Chapter-2

It is an extremely difficult task to give a concise socio-political-economic background of an ex-patriate like Lessing. First of all she had a very long span of life. The world when she was born is totally different from the world in which she received the Nobel Prize. Then also, she spent most of her adult life in Africa, yet she did not live as an African lived. Instead she led the highly privileged life of a British colonial. So her upbringing was Edwardian as she was born in 1919. Yet the two world wars were imminent which were to change the face of the entire world, including that of the place she lived in. Yet it will be foolish to neglect the contemporary background of the home country, for, though surround by the Dark Continent, yet the colonials have always lived a life bottled up, as it were, in the home country, and at the same time, at considerable distance from it, both geographically and socio-politically. It is a paradoxical situation, very like that of the British in India who led a double existence, as it were, belonging neither fully to England, nor fully to India, a half and-half existence. Very much the same was the case with her.

To take up England first, Edwardian and Georgian England was in for a drastic change with the onset of the First World War. Lessing, of course was born in 1919 that is she did not have to undergo the trauma of the First World War. But by this time the supremacy of the Empire was already being challenged. The world in which she grew up and attained full consciousness was the world of the thirties. The Reform Acts had brought about a charge in the labour class and the establishment of grammar schools had raised the level of education. The upper classes, to which Lessing, be it at some remove,
belonged were no longer what they had been. Hennery James refers to the “clumsy conventional expensive materialized vulgarized brutalized life of London.” According him the state of the upper class in England was “in many ways very much the same rotten and collapsible one of which the French aristocracy before the revolution.” It was proclaimed by Ramsay Mac Donald as the “Age of the Financier” and did not command the moral respect that tames class hatred. There was a look of concern for personal relationships and the judging of people by materialistic standers that is reflected again and again in Lessing’s novels. It was in evidence not only in the England of the thirties, but when *The Grass is Singing* was written.

The progress of events in the early part of the century, that is during Lessing’s adolescence involved facts like war, unemployment, economic depression and this produced a concentration on social and economic problems. It gave rise to the theory of the welfare state and the principle of laisser-faire. Keynes gives his views thus:

> It is not true that individuals posse a prescriptive “natural liberty in their economic activities. There is no compact conferring perpetual rights on those who have and on those who acquire. The world is not so governed from above that private and social and interest always coincide. (Ford, Boris33)

The effect of the 1931 crises, when three important members defected from the Labour party changed the philosophical standpoint of the party. Marxism came to predominate. Arthur Koestler, in his autobiography has made it clear:

> …. born out of the despair of world war and civil war, of social unrest and economic chaos, the desire for a complete break with the past,… was deep and genuine. (Ford, Boris34)
 Appropriately enough, it was known as the Age of Anxiety, and the anxiety was not limited within England but echoed in the colonies too, Rhodesia were Lessing was growing up, among them.

Desperate attempts at recon structure of society were being undertaken. Comprehensive experiments were going on in the field of education that encouraged the upward mobility of the lower classes and the intermingling of classes, very efficiently depicted in *Look Back in Anger* and other works of the Angry Young Men, in which group our author here if belongs. Businessmen indulging in advanced views proclaimed industry to be fulfilling a social as well as economic need. In every sphere a sense of avoidance of responsibility gave rise to moral turpitude. Indeed, a social scientist said in 1950 that

> The logical drive, in modern social science away from notions of individual responsibility is very powerful. (Ford, Boris36)

In spite of universal literacy, the benefits of Welfare State and a number of other like benefits, a sense of discontents, was continuously breeding. This was fostered by a sense of rootlessness which, however unjustifiable in England, was only too apparent and understandable in the case of the residents of the colonies, of which Doris Lessing was one. This was fully used by the poets:

> “Was that,” my friend smiled, “were you have your roots”? No, only where my childhood was unspent, I wanted to retort, just where I started. (Ford, Boris41)

This is what Philip Larkin, firmly rooted in England, said in the second half of the century. One can well imagine the impact of such a mentality on a mind like Lessing’s.

Things underwent a drastic change after World War II. The entire perspective changed. Imperialism had already been on the wane after the first
war and now the Empire Crumbled. The Cold War, the shift in the balance of power, all this brought to birth a world so different from the early twentieth century world that it was virtually unrecognizable. There was a;‘Obliteration of the ideals of the Renaissance’. (Ford, Boris 53)

This was the case with the last decade of the century, by which time Lessing was a venerable septuagenarian, with her best work behind her, processing on her way towards Nobel Laureateship. By this time a decay in elitism had set in with mass penetration of cultural truths. There was a general up gradation, from one point of view, of the cultural level while from another point of view the facility in communication introduced by Television brought about a general vulgarization that was truly alarming. Lessing died in a world that was totally different from the one she had been born in.

