Chapter-3

The *Children of Violence* series is Lessing’s first major work. It took her fully two decades to write. Of course she wrote many other works in-between as the following table of the publication of this and other works will show. The series has no less than five full-length novels:

4. *Going Home* – ‘57
5. *Each in his own Wilderness* – ‘59
7. *Landlocked* (Children of Violence, Vol. IV) - ‘65

In this chart only the few novels have been listed. There are innumerable talks, essays and interviews besides them which have not been mentioned here. Even then, this will serve to clarify the fact that the idea of a novel, a series, spanning nearly twenty years is there. This means there is continuity and growth. Her heroine grows as she herself grown in the novel.

In the beginning Martha Quest is an adolescent. She is in quest of an identity for herself. Indeed she is in this quest throughout all the five volumes of the series. Her name itself is an indication. It is an allegorical name, signifying the nature of the person named, Martha signifies the ordinary, homely girl, and her surname Quest indicates her nature, that she is in quest of, in search of, something. In this novel, as indeed in many novels of the twentieth century, it is a quest for her own self, or for her own identity. This
kind of novel indeed, started much before Lessing came on the scene. One of the first of such novels was *The Portrait of a Lady* by Henry James. The difference between James and Lessing, in this case, is that James did not deliberately set to portray a Lady who is in search of an identity for herself, it is the hindsight of literary critics that has endowed her with this quality. In fact, in the book *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* is responsible for this view of Isabel, James’s lady Isabel Archer is not consciously in search of herself either. But Doris Lessing deliberately, consciously, set out to portray Modern Woman in search of her soul. She gives an allegorical name that is indicative of this to her heroine. Throughout the five novels of the series she gradually grows and as she grows she reads many books, joins many political groups and has many lovers and many husbands. Lessing gives all this in painstaking detail:

> She was adolescent, and therefore bound to be unhappy; British, and therefore unhappy and defensive; in the fourth decade of the twentieth century; and therefore inescapably be set with problems of race and class, female, and obliged to repudiate the shackled women of the past. (MQ20)

The adults who surround her tell her many stories, some legendary and some from real life, some horrendous, some humorous, some entertaining and some instructive. All of these stories are automatically, instinctively told by women to young girls and other women. But Martha is not frightened or even alarmed. She has read Havelock Ellis. Now, Ellis’s views on sex were anything but traditional, and anathema to the elder generation of women, “aunties,” who were all white, British and middle class. It was a generation that was conventional and a repressed generation, with a fully Edwardian upbringing. Ellis’s ideas would naturally shock them. Martha wants to shock
them and it is with this intention that she parades her newly-acquired knowledge before these ladies.

Lessing gives instances of male chauvinism throughout the series. Mrs. Quest and her Afrikaner neighbour Mrs. Van Rensberg gossip about domestic matters their children, their native servants, their household trials tribulations. Their husbands do not pay them any attention. It is not that they deliberately ignore or neglect the wives, it goes far deeper than that. It is as if they are just not aware of them, as if they inhabit different world. They sit at the other end of the verandah, with their backs turned on these women and talk about their own concerns their office work, the “native problem,” politics etc. Martha’s position is between the two, she belongs neither to the women’s group, nor to that of the men. She is like an observer. She, with the detachment of an impartial observer, says that they have been saying the same things ever since she could remember.

Here she is shown as an outsider and yet not totally an outsider, for she is familiar with both the women’s gossip and that of men, for she has been listening to both ever since her childhood. From the conversation she hears, has been hearing since her childhood, she becomes aware of the two widely different worlds. On the one hand there is the world of the colonials and on the other is the world of the natives, on one there is the world of women, and on the other that of men, on one there is the world of the Africans and on the other that of the whites. It was a world full of dichotomies and many complexities, an extremely bewildering world, full of contradictions. Writing about her attitude to the war in the essay Doris Lessing’s *Great Escape* the critic Karen Schneider says of the adolescent Martha:
….she is an unwilling and helpless participant in life as they tell it, with its over-determined but seemingly natural, unbridgeable divisions by gender, class and race…..stories of romance, the family, state politics and the past – all filtered through an unquestioned assumption of essential division between male and female, black and white, rich and poor. (110)

