs. Pond about the regulation passed by the government justifying her gesture. Thus Marina tries to improve the native’s morale on one hand and snubs the Whites, by invoking regulations.

The natives also try to cope with their marginalized situation by parodying the white man’s petty gestures like Mrs. Pond’s squabble over a very small quantity of sugar, or by parodying the illicit relationship of the engine driver’s wife with a stranger who visits her in her husband’s absence. The black natives laugh out their helplessness by resorting to parody. Lessing writes:

It was mid-morning…, for the moment; they could not think of anything to do, they might as well go on with the wood chopping. One yawned; another lifted his axe and let it fall into a log of wood, where it was held vibrating. He plucked the handle and it thrummed like a deep guitar note. At once delightedly, the men gathered round the embedded axe. One twanged it, and the others began to sing. At first Marina was able to make out the words. Then she heard:

There’s a man who comes to our house,

When poppa goes away,

Poppa comes back and…

The men were laughing and looking at No. 4 of the flats, where a certain lady was housed whose husband worked on the railways… the thing had turned into another drama. Charlie, her own servant was driving an imaginary engine across the yard, chuff, chuff, like a child, while two of the others, seated on a log of wood, were really, it was positively obscene!(264)

The most marginalized character, who is genuinely helped by Marina Giles, is the black native girl, Theresa, who works for Mrs. Black, the pre war white settler, who extracts work out of Theresa from morning seven to seven in the night but pays no attention to her living conditions. In keeping with the rules of the colonial government, Theresa cannot live in the town at night and she must return to her native reserve, which is located at a distance of five miles. It is humanly impossible for the native teenager to walk ten miles every day and moreover to report at seven in the morning. Theresa shares the servant’s room with the houseboys. Mrs. Black expediently connives at it, and blames the blacks for their low standard of morality. Marina enquires after Theresa’s accommodation with Charlie. When she learns that Theresa shares the room with Charlie
and other servant boys, she expresses concern. Marina also learns that Theresa is in trouble; she is pregnant. Marina speculates that the native girl will soon turn into a prostitute if she is not married off at the right time. When Marina learns that Charlie is in love with Theresa and wants to marry her, she arranges for the lobola, the bride money that amounts to some six oxen, by very spitefully, parting with the painting of the Highland Cattle, much admired by Charlie, and seen as a solution to the problem for the bride price, that hung on the Cecil Rhodes Vista flat, owned by Marina’s land lady Mrs. Skinner. Marina hated the painting of the Scottish Cattle, as a reminder of the Victorian relic, as much as she hated the name Cecil Rhodes as a symbol of oppression and racial superiority. Marina keeps an amount of seven pounds for Mrs. Skinner’s painting as its price and with her husband, she drives Charlie and Theresa to Theresa’s father, who always demanded money from Theresa and compelled her to work. Though not happy with the deal, her father marries her off with Charlie. Marina succeeds in saving the adolescent native girl from being trapped into prostitution. At the same time she brings dignity and happiness to both Charlie and Theresa as a married couple.

But at the end, Marina fails to identify the handcuffed Charlie and Theresa, who were taken to the police station for stealing the Mrs. Skinner’s painting of the Highland cattle and a couple of other household articles from Mrs. Skinner’s house that was vacated by Marina a month back. The story ends with a touch of irony, where Lessing shows Marina absorbed in looking for a table for her new house.