The world she had been born in, however artificially British it might have been was still situated in Africa and this naturally influenced her sensibility. It will not be very practical to give tedious account of African socio-economic background here since hardly any of it influenced her in her formative years. Only as such as had truly in influenced her will be useful for the present study.

It is true that she comes to regard Africa as a subject nation and was therefore alienated from it. She refers to Africa as belonging to the blacks and was of the opinion that “the sooner they take it back the better it is.” At the same time, she regarded it as her own country since she was brought up it. She regarded it as “home.” She says in a book with the significant title *Going Home* that she belongs to it:
But a country also belongs to those who feel at home in it. Perhaps it may be that the love of Africa the country will be strong enough to link people who hate each other now. Perhaps.(10-11)

It was a paradoxical situation. On one hand there is the feeling that “home” means Britain. On the other there is the indubitable fact that one is being brought up in a totally different environment. Not only that, because there is also the fact that the colonial world is a world unto itself: a home within a home, peculiarly detached from the life of that country. Frantz Fanon has analyzed the situation quite efficiently:

The colonial world is a world cut in two. The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settler. The two zones are opposed but not to the service of a higher unity… both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. The settler’s town is a strongly built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly-lit town. The settler’s town is a well-fed town, an easy-going town, its belly is always full of good things. The originality of the colonial context is that economic reality, inequality and immense difference of ways of life never come to mask the human realities….In the colonies the economic substructure is also the superstructure.(Frantz Fanon30)

This was the paradoxical world in which she grew up and, what is more, spent her adult life. It was a world of divided loyalties, of intentional, tension, of contradictions. The rich contradictions in the very landscape of the country helped to push her on to a meaningful creative life. On one hand, the African outback is described in her texts as desolate, bleak and empty. It is depicted as containing vast open spaces wherein it was possible to be isolated and lonely. Yet this savage and primitive land also had a mythical charm, a dreamy charm that was entirely captivating. She has presented many aspects of Africa in her works. Most of them contradict each other. She speaks of an Africa with a
This book makes a poignant comparison between the lush countryside, greenery rich with the fertile sap rising in every blade of grass, as also a dry, hot and barren land “black-maned with forest, twitching in the heat.” This is what she writes in *Going Home*:

….. a magnificent country with all its riches in the future. We can dream of cities and a civilization more beautiful than anything that has been seen in the world before. (14)

One can get a glimpse of the historical and geographical aspect of Africa in *The Golden Notebook* and the early novels of *Children of Violence*. The savage and primitive Africa is represented in *The Grass is Singing*. In this novel the main protagonist Mary Turner experiences regression and confronts the horrors of total negation and finally succumbs to the violence of murder. This novel has been seen as an “indictment of racist colonial society.” It has also been seen as strongly depicting a determination to submit to nature, “a mystical and deterministic resignation in the face of the forces of savage nature”. (Bertlsen648)

Here again we find different polarities. On one hand there is the scientific and political thought that goes towards progress and development, suggesting “balance, tolerance, individual autonomy and the democratic ideal.” At the same time notion of man existing in a continuum of linear development is mingled with a contrary pull in the opposite direction – unspoilt savage nature, primitive races, anarchic and uncivilized forces, hostile, irrational, disordered, fearsome and destructive energies. (Bertlsen650).

This way of reading the book finds Africa as a country that is an untamed, barbaric country, threading and uncivilized:
---quintessentially savage, a symbol of uncontrollable energy, a collection of
dark, extreme forces that are constantly threatening to run out of control, to
reassert themselves and claim some primitive ascendancy. (Bertelsen657)

Lessing’s early experiences of a racist Africa colour her novels, as it is
inevitable that they should. Her increasing concern with disorder, disintegration and doom can all be traced back to it. She gives an account of
her move to London in the post-war era In Pursuit of the English and in The
Four-Gated City which makes it clear how much of an outsider she felt there.
That is when she wrote that Africa belongs to the blacks. At the same time she
felt it to be more of a home to her than England was, which the expatriates
designate as “Home.”