Martha was being, in other words, gradually and almost unawares, slowly indoctrinated, being made fit for the society she had to live in, for marriage, for motherland. But she is a rebel, she refuses to acquiesce unquestioningly to what life in this world demands of her, to what society demands of her. She is in need of asserting herself to escape the fate apparently prescribed for her. But she cannot possibly escape it till she accepts the ambiguities of her own desires and needs. This is what she tries to do throughout the novel. It is a process that is, culturally productive and develops many different aspects of her personality. In this context Lessing uses the highly telling phrase “ambiguities of complicity” to describe the theme of Kurt Vonnegurt’s *Mother Night*. Later also, in *The Golden Notebook* one finds the same phenomenon when Anna Wulf finds that in spite of her attitude to her lover and to sex, she all the same wants to submit to his caresses. She is bewildered by it:

I wanted, then, for him to put his arms up around my neck. I lay, fighting not to touch him…My brain blacked out with exhaustion, and while it did, the pain of pity took me over and I cradled him in my arms, knowing it was a betrayal. ( TGNB 555)

Since Martha is but a human being, and this is an eminently human trait, she faces it throughout her life. She thinks it is something peculiar to her, but she does not understand that it is a quality she shares with the rest of humanity: this conflict between reason and passion. It had been expressed
most memorably by a sixteenth century poet. The dramatist, William Shakespeare in his play *Hamlet* has written these lines that are expressive of man’s state:

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what piece of work is a man ,how noble is reason, how infinite in faculties ,in form and moving how express and admirable in action how like an angel ,in apprehension how like a god : the beauty of world, the paragon of animals and yet, to me…Man delights not me.(Act ii, scene ii-13 )

This is the case with Martha Quest in her life-story, and the self-division mentioned in the passage quoted above becomes literally true for her when she becomes schizophrenic later on in her life. But, by then, of course, her quest is nearing the end.

Martha, then, grows up as a white woman in Africa-but there are two sides to this experience as she was the first to realize. This is out of Lessing’s own colonial experience:

She has said that to be an African, growing up in that vast land, is to be freer than an Englishwoman, a Virginia Woolf, enwebbed in custom and the city. (APM146)

This is perfectly true, but one must not forget that being an African also means participation in a patriarchal and hierarchical social structure. Within this social structure are certain accepted norms, certain “received truths,” Some of them, for example, are these: white men dominate everyone, including white women, and white women dominate all blacks. There is for example a woman, Myra Maynard, the wife of a powerful judge, who exercises considerable power, though in a covert over colonial matters politically, and quite openly over her “Kaffirs” in domestic matters. It is nothing surprising. Even if one
wants to be progressive in a colony, first and foremost one will have to grapple with the problem of the “natives” and the colonists, in this case the problem of the white and the black or the colored. For Martha the problem becomes more complicated, for black women have a double function, a symbolic one. There is no kind of mutuality, no scope of friendship and understanding, between black women and white. There may be fitful mutual understanding or caring, but no permanent ones. They are the living example of the rights and privileges she must claim, the bondages she must break of male domination over female, of white domination over the black. It is when she is giving birth to her child in the down’s best maternity hospital that Martha becomes conscious of this:

Martha tensed and groaned, and the native woman raised her head, looked over, and smiled encouragement...As a fresh pain came, she said “Let the baby come, let the baby come, let the baby come.” It was a croon, a nurse’s song...Martha let the cold knot of determination loosen, she let herself go, she her mind go dark into the pain....Suddenly... Martha looked and saw that the native woman was on her knees with the scrubbing brush.

(APM146)

Martha grows in the books and her life is like a feminist analysis is of the white woman’s life which, Lessing knows, cannot be included in any feminist programme. It is not a public affair. Instead of it must be worked out by her personally, individually. So she goes on in a voyage of self-discovery and discovery of various social, moral and psychological factors that help her to survive. She develops a detached, critical self that supports her in all situations. It is an alter-ego that she calls as the watcher, that helps her to keep her consciousness alert by indulging in seeing her own foibles as well as those of others in the clear light of reason. When she gets married for the first time in A Proper Marriage she presents a submissive, conventional front, and she
takes “every step into bondage with affectionate applause for Douglas” (279), yet even then this inner critical self of hers will not let rest, it is “secretly and uneasily curious.” This inner Watcher indulges in mocking self-derision and yet it has the positive function of guarding her against deception and bad faith. It helps her to criticize and not to accept, the vagaries and domination of her husband, the male chauvinism against which she, and the other heroines of Lessing, fought all her life. Though everyone, her friends and neighbours and acquaintances, try to persuade her to say “properly married,” she refuses to conform with social acceptability and walks out on her husband Douglas when his dominating nature becomes utterly unacceptable to her. She gives up the power, money, comfort and security of marriage. She even gives up her daughter, to whom she is most intensely attached. A patriarchal society supports Douglas in his extra-marital affairs because he abides by the unspoken rules laid down by society in these matters, but it turns a blind eye to her pain over Caroline. She has come to dislike her husband now, particularly his caresses and wants to leave him. But even in her dislike she is still, out of habit, a conventional wife in outward appearance, whatever might be there inside her mind:

It was a moment when the hatred between them shocked and dismayed them both.“Well, perhaps it’s just as well we’ll – have a break for a few weeks, eh, Matty”? He came over and stood a few inches from her, smiling in appeal .She at once responded by rising and kissing him – but on the cheek, her lips, which had intended to meet his, instinctively moved past in revulsion. This revulsion frightened her so much that she flung her arms about him and warmly embraced him. The act of love immediately followed.(APM279)
This may surprise us. How does Lessing portray desire and hatred reigning in one heart at one and the same time? But actually it is not surprising. Lessing is expressing a basic symptom of the human heart, it can hate and love at the same time. Shakespeare had expressed, in sonnet after sonnet, his desire for the dark Lady and his hatred for her at one and the same time. So here is Martha hating her faithless husband yet not able to resist him. Later on, living in a patriarchal society, she will go to London and there refuse Jack who had once been her lover, and, what is far more serious, she will have to refuse Dr. Lamb, the psychiatrist.

But refusal means there must be something to refuse. The modern age advocates an egocentricism that means, beyond self-sufficiency, a free and autonomous ego. This kind of self-sufficiency however, along with the self analysis it implies, means the adoption of a solitary life. If one is surrounded by people one automatically leans upon and depends upon them. Independence can be developed only in solitude. Martha’s childhood in the African countryside had been a solitary one, so she was prepared for it. She knows that after she has left her husband she will be equally solitary, she is quite practical about it. Before she leaves her husband she broods over it, that “there was no woman she had ever met she could model on” (APM274). Paradoxically enough, having no one model herself on, she turns to narcissism. She knows enough of psychology to know that narcissism meant a denial of the outer world, a withdrawal into oneself that was looked upon as a psychological version, not as self-sufficiency. She goes to a Communist meeting and there she looks at a woman who has become a member recently:

She’s what I used to be; she looks at herself in the looking glass, and she sees how her face body from a sort of painted shell, and she adores herself,
but she is waiting for a pair of eyes to melt the paint and shoot through into
the dark inside. (RS114)

One can sense that, behind all the ratiocination, this is the very
beginning of the schizophrenia that will finally overtake her. It is a mental
condition to which her husband’s selfishness and infidelity has driven her.
George Eliot had said that every private life has been determined by a wider
public life. This is what Marxism also taught. In this case the wider public life
means the life of the two World Wars, colonialism, the Spanish Civil War, the
cold war and all the evils that are the product of male domination. It is a world
of violence and Martha is but one of the children of this violence. So,
analyzing herself she comes to the conclusion that in her heart of hearts she
wants to strike out at this violent world, the world which male egotism has
brought to this pass.

Martha’s mentality at this time is a mixture of feminism, Freudianism and
Marxism. Like Freud, Lessing believes that we can never wholly purge the past
and like Marx she believes that history and society as an entirety influences
individual men as well as whole groups of men. But, over and above all these
yet encompassing and containing all these ideas, is the mentality of a feminist
who believes in overthrowing the domination of men, in bringing forth the
personality of women in its entirety. That is why Martha’s leaving her husband
is such an important action. It defies society and asserts her individual self.
Judging and weighing all this. Catharine R. Stimpson has some impor-
tant observations to make:

It Martha rejects the nuclear family, she enters an extended family in which
cords of choice replace those of blood and law. If she refuses biological
mothering, she becomes a surrogate parent. Lessing is too flexible to
feminize wholly the nurturing role and evoke the spirit of a Great Mother to rationalize women as mothers. (246-47)

But when this critic says that Doris Lessing is too flexible she is not quite right. What actually happens is that Lessing is too much a devoted feminist to see a woman only as a mother. She sees her as a whole human being, of which motherhood is only one aspect. This is feminism at its truest. It is this feminism that triumphs in her heroines, that challenges make chauvinism at all levels and emerges covered with glory.