Marina happened to be turning into a shop one morning, where she hoped to buy a table for her new house, and saw, without really seeing them, a file of such handcuffed Africans passing her. They were laughing and talking among themselves, and with the black policemen who herded them, and called back loud and jocular remarks at their women. In Marina’s mind the vision of that ideal table (for she had been searching for some days, without success) was stronger than what she actually saw; and it was not until the prisoners had passed that she suddenly said to herself: Good heavens, that man looks rather like Charlie- and that girl behind there, the plump girl with the spindly legs, there was something about the back view of that girl was very like Theresa…” The file had in the meantime turned a corner and was out of sight. For a moment Marina thought: Perhaps I should follow and see? Then she thought: Nonsense, I am seeing things, of course it can’t be Charlie, he must have reached home by now… and she went into the shop to buy her table. (298)
The reasons for Marina’s failure at the end can be attributed to two things. The first reason is her lack of complete grasp of the threats and dangers of colonialism. She fails to realize that once she is out of the old housing colony, the rigid and malaised colonizer mindset is bound to settle score with the natives, which is proved in the vindictive gesture of Mrs. Skinner of complaining against Charlie and Theresa for stealing the picture and some other artifacts, and secondly, though Marina with her well intentioned reformist activism, tries to bring justice to Charlie and Theresa in the initial stage, she fails in the end even to identify the native for whom she fought vociferously against the white settlers at 138 Cecil Rhodes Vista, because she puts self before selflessness. In the long story *The Ant Heap* Tommy Clarke succeeds in bringing justice to the half-caste native because of his hundred percent commitment to the principle of justice, and because of empathy, whereas Marina is too engrossed in her own comfort to see the natives. She lacks hundred percent commitment and imaginative ingenuity like Tommy Clarke. Michael Thorpe comments, “The sequel is crisp, and could stand as epitaph for a legion of good intentions, fatally unsupported by imagination like Marina’s… her well- intentioned but amateurish meddling has merely violated the accepted order of things.” (1978: 48). One agrees with Thorpe, when he comments that, at the end, a new story is born with a title, “Making of the Madame.” (48) Lessing expects her protagonists to take up responsibility and show hundred percent commitment to cope with marginality. Wherever, the sense of responsibility is missing, homecoming for the marginalized remains a distant dream.

*Eldorado* (1953) is a deeply painful and a pathetic tale of a respectable, idealistic but mediocre white settler farmer, Alec Barnes in South Africa, who lives very close to Johannesburg, the rich territory of gold and copper mines, who succumbs to the destructive obsession for gold, losing his mind, money and his long cherished principles of ethical living. Alec Barnes is helplessly watched over by his kind-hearted wife, Maggie, who suffers endlessly on account of Alec’s madness for gold, but nevertheless offers him full psychological and emotional support. Their adolescent son, Paul, who is neglected by both parents, is supported by the disreputable gold miner, James who helps him find the goldmine very ironically on Alec Barnes’ farm itself, putting an end to the quest for gold. Paul treats his father with utmost kindness in Alec’s moment of defeat. All the three characters in the story suffer in their private worlds, and yet they bond seamlessly, notwithstanding their ideological differences.
Alec Barnes is a white settler farmer in South Africa, who emigrated soon after the First World War, in quest of a life free from competition and hankering. He bought a small, two thousand acres of farmland, very close to the gold country but kept himself insulated from the greed of gold mining, and tobacco farming, the two money pulling enterprises were looked down upon as indecent and unethical by Alec Barnes. He took immense pride in maize farming, for he associated maize with farming for food. He led a mediocre but a contented life with his wife Maggie and son Paul.

When Alec Barnes came searching for a farm, he chose the rich maize soil, though cleverer and experienced men told him the big money was to be found in tobacco. Tobacco and gold, gold and tobacco- these were the money makers. There were many ways of seeing this country; he chose to see it with the eye of the food producer. He had not left England, he said, to worry about money and chase success. He wanted a slow, satisfying life, taking things easy. (1953:300)

Though Alec’s life had been distorted by the First World War as his wife observes, “the trouble started long before... with the war that so unsettled men and sent them flying off to new countries” (310) he tries to find a way out of post war trauma by leading a tranquil life of a maize farmer. He tried living an idealistic life of a food producer, but his agricultural practices were faulty, he went on cutting trees unmindfully on his farm and exposing soil in a wasteful way that reduced the maize yield which accounted for his mediocre economic status as a maize farmer. Yet Alec led a contented life, with his wife and son.