In her early novel The Grass is Singing she names the part of the country
where she localized her book as Zambesia. In this book she tries to resolve all
contradictions so that the settler and the native may to understand one another
and live in harmony with each other:

…the important thing, the thing that really mattered was to understand the
background, the circumstances, the characters of Dick and Mary, the pattern
of their lives.(23)

On the other hand there is the strictly colonial mentality. The newly-
arrived Tony is given the imprison of a unified British community, “belike us
or get out.” There is the doctrine:

Thou shalt not let your fellow whites sink lower than a certain point because
if you do the nigger will see that he is as good as you.(TGS210)

This internal difference between the colonizer and the colonized has
been presented by her with true author-like detachment, though she does not
sympathise with it. What is important is that in that colonial socio-economic
set up both the attitudes existed, both were valid, and both have been
presented by her. The latter attitude was unsympathetic to her as it was not only partisan and racist, but also because in nipped in the bad all possibilities of individualization in those who were being work upon as an inferior race merely because they were lacking in what their masters regarded as “progress,” where as the very concept is a debatable one.

It was an inherent belief that the colonized was definitely inferior to the colonizer. This is the typical imperialistic stand point. It strove towards effectively silencing the post-colonial voice. Needless to say, Doris Lessing’s voice was most emphatically one such voice. She challenged the imperialistic standpoint. In her non-fictional work *African Laughter* there is a most relevant remark in the opening section *A Little History*:

> The hearts of innumerable men and women responded with idealistic fervour to his (Ceil Rhodes’) clarion, because it went without saying that it would be good for Africa, or for anywhere else, to be made British. Having taken the best land for themselves, and set up an efficient machinery, of domination, the British in southern Rhodesia were able to persuade themselves - as is common among conquerors - that the conquered were inferior, that white tutelage was to their advantage, that they were bound to be grateful recipients of a superior civilization. (3-4)

The very terminology applied to the natives was such as was meant to present them as beasts – a dehumanizing terminology. Phrases like “breeding swarms,” “reptilian motions,” “stink of the native quarter” etc. abound in all references to them. Fanon writes of the way an African responded to these descriptions – it was with an inward laughter:

> For he knows he is not an animal, and it is precisely at the moment he realizes his humanity that he begins to sharpen his weapons with which to secure his victory. (33)
It was in this world that Lessing was brought up. It was a world of exploitation, of snobbery, of exclusiveness, of racialism. Her sympathies were with the exploited. So in that small colonial world, a home from home, she felt an outsider, isolated and excluded. Time and again in her novels these feelings have been expressed. For example, in *The Grass is Singing* there is the character of Mary who is essentially a product of this anomalous environment:

Mary’s personality was determined by her upbringing, the poverty of the family, their situation, emotional and economic. (131)

On one hand she is obsessed with the natives, and on the other she is concerned with her role as a colonial. Her desire for Moses is but an expression of this tension in her, since Moses is a native who works for the Tuners. Her private self was schizophrenic – the conforming colonial self on one hand and the rebellious self that sympathized with the natives the other. The influence of Freud is quite a clear – cut one in this context.

The patriarchal standards of her society compels her to respect men. Here Lessing’s feminist tendencies also come to the surface. In order to respect herself Mary must respect her man:

when she saw him weak and goal-less she hated him and the hatred turned upon herself...How can people be born without that streak of determination, that bit of iron that clamped the personality together? Hopeless, Decent, nice, doomed. (TGS168)

Her relationship with Moses, that victim of racialism and colonization, is quite typical of Lessing’s feminism as well her anti-racialism and post-colonialism. She sees him bathing at a pool and this:

..jerked her clean out of her apathy for the first time in months, seeing the ground she walked on, feeling the hot on her neck. (TGS177)
This scene has been compared with a certain scene in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and Lessing had acknowledged the influence in an interview. This effectively brings together the socio-economic as well as the literary influence of both contemporary England and Africa.

Her joining the communist party is also reflected in her works. She had done this while in Rhodesia, and in *African Laughter* she writes about Capricorn, which was not a political party but comprised a group of individuals who deplored racialism and suggested different methods to overcome the colour bar. She decides that there is no real cp there in Rhodesia. She writes:

> If you are living in a country which is stifling, backward and provincial, and you are a lively idealistic person, you need something to buoy you up… your neighbours think you are mad and treacherous Kaffir-lover but in other part of the world you have friends….No one should laugh at this, or think it childish who has not lived in a backwater full of neurotic and bigoted racists. (TGNB313)

But, as she herself admits again that in her country whites can at times sit around the same table with blacks. That is however, only the outward show. Words and actions reveal gust the opposite.