The situation deteriorated suddenly and irreversibly with the arrival of a wandering gold prospector, who stayed overnight on Barnes’ farm and talked about gold prospecting with unrelenting passion. Lessing comments, “The old man spoke of the search for gold as a scientist might of discovery or an artist his art.”(309)

Alec Barnes listened to him as if he was listening to a “siren song.” (309)Alec’s imagination was fired by the gold prospector’s seductive talk, reminiscent of the prophecy of the three witches who played upon the imagination of Macbeth. Barnes had a natural propensity to be carried away by fantasy; he is charmed, bewitched and terribly fascinated by the idea of gold divining. Like a possessed man, he spent a lot of money to buy equipments, books and maps for finding gold. Alec was a failed farmer with very little economic resources. He could barely eke out money for his
son’s education. Their house was in a dire need of a make-over. His wife had been waiting for years to buy new linen and even a visit to a doctor for her headaches, they could hardly think of a holiday to Scotland. To satiate his desire for gold finding, very fanatically, he squanders money on books, full of information about metals, he spends heavily on equipments for panning gold, and he also spends money to buy maps to identify the possible sites, where gold could be found. Alec, is oblivious of the world outside, he is blind to the needs of the household. He is driven passionately to his fantasy of gold finding. Due to the shortage of money, Alec had put severe restrictions on the consumption of water. Water had to be used in a “niggardly” manner on the farm, he had never thought of digging a well on the farm, in spite of his wife’s repeated demand for water. Now with his new found love for gold, he had no qualms wasting water for cleaning the gold samples. Due to an increased want of water, Alec spent a lot of money on digging of well. Though, Alec was never a successful farmer, he took lot of pride in farming, and producing food. He associated farming as a spiritual or a religious engagement. His flirtation with gold finding, cajoles him away from his farm. Gradually Alec starts neglecting his farm. He employs the farm labour for digging trenches to find samples of gold. As a consequence, the whole family suffers a huge financial loss.

He spends hours together peering at the gold samples, walks all over the reef desperately looking for the metal. He loses his mind. He becomes insane enough to lose his wife’s wedding ring, and gold brooch for testing his theory of gold divination. Alec neglects his wife, doesn’t think about the future of his adolescent son. In fact, Alec is in no state of mind to think rationally about anything but gold. His condition becomes pathetic, reminding one of King Lear’s insanity.

Alec suffers in terms of monetary crisis, in psychological terms by losing his mind and he suffers most by trampling upon his principle of decent living, which was kindred to his heart and was cherished all his life, by digging a trench in the midst of his maize farm. It appears that Alec had mortgaged his soul to the devil called gold that dragged him to the abyss of doom. Lessing writes:

Some days later he remarked that he was taking the workers off the reef to a new site. She did not care to ask where. But soon she saw a bustle of activity in the middle of the great mealie
field, Yes he had decided to sink a shaft just there, he who had once lost his temper if he found even a small stone in a furrow which might nick the ploughshare. (326)

Maggie Barnes, Alec’s wife, was a woman of gay and humorous disposition. She is of Scottish origin, and has her own ideology about life. She saw no harm in bettering one’s prospects in life. She admires success. She doesn’t agree with Alec’s idea of a life free from competition. Maggie hates the lax and easy going attitude of the colonial. She looks upon intellectual pursuit and academic excellence as the true way to make a living. She expects her son, Paul to excel in academics, and become an engineer, or a soil scientist. She doesn’t want her son to live by luck alone like the gold miners and lucky tobacco farmers. Maggie believes in cerebral power to make one’s identity in life. She is terribly disappointed, when she learns that Paul totally lacks academic inclination. When the headmaster writes to her about Paul’s keen interest in practical things, Maggie shudders to imagine her son as a tobacco farmer or a gold miner. Maggie suffers because neither her husband, nor her son, meets her expectations.

Maggie suffers economic crisis because, her husband does not pay any attention to the farm work, due to his new found love of gold finding that acts as the other woman in her life. The farm yield is negligible. Alec spends all the time on gold diving and has no time for her or their son, Paul. Maggie suffers emotionally, because her husband, unmindful of her sentiments, sacrifices her precious wedding ring, gold brooch and her signet ring for testing his theory for identifying gold. Maggie suffers a sense of loss, and a nervous breakdown. Marginalization of Maggie is seen poignantly through the eye of her son Paul as follows:

He saw his mother, as a fading tired woman, with grey hair, he watched her at evening sitting by the lamp, with the mending on her lap, in the shabby living room. He saw how she knitted her brows and peered to thread a needle and how the sock or shirt might lie forgotten, while she went off into a dream of her which kept her motionless, her face sad and pinched, for half an hour at a time, while her hands rubbed unconsciously in a hard and nervous movement over the arms of the chair.(321)

Paul Barnes, the adolescent son of Maggie and Alec Barnes suffers in his private world. Since his childhood, he manifested a keen interest in practical things, as a child, instead of playing with toys, he actually made miniature dams using mud and water, he enjoyed robust games, and he grows up into tall and lanky youth of independent disposition. Since he fails to evince any aca-
ademic excellence, he leaves the academic institution without becoming a college student; consequently, he fails to meet the expectations reposed in him by his mother, who wanted him to be an engineer or a soil expert. Since he is practically oriented, he desires to reorganize the farm, which is completely neglected by his father. He pleads before Alec to guide him for a few days. Alec does spend some time with him on the farm, but since he is mentally lost in his own world, he leaves Paul at his wits end. He suffers because of mother’s pressure of expectations, and father’s negligence owing to insanity. Since he is neglected by both his parents, he starts looking for fatherly guidance and emotional support away from home, which he receives from the gold miner, James who lives on the neighboring farm. James, the gold miner helps Paul find the gold mine on Alec’s farm, and, he enables him to establish his identity in the practical venture of gold mining.

Though all three members suffer in their private worlds, each helps the other through unconditional love, pity; care, affection, and soothing gesture, and bond seamlessly. Maggie, acts as a shield, and protects her husband in every possible way. She understands Alec’s nature perfectly well.

Alec’s manifestations of lunacy were witnessed by Maggie long before Alec turned to gold finding after the arrival of the old prospector called as “lolloping nuisance” by Maggie, in his propensity to lead a life free from any competition. She knew that her husband wallowed in fantasy and vagueness about everything, whether it was farming or gold finding. Lessing writes, “It was that oblique, unnamable quality in life which Maggie trying to pin it down safely in homely words … getting something for nothing, that is what they wanted. (317)

Maggie also understands that Alec is not in love with gold but the idea or the theory of finding gold. She fully empathizes with Alec and eyes him with pity whenever he fails. Maggie supports him by parting with her jewellery, the signet ring, the gold brooch and even her wedding ring in Alec’s endeavour to test his theory of gold finding; though parting with her wedding ring lacerates her heart. Maggie suffers endlessly, but never thinks of divorcing him even for a minute. When Maggie is in dire need of money, she supplements the domestic expenses by selling eggs and poultry.
When the gold sample is sent for testing at the Assay Department in the city, both Maggie and Paul spend sleepless nights due to anxiety emanating from an intense desire for Alec’s success. Sometimes when Paul is filled with anguish on account of Maggie’s sufferings and he speaks with bitterness about Alec, Maggie shields Alec by saying, “he is a brave man…he is a very brave man.” Lessing says, “She found herself saying, in a choked voice; for she found that determined figure in the moonlight unbearably pathetic.” (336)

The biggest moment of defeat and triumph at once is the time when Paul, Alec’s adolescent son finds a gold mine on Alec’s farm. Very ironically, it is the same spot, where Alec had been digging for gold for years with no success. Young, energetic and practical oriented Paul, is successful in discovering the gold mine with the help of an experienced gold miner, James. He talks about his success with a touch of arrogance in front of Maggie, but Maggie makes Paul see the situation with empathy. Lessing writes:

One day Paul came again and said – and now he sounded apologetic: you’ll have to tell him, you know. We are moving the heavy machinery tomorrow. He will see for himself.’

I really will tell him,’ she promised.