Another burning issue of the time was voting rights. The politicians were hungry for votes but it was doubtful whether privilege to vote will be extended to the blacks. In Africa voting rights was the very symbol of equality however tarnished it might have become in other countries. Lessing was fully alive to the issues involved. Entities like democracy, liberty, individual rights were being threatened by poverty in a world that spent money on materials of deference rather than on social development like abolishing hunger and disease.
This is what made Lessing admit in *Going Home* that she would not have come to going the communist party if her experience of apartheid (a world not them invented) had not been so bitter in a racialist Africa. It has often been said that her dreams of liberty had been mostly fostered by all the open space available in Africa. In this novel one of her characters says:

> When the world’s filled up, we’ll have to get hold of a star. Any star. Venus or Mars. Get hold of it and leave it empty. Man needs an empty space somewhere for his spirit to rest in. (12)

Lessing, as a result of the influence of Freud and Jung, looked upon madness as a loss of contact with reality. Reality for her did not mean merely the geographical reality of the environment surrounding one but also the socio-economic reality. Martha in Martha Quest, Anna or Ella in The Golden Notebook, Kate in The Summer Before the Dark and the narrator in Memories of a Survivor undergo many. Social and psychological pressures brought about by their socio-economic surroundings. It is true that the experiences they pass through bring new Understandings and new insights to them but they also aim at a new re-orientation with their society and other surroundings that the familial and social pressures bring to bear upon them.

It is to be seen, thus, that Doris Lessing was very much a product of her environment, and this was an environment far more complex than is commonly realized. The colonial set-up was there, which demanded conformity, the English upbringing or in other words “home culture” was there, and racialist mentality was there. In addition there was the socio-economic background of the Dark Continent was there in all its beauty as well as terror added to this was the perpetual feeling of being an outsider, of not belonging anywhere. The only ambience that could really envelop her was that of literature. Though an
expatriate, she was an avid reader and as such belonged to the community of the well read and the cultured. This is what will be studied now.

**The Literary Background**

The literary scene of Lessing’s time, like the socio-political one, was variegated and complex. She began with an Edwardian background and ended with a post war II one—a world of difference. In her young age she saw the experimentation of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce and ended with the coming of metafiction. There have been more changes in her own lifetime than in any other eight decades in any other century. This change is naturally reflected in the subject-matter and the technique of her own novels.

In Lawrence one can see the inner, intangible but strong integrity is prized over everything else. The old values that went to the building of character disappear and so does that of plot. Characters are now seen from a different perspective, not as firm and stable realities but as wavering in their outlines yet substantial in their integrity. In keeping with their disjointed quality the plot also becomes episodic and disjointed. He had said, “Tell Arnold Bennett that all rules of construction hold good only for novels which are copies of other novels”. (Ford, Boris89)

The major novels of Lawrence bear out this statement, particularly *Women in Love*. This is a novel that shows one character’s determination to dominate another but there were other preoccupations in Lawrence as well. Rootlessness is for him not a weakness but a brave recognition of a man’s own predicament in the world:
It is our being cut off that is our ailment, and out of this ailment everything bad arises….one has no real human relations –that is so devastating. (Ford, Boris-91)

Lessing’s own attitude reflects exactly this –recognition of her own feeling of being an outsider together with a determination to belong –to a human being, to a society, to a country.

After this came novelists like Aldous Huxley, L. H. Myers, J.C. Powys and Joyee Carey in the middle of the century. Each of them is so different from the others that it is difficult to say anything in general about the novel of this time. None of them is an experimenter like Joyce. All of them give importance to the narrative element and characterization. L.H. Myers in “The Root and the Flower” (1935) shows himself as interested in human personality. Powys’s response to life is especially vivid and his response to nature is quite poetic, like that of Lawrence and Hardy Carey is a writer in the traditional manner. His novels have a loose, episodic structure and very concrete character portrayal as in Dickens. His chronicle novels try to give a sense of continuity very much as Galsworthy does, in a traditional manner. John Holloway has very pertinently observed in this connection:

> It is what makes him belong to the period… for this, it will be seen, turns out to be a period when the cosmopolitan influence has spent itself and English writers are resuming certain-for a time neglected – links with the native past. (Ford, Boris93)

Carey in his political novels like “Prison of Grace,” (1952) and “Except the Lord” (1953) shows affinities with wells. His novels, like those of Doris Lessing herself, show how human beings live and thrive in their relationships with each other, as Marry and Anna do in the first “Free woman” section of “The Golden Notebook.”
This is the picture of the mid-century literary scene. What happens after this is far more complex. In categorizing the novelists of the post-war II generation Gilbert Phelps divides them into four distinct categories. This is how he puts it:

The survivors of the thirties (that is, writers who were already in the forefront of the literary scene between the wars; novelists who were writing during the same period, but who either did not achieve maturity or failed to gain full recognition until after the second World War; the so-called “Angry young Men” or those related to them in theme or approach; and (obviously a particularly amorphous grouping) those writes who have also achieved considerable reputation in the period under consideration but have little in common with any of the other categories. (Ford, Boris 490)

According to him the writers of the first group are those who had found it difficult to adjust themselves to the new conditions after the Second World War. The socio-economic background had changed so drastically that, as writers, they found it difficult to portray the new kind of life in their novels. It was an alien world for them. The mentality has been summed up most graphically by Cyril Connolly:

It is closing time in the gardens of the West and from now on an artist will be judged only by the resonance of his solitude or the quality of his despair.
(Ford, Boris 491)

He puts Rex Warner, Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, Evelyn Waugh, Joyce Carey and Graham Greene within this group. They are all powerful and influential writers, but they all have a old-world flavour, whether it is in their character- depiction or picture of society. It has to be remembered that Virginia Woolf’s last novel, *Between The Acts* was published in’41 It was daringly innovative in its narrative structure, but it failed to catch the post war
flavour. So did Huxley’s “the Island” whereas Greene in his novels went in for a religiousness that gave them depth and universality, but did not reflect the spirit of the age. Evelyn Waugh, very much like Greene in his attitude towards life and morals, faces the same problem. Comparing the two, AC. Capey says:

It Greene’s World is also a Catholic world, it encompasses more of the world to justify the assumption; and the problems. Set… are more searching. Greene at his best can show something of the grandeur underlying the sorriest things. (Ford, Boris495)

Ivy Compton-Burnett, L.P. Hartley, Anthony Powell, C.P. Snow and Joyce Carey are the novelists of the second group. Their achievements vary in each individual case, yet they have all established their reputations, in the post-war world, on a firm basis. They have all had definite contributions to make this age and society. Phelps however, is reluctant to give any of them status of a major novelist, one who has a “growing point” in the tradition of English novel.

Ivy Compton-Burnett is the most important writer of this group. Her field is an old one, a passé, for the post war generation, for she deals with the upper middle class of the Edwardian era. This is the world she knows intimately and feels confident in depicting. She says quite frankly:

I do not feel that I have any real organic knowledge later than 1910. I should not write of later times with enough grasp or confidence. (Ford, Boris497)

She was a politic writer and wrote mainly domestic novels, as is apparent from the titles, “A House and Its Head” (1935), “Parents and Children” (1941), “Elders and Betters” (1944). Thus she depicts a narrow, passed out, extremely limited, world, but as she deals with perennial issues like human relationships she gained great popularity.
Anthony Powell and C.P. Snow, both wrote long sequence novels. Powell’s sequence, named “The Music of Time” (1952-68) contains nine novels. The books resemble each other in every respect, plot, character, location and attitude. C.P. Snow’s sequence has far more depth of vision:

Each novel is a panorama of moral attitudes and social behavior, invariably heightened by a crisis within a closed society. (Ford, Boris 504)

A about Joyce Carey, another important novelist of this group, enough has already been said in the foregoing pages.

It is Gilbert Phelps’s third group of writers that is of special interest in the present instance, for it is in this group that he places Doris Lessing. It is a group of writers who where children or adolescents in the period between the wars. These writers worked in a far lower level of achievement and within far narrower limits but were able to catch and successfully transmit the typical mood of the times. This was a mood of discontent, of anger, that earned these men the label of The Angry Young Men, which was taken from the little of the most successful play of the time, John Osborne’s “Look Back in Anger,” produced in 1936. So successfully did the play voice the mood of the time that the name at once became symptomatic of the prevailing attitude. The label was applied to a group of writers of varying talents and Kenneth Allsop tried to analyse the attitude of the group:

They are all, in differing degrees and for different reasons, dissentents. I use that word in preference to dissenters because that implies an organized bloc separation from the Establishment, whereas dissentience has a more modulated meaning—more to disagree with majority sentiments and opinions. (Ford, Boris 509)
The writers who come within this group are Kingsley Amis, John Wain, John Braine, Alan Sillitoe, and, of course our author, Doris Lessing. Kingsley Amis’s “Lucky Jim” (1954) was a pointer more direction than one, for not only was it an “angry” novel, but it was a campus novel. According to many critics it is the first campus novel, which is not actually the case, since that distinction goes to “The Masters” by C.P. Snow. Amis explores the hypocrisies of life in this novel.