‘I don’t want him to feel bad, really I don’t mother.’ He sounded as insistent as a child who needs to be forgiven.(353)

Maggie finds it difficult to break the news to Alec that Paul has found the gold mine on their farm. She musters all kindness in her voice and empathy in her eyes and tells about Paul’s success to Alec. Lessing writes as follows:

‘And on that ridge,’ he exclaimed at last. There was no resentment in his voice. She glanced at him again. It seems hard, doesn’t it? He said slowly; and once she clutched his arm and said,

Yes, my dear it is, it is, I’m so sorry…

And here she began to cry, she wanted to take him in her arms and comfort him… (355)

It is Maggie’s empathy and Paul’s kindness that enable Alec to regain his self esteem, the very fact that the goldmine was found in the domain of his farm, in which Alec had been searching
for, makes him see the vindication of his theory, he says at the end in a proud and pleased voice, “Well that proves it. I told you didn’t I? I always told you so. (355)

The nouvelle, *Eldorado*, offers love and empathy as the coping technique; the short novel, *Hunger*, written during Lessing’s visit to the Soviet Union, in 1952, as a member of the British literary delegation, offers Marxism, as the coping technique.

*Hunger* (1953) is a short novel about an intelligent, ambitious but self-centered adolescent boy, Jabavu, from the native reserve of colonial Africa, who has a strong fascination for the Whiteman’s city, and its culture. He despises the native Kraal life for he believes it to be obsolete, regressive and old fashioned. He leaves for the Whiteman’s city, in quest of excitement, but he is dismayed to find it full of inequities. Jabavu is excluded from the privileged world of the white man and at the same time treated as the ‘other’ by the black natives, who inhabit the Whiteman’s city. Jabavu’s overwhelming hunger for excitement of the city life, and carnal pleasure lures him into the notorious underworld. Jabavu experiences a virtual descent into the hell on account of moral degradation; he slumps into drinking, stealing and debauchery. His involvement in crime sees him behind the bar. A turn around in Jabavu’s attitude is brought about through the exhortation provided by Mr. Mizi, the leader of the African liberation movement, which inspires him to dedicate his life for the liberation of his African brothers, who suffer oppression under the white colonizer, by espousing the principle of “We” rather than “I”.

At the centre of the power structure is the white man and his city, full of inequalities and oppressive rules and regulations that treat the black African native as inferior. Away from the centre are black city dwellers, and at the margin is the black, native adolescent boy, Jabavu, who comes to the white man’s city from his Native reserve in colonial Africa, only to be humiliated, excluded and discriminated against not only by the hegemonistic whites but also the blacks who treat the village boy as a “nigger” from the Kraal. It is not merely the racial politics in colonial Africa, nor merely the divide between the city and the village that marginalizes the native adolescent boy, but Jabavu’s self seeking attitude and an overwhelming desire to satiate his carnal pleasure that throws him into the notorious underworld which leads to his moral degradation. The way out of the situation is suggested by Mr. Samu and his wife by giving him the address of the African
leader Mr. Mizi even before Jabavu reaches the city. Mrs. Kambusi, though she is the proprietor of a disreputable shebeen, she tells Jabavu to meet and engage himself with Mr. Mizi’s political cause. Jabavu has a divided mind. One mind says he should be with the people of light like Mr. Mizi and Mr. Samu, but the next moment his mind oscillates in the direction of carnal pleasure. It is the self seeking attitude that gets better off, and he gets ensnared in the notorious company of shady and dubious characters like Betty, the prostitute, and Jerry the gang leader of the criminal world. Jabavu suffers a moral degradation. He takes to drinking, stealing and debauchery. He doesn’t regret the murder of the girl Betty at the hands of Jerry the gang leader, who actually had helped him by providing him with food and shelter at the initial stage when he came to the city and had no money for his survival. His involvement in the criminal world finally sees him in prison, where he is morally rescued by the letter written by Mr. Mizi, exhorting him to join the cause of African freedom, and work for the have-nots relinquishing individualism, the hallmark of capitalism.