John Wain’s “Hurry on Down” expresses one particular aspect of the disillusionment of the post-war generation. The protagonist Charles Lumley wants on one hand to stand aloof from society but at the same time wants to belong to it, provided he does not have to commit himself to any responsible position in it. This is a paradoxical situation, but Lumley does find a partial different of it:

Neutral; he had found it at last. The running fight between himself and society had ended in a draw. (Ford, Boris 510)

This expressed one aspect of the political disillusionment of the angry generation whereas John Braine’s “Room at the Top” (1957) expressed another aspect of it. The hero Joe Lampton is a product of the welfare state that offered security and opportunities for individual improvement but no real political system and offers a very superficial moral code.

These writers were all emotionally involved in the values they castigated or the ones they propagated. Consequently they lacked in artistic detachment and were too emphatic:

The fifties were in fact a decade in which the confusion of firm values encouraged the literary gimmick, self advertisement, and manifestoes of self-genius. (Ford, Boris 511)
These writers all emphatically rejected what they called “fine writing.” But they had little to offer in its place. The standard of their own writing was quite low, it did not invite comparison with those of earlier writers. Most of the tome they contained flaws of structure or of style what, in an earlier age, would have been condemned as, at worst, incapacity, or, at the best, as laziness. The same goes for moral values. John Wain, for example, said that the point of “Hurry on Down” was something to do with goodness,” but this is not strongly enough expressed, it is too vague and weak to be really effective. The moral standpoint for example of Arnold Bennet or Lawrence is never in any doubt, it is always clearly evident. This is not the case with these writers. Their stand point, at the best, is vague and weak. One sometimes wonders what exactly it is. This makes for a lack of depth in their writing which is not desirable in the works of any writer who wants to be taken seriously. Even a comic writer, if he has sufficient power, like David Lodge, can be taken seriously.

William Golding, Muriel Spark, Lawrence Durrell and Angus Wilson belong to the fourth group of novelists as given by Phelps. This group, as he himself says, is an “amorphous” one and those novelists who cannot be put inside any of the three preceding groups have been put inside it. There is hardly anything that they have in common except the fact that they all write novels. Each of them is distinctly different from the others, with different sympathies and loyalties as persons, and as artists, their subject-matters as well as the techniques they employ vary widely. Golding is a novelist of undoubted narrative skill. His most popular book, The Lord of the Flies is a work that inspires respect:
There can, indeed, be no doubt that it is a distinguished and beautifully modulated piece of narrative, a brilliant reconstruction for our times, at an adult and sophisticated level, of R.M. Ballantyne’s famous adventure book for boys, *Coral Island*…The irony of the contrast is reinforced by the fact that the three main characters have the same name as Ballantyne’s young heroes. (Ford, Boris522)

It is, however, unlike Ballantyne’s book, eminently not a book for young boys. The presence of evil is innate in man’s nature-this is the theme of the book. It is also the theme that is recurrent and ever-present in Golding. He is obsessed with the problem of evil in man, very much as a tragedian is, and harps upon it in book after book. But the problem with Golding is that there is no hope held out of purgation as in Greek tragedies or of the restoration of moral order as at the end of Elizabethan and tragedies. His novels cannot even hold out the positive implications that are inherent in Christianity. Religion talks about the Fall and Original Sin, but also talks about the reality of Redemption though grace and also through the sacrifice of Christ. Golding does not negate this possibility, but also persistently implies that the power of evil that is inherent in man is far too strong for him to overcome and seek salvation. It is, philosophically speaking, a very dark picture of man’s nature and of the world that he presents. A. C. Capey says about his work:

> Adult civilization, Golding implies, has nothing to offer to these children but subjection to itself, nothing nutritive or real. (Ford, Boris 523)

This sentence refers to *The Lord of the Flies* but it is graphically true of all Golding’s work as a whole. It in the above sentence “men” is substituted for “children” then it will be true of the entire work of this novelist.
As it has already been pointed out these writers are all very different from each other and there is hardly anything that can be said of them as a whole and it is doubtful if any of them had influenced Lessing to any remarkable degree. Indeed by the sixties she had become set in her ways and had already published *The Golden Notebook*. It is perfectly true that she was aware of what was happening in the literary scenario, she was also aware of meta-fiction or the anti-novel but it is doubtful how much she allowed herself to be influenced by them. Writers like John Fowles, Malcolm Bradbury, Fay Weldone, David Lodge and others were producing works of great importance and she was fully aware of them. This is apparent from her later non-fictional works, interviews etc. but it is not important for us because it is quite clear that she was not influenced by them. David Lodge puts the situation of the present novelist thus:

The anonymous narrator is sitting in some vague, murky space, whose limits he can neither see nor touch, while dimly perceived figures, some of whom seem to be characters form Beckett’s early novels, move around him…where is he? It could be hell. It could be senility It could be the mind of a writer who has to go on writing though he has nothing to say, because these is nothing worth saying any more about the human condition. (221)

This is exactly the condition of Anna Wulf of *The Golden Notebook*. So Doris Lessing has, in spite of having a colonial education, kept in the forefront of the present mood of metafiction.

**Biography and the Sensibility of Doris Lessing.**

“No man is an island,” it has been said. But Doris Lessing came as near to it as is possible in the modern world where almost every place is a
global village. But it is true that she felt isolated, felt herself to be an outsider, rootless individual.

She was born of British points in Persia in 1919 and was taken to southern Rhodesia which has now come to be known as Zimbabwe, when she was only five. She had a blissful childhood there in a large farm till 1949. Her father’s experiences of the First World War had been quote bitter ones since his leg had to be amputated, and he had also, like so many soldiers in that war, undergone a massive dose of shell-shock. He was no longer the man he had been and much of the active work fell on the shoulders of her mother. She was a definitely capable, but over-burdened and harassed woman, worried always about economical and financial matters of running a big farm almost single-handed. Doris Lessing wrote thus about her father in a non-fictional work:

He was an ill, irritable, abstracted hypochondriac. His leg was cut off at mid-thigh, he was shell-shocked, very ill for many months, with a prolonged depression afterwards….His childhood and young man’s memories, kept fluid, were added to, grew, as living memories do. But his war memories were congealed in stories that he told again and with the same words and gestures, in stereotyped phrases” (11)

Far more overwhelming was the personality of her mother who was a dynamic, extremely strong minded woman. She comes again and again in her works, all of which are largely autobiographical. She is presented in Children of Violence as Martha Quest’s domineering mother, managing her life, benevolent, but never allowing her, easily, to have her own way, from the way she should dress to the people she should mix with. Martha’s life is a continual struggle with her. Much later, in The Four-Gated City she presents her as
a middle-aged woman, thickened and slowed, with the face of a middle-aged woman. An anxious face, a face set to endure, to hold on, - there was such pain in this vision, such hurt, and she heard herself crying in pain. (62)

This is also the picture we get in Martha Quest:

Martha’s mother, Mrs. Quest, is depicted as a frustrated middle-aged woman living a traditional married life, attempting to compensate for her disappointments by domineering over her family and especially her daughter. (M.Rambhau Badode 42)

The image of her mother dominated Lessing’s whole life. As early as in Martha Quest she had apotheosized her into a goddess-figure who is not entirely benevolent, but is an ambiguous entity:

The eternal mother holding sleep and death in her twin hands like a sweet and poisonous cloud of forgetfulness – that was how she saw her, like a baneful figure in a nightmare in which she herself was caught.(32)

The child Doris ran wild in the fields and hilts of the farm, taking in within herself, absorbing, the spirit of Africa – the beauty of the landscape as well as its primitive, intense quality. This childhood experience coloured her whole life. Again and again, in her works, we find ample evidence of this effluence:

The measure was that experience which was the gift of her solitary childhood on the veldt: that knowledge of something painful and ecstatic, something eternal and fixed, but flowing. It was a sense of movement, of separate things interacting and finally becoming one, but greater – it was this which was her lodestone, even her conscience. (MQ220)

Here in this extract she has taken a philosophical stance, which is not always the case. She presents many faces of Africa in her fiction. There is the familiar Africa:
with the lush, green sap or the dry, hot and barren land, “black-maned with
forest, twitching in the heat,” crickets, snakes, and lizards, mountains with its
uncreatedness. (Kumar Alaka51)

This was home to her, not the far-away mist-bound country that the
colonials called “Home.” So when she wrote her book “Going Home,” it was
not England she called her home: it was Africa, the country which was her
foster–motherland, which nurtured her. In that book she sees it as a country of
infinite possibilities:

a magnificent country, with all its riches in the future. We can dream of
cities and a civilization more beautiful than anything that has been seen in
the world before. (GH14)