Jabavu, who experiences a marginalized status in the white man’s city, looked upon himself as superior to his fellow Africans in the native Kraal. He is strong and well built, an intelligent adolescent, who learnt to read and write, English, the white man’s language of his own accord, without going to the mission school. He has a passion for fanciful items of luxury. In the native Kraal, nobody used warm water for bath, nor did anybody ever use soap for washing himself. Jabavu did. He wants his mother to serve him piping hot food even before his father is served. He works only when he chooses to work. He has an irrepressible fascination for the white man’s city and its culture. Jabavu recalls Obi Okonkwo, the protagonist of Chinua Achebe’s novel, *No Longer at Ease*, who holds the native culture of Africa in contempt, and embraces corrupt practices of living. Jabavu holds everything native as contemptible. He doesn’t approve of his father’s love for traditional African, tribal culture. He looks upon his father’s agricultural practices as outdated and ruinous, and his love for rickety cattle as ridiculous, and he hates his father bemoan the loss of old African values at the hands of the oppressive white colonizer. He has a great fascination for the White man’s gadgets, his scientific and progressive attitude about agricultural practices soil treatment and cattle rearing. He ardently believes that he Kraal belongs to the old people and his future lies in the white man’s city.
Jabavu’s mother is proud of him, because he is brave, intelligent and above all he is a survivor, of the period of great Hunger, the worst drought suffered by the Kraal, and the famine that ensued thereafter, which was artificially created by the white man. Jabavu’s mother knew that there was a hungry animal that lurked in his body that craved for unusual things.

Jabavu sets out for the white man’s city along with his brother, Pavu. On the way, he suffers a great shock, when he finds the white man as well as the black man treat him as the ‘other’. He is bewildered to find the white lorry driver frighten him, by swerving his vehicle very close to the two brothers, who leap off the road in the grass with their mouths wide open calling for a laugh from the white driver. Jabavu expresses his surprise over the unprovoked mischief played by the White man. Jabavu suffers yet another shock, when a black native from the city, very wickedly tries to cheat them into recruiting for the mine. Since Jabavu is strong, the black man wants to recruit him for the mine at Johannesburg, leaving behind his brother, Pavu for want of strength. Jabavu foils his plan by running away from the place and hiding behind the trees, where he hears the black man, address him as “nigger.” Jabavu is puzzled, he says, “He called us nigger and yet his skin is like ours that is not easy to understand.”

Jabavu suffers on the way to the city, because he is a native from the village and at same time because he is a black African.

Jabavu and Pavu suffer hunger for food, for the maize cake given by the mother was insufficient. Their sufferings on the road to the city are alleviated by the three Africans, identified as Mr. and Mrs. Samu and their brother. They offer the two boys fish and bun, the food from the city. Mr. Samu is quite impressed with Jabavu’s sense of curiosity, his intelligence, and his knowledge of English, and he talks about the appalling condition of the African natives in colonial Africa; he also speaks about the future of Africa and the need for sacrifice for a better tomorrow. He gives him the address of Mr. Mizi, his fellow crusader, and assures him that Jabavu would be found a job by Mr. Mizi. Jabavu is too fascinated by the idea of the glamorous city life to listen to the agitators like Mr. Samu.

Jabavu arrives in the city which he finds both ugly and beautiful, and contrary to his imagination, he encounters shocking inequities. Here, he suffers because he is a native from the village, as well as because he is a black African. On the very first day, looking at Jabavu’s torn attire, the
black policeman identifies him as a villager, and asks him if he has lost his way. He also asks him about the pass that every African is required to carry with him for obtaining job. He tells Jabavu the way to the pass office, but can’t follow him completely, he remains at a loss. Though, there are many Africans, but not all of them speak the same language, Jabavu feels as an outsider even before a fellow African. The Africans from the city, who understand his language, laugh at his torn trousers and his bundle and ridicule him by calling him “the raw boy from the Kraal.” Thus, Jabavu is thrown into an exilic state. Jabavu has no money to buy food; he is compelled into stealing a bun from the vendor’s basket, and a shirt and trousers from the Whiteman’s backyard. The white man’s city reduces the proud Kraal boy into a petty thief, besides robbing him of his identity. He always took pride in calling himself “I am Jabavu” with a swagger, sadly, his identity is reduced to the situpa, his identity card that bore his name and registration number. His experience at the pass office, located in that part of the city which is called as “coloured” throws him into a state of trauma. Jabavu looks at the long queue in which hundreds of natives stand like cattle and undergo a medical examination, where the white doctor does not care about the native’s general health; he examines the native to rule out the possibility of a white man contracting any disease because of the African native. Lessing shows the callousness of the white man; even medical profession is not free from racial politics. She says:

At last Jabavu reaches the doctor, who listens to his chest, taps him, and looks in his throat and eyes … and the secret parts of his body, in a way that makes anger mutter in him like thunder… and when the doctor has said that jabavu is strong as an ox and fit to work, he may go. The doctor has said too that Jabavu has an enlarged spleen, which means he has had malaria, and will have it again, that he probably has bilharzias, and there is a suspicion of hookworm. But these are too common for comment, and what the doctors are looking for are the diseases which may infect the white people, if he works in their houses.(285)

Jabavu suffers yet another shock, when he enters the white man’s house from the front side to enquire for a job. The white woman, very rudely, tells him to come from the rear side, because of his colour, and refuses to pay him one pound salary, for want of experience. Jabavu is excluded from the white man’s world. He experiences an economic and social marginalization.

Yet, his desire for excitement of the city life does not diminish. Though he has Mr. Mizi’s address with him he keeps himself away from the world of commitment. His irrepressible hunger for the carnal pleasure lures him into a world of notorious criminals. Betty, a disreputable girl,
catches Jabavu steal a loaf of bread. Impressed with the sleight of his hand, she brings him to the shebeen, a disreputable house run by discreditable woman, Mrs. Kambusi. Though both the women are ill-famed, they are kind to Jabavu. Betty offers him food, and genuinely looks after him. She wants to marry him and settle down in life. When Mrs. Kambusi, learns that Jabavu possesses Mr. Mizi’s address, she speaks to him in their native language since it cannot be followed by anybody around them, to join the African movement with Mr. Mizi, calling him the “man of light”. She also warns him to stay out of the criminal world represented by Betty, the prostitute. Jabavu’s mind is divided between the world of easy luxury and irresponsibility and a world of serious commitment. Life of ease, easy money, and excitement gets better off and Jabavu turns a deaf ear to Mrs. Kambusi’s admonishment. Love for self sees him slump into stealing, drinking and debauchery. Jabavu who was proud of his intelligence, knowledge of English and proud of his physical strength, could have made a mark even in the white man’s city, had he devoted himself to the cause of African liberation, soon after coming to the town, but pawning his soul to the devil of pleasure principle, degrades him in both, physical and moral sense. Thus Jabavu suffers an exclusion, and discrimination as a boy from the village, as an African native, but he suffers a moral debacle owing to his egocentric attitude. Jabavu reaches the nadir of moral degradation when the gang leader, Jerry kills Betty out of jealousy and Jabavu feels relieved of a burden off his chest. Betty loved Jabavu and cared for him very genuinely. Morality expects him to mourn for her. Jabavu’s love for self, immunes him to sorrow of bereavement. Eventually, Jerry blackmails him into stealing money from Mr. Mizi’s house against his wish, Mr. Mizi identifies him, and Jabavu is sent to the jail. He is filled with a deep sense of despair. He refuses to eat or drink. He reels under a shock for having compromised with his dignity. He regains his self respect only when he submits himself to the principle of “We” by lopping off his selfishness, on being exhorted by Mr. Mizi who addresses him as “my son”, and tells him to dedicate his life for the amelioration of his people. It is the sympathy and affection shown by Mrs. Mizi, and the other members of the light like Mr. Samu that offers a way out of his sense of loss and despair. Jabavu is filled with a sense of peace when he espouses the principle of We, the Marxist ideal, and abandons his selfishness, symptomatic of the principle of capitalism.

The word that meant most to him, of all the many words written hastily on that paper is We. “We” says Jabavu. “We… Us.” Peace flows into him… for the first time that hunger in him,
which had raged like a beast all his life, wells up, unrefused, and streams gently into the word We… We, says Jabavu over and over again, We. And it is as if in his empty hands are the warm hands of his brothers. (377)

Thus, Marxist ideal of wholeness emerges as the coping technique.

To sum up the argument, one can say that, in Lessing’s fiction the people away from the centre of the colonial power structure suffer social, cultural and economic exclusion, and consequently, they suffer a loss of identity. A solution to the problem is found in the principle of love and empathy, embedded in the philosophy of Sufism, in the humanistic principle of Universal Brotherhood, in Education, in Art and in the sense of wholeness suggested by the philosophy of Marxism.
Chapter III

The Patriarchal Structure