Her first novel The grass is singing presents this highly complex picture
of Africa in almost every page. It is as if there was a love-hate relationship
between it and her. This in turn gives rise to a sense of tension in her writing
that has been quite apparent to her critics. Referring to this feature of her
writings Alaka kumar says:

The ambivalences in her response are what result in a creative
tension which makes her both a sensitive and a prolific writer. On the one
hand the lonely mud house in the vast African wilderness signifies for her
the only home she ever had…. On the other hand the ambiguities of her
status cause a rupture that is self–divisive. (54-55)

The loss of the vast African bush land was something she went on
lamenting throughout her life because it meant the loss of her own childhood
self. This was the time when, surrounded by this wonderful countryside, she
read voraciously and her growing acquaintance with the European Masters of
the nineteenth and early twentieth century formed her young and
impressionable and highly sensitive mind. The family’s economic status was
not good, and she had to leave school at the age of fourteen, just when she was
growing out of childhood into adolescence. Thereafter she educated herself.
She spent the time reading the England and the European masters:

For me the highest point of literature was the novel of the nineteenth century,
the work of Tolstoy, Stendhal, Dostoevsky, Balzac, Turgenev, Chekhov.(SPV 6)

The lack of academic education and, what is more, of academic
training, is to be seen later on in her writing. She had an outsider’s detached
view of academic training and wrote in 1971 in the Preface to a later edition
of The Golden Notebook:

After the publication of The Golden Notebook, I made it my business to find
out something about the literary machinery,… I looked at innumerable
examination papers – and couldn’t believe my eyes; sat in on classes for
teaching literature, and couldn’t believe my ears. (17)

This was, as she admits herself, an extreme. But it proves that in this
way also, not having had any academic training, she was essentially an
outsider. The only hopeful aspect of this lack was that she thought it to be “a
lucky escape,” which is not always the case.

In 1938 she got employment in an office and started writing. She got
married the next year and had a son and a daughter, but got divorced after four
years. But her quest for happiness in human relationship had not ended here.
So she got married again to a half-Jewish man, Gottfried Lessing. This
marriage too lasted for four years and produced a son. In 1949 it came to an
end, but she kept on her married surname, till the end.

Then in 1949 she came to England with the manuscript of her first
book, The Grass is Singing. It was published and got instant recognition. Buy
while in England she came to realize, more strongly than ever, how much of
an outsider she was. The colonials called it “Home” but were not home for her. She thought herself a settler, and outsider, in Africa. Here in England she was a colonial, still an outsider; she makes this feeling quite clear in her book *Going Home* where “Home” means Africa. In it she expresses the much-vaunted thought “Home is where the heart is” and says:

But a country also belongs to those who feel at home in it. Perhaps it may be that the love of Africa the country will be strong enough to link people who hate each other now. Perhaps. (10-11)

Later she makes Martha dream of England, but it is not a pleasant dream. It is a dream of a cold, mist-bound country as opposed to the open, sun washed veldt of Africa:

“That country”… was pale, misted, flat: gulls cried like children around violet-coloured shores. She stood on coloured chalky rocks with a bitter sea washing around her feet and smell of salt was strong in her nostrils. (RS84)

After this there was no looking back for her. She continued to write and received award after award. Her best-known works are the two- the *Children of Violence* series and The Golden Notebook. The former took nearly two decades to write, from 1952 to 1969. It has two special appeals for contemporary literature, first of all it is about Africa and secondly because the narrator is a woman. It is here that her feminist sympathies are seen the most clearly. *The Golden Notebook* is a most carefully constructed novel, with as she herself makes clear in the *Preface*, two clear-cut themes. All these aspects will be discussed in the proper place, in the relevant chapters, later. As the genre of science fiction became popular, she experiment with this also, in the series of four novels: *Canopus in Argos: Archives*.

Her career received the highest reward a writer can get, the Nobel Prize for literature, in 2007. After this, little remains to be said. It was the crowning
glory of her long literary career, longer than that of any writer of the twentieth century. She has had a variegated career, for she had been influenced by Marxism, Freudianism and colonialism, but it is a feminist that she fulfilled herself, for she makes that clear ever as late as 1972, in a Preface to a later edition of *The Golden Notebook*:

To get the subject of Women’s Liberation over with – I support it, of course, because women are second-class citizens. (8)
Works Cited


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