Martha’s disillusionment with the political parties is also enlightening. At first she thinks of the party as an extension of her family. It is a world of incompetent, selfish men, but it is a world she has chosen herself, whereas one does not choose one’s family but is born into it. Then, gradually, subtly, disillusionment sets in as Martha sees the working of the party that only highlights the incompetence and selfishness of the men in the party. There is, she discovers, not even one man who has the ideals of the party at heart and is powerfully but selflessly devoted to the cause. Anton is a good organizer, but he does not have the inner energy, or devotion, or even a sense of humour to put things against a proper perspective. In this context Charlotte Bronte is the precursor of Lessing. Bronte’s heroine Shirley Keeldar cries out against sectarianism very much as Martha does against party politics:

Must I listen coolly to downright nonsense.? No. . . .all that cant about soldiers and persons is most offensive. . . .All ridiculous, irrational crying up of one’s class, whether the same aristocrat or democrat. all howling down of another class, whether clerical or military – all exacting injustice to individuals, whether monarch or mendicant – is really sickening to me: all arraying of ranks against ranks, all party hatreds, all tyrannies disguised as liberties, I reject and wash my hands of. (Bronte Charlotte356)
This, indeed, seems to be Martha speaking. All and every word of this passage could have easily been written by Lessing.

So far as love or sex or marital life goes, here also it is found that Martha has been indoctrinated in various ways by various institutions and she wants to achieve a free self. From science she has learnt how a husband and wife find fulfillment and satisfaction. This, she finds out, is not true, it is a myth. From romantic poetry she has learnt all about idealistic love. In *A Proper Marriage* she thinks of how “love lay like a mirage through the golden gates of sex” (26) A Patriarchal society has taught her how complaint wife in bed as well as outside it. All these, she finds, are myths. All is but a sham. Life with Thomas is a revelation for her, for he is a warmhearted and generous person, allowing her quite a lot of individual freedom in domestic life as well as in her love-life.

In this context personality of Mrs. Van and the influence she exercised on Martha in Zambesia is important. Mrs. Van was a very intelligent and sensitive woman. She had tutored Martha to the best of her considerable abilities. She was no rebel. She had willingly accepted the ruling of the society that surrounded her. Her husband fails to gratify her yet she is a good wife to him and a good mother to her children. Nevertheless, the memory of her wedding night as given by Lessing is a poignant one:

> Cold tears had rundown over her cheeks all night...(an) image....filled the girl’s mind through those long hours while she lay awake by a man who also lay awake, waiting for her to turn to him. The image was of something deep. Soft, dark and vulnerable, and of a very sharp sword stabbing into it, again and again. (RS204)

This is Doris Lessing’s feminism portraying a girl acquiescent because she must acquiesce in a male-dominated society, but keeping her individuality
intact and independent in spite of everything. It is significant that Martha, in her rebellious mood, has her first affair with a Polish Jew named Adolf King and he is a man she is not in love with.

The first novel of the series *Martha Quest* thus portrays her attempts to survive at different levels: at the level of a child under parental authority on the veldt, then at the financial level through the job of a typist in the city, at the group level in the club of which she is a member, and at the level of a married girl. This last part is always contrasted with her partner, whether it is an un-loved like King, or her husband. This continued attempt at survival, at self-recognition reveals different aspects of feminism throughout the series.

*A Proper Marriage*, the next novel in the series, continues the struggle on a marital as well as a social level. Here the context of motherhood also comes in. In addition to this there is the far wider world of a society caught within the disintegrating forces of a World War. This general catastrophe also influenced her own individual as well as domestic and marital life.

Her unwanted pregnancy and her unsatisfactory marriage with Douglas Knowell make up the first part of the novel. Her feelings for her husband are a mixture of guilty affection and dislike, for he is eminently not; “that image of a lover that a woman is offered by society and carries with her.” (APM35)

There are many instances of rebellion against this situation. For example Stella Mathews who is almost like a mother to her in this book asks her to have a haircut, but she phrases it in such a way as to provoke-Martha into refusing. She says “it is her duty to her husband to look nice.” In other words she not only knuckles down to the conventions of a male-dominated society, but encourages male chauvinism and nags of Martha to do the same. No wonder Martha protests.
There is ambivalence in her attitude towards her husband. On one hand she dislikes him as she insists on being a unique individual and on the other hand she finds herself wishing for his support in order to achieve an existence independent of him. It is a paradoxical situation. She feels that “the whole graceless affair had nothing to do with what she felt…marriage is only a gigantic social deception.” (APM45)

Her whole situation is enough of a deception and it is aggravated by the fact that in her heart of hearts, in spite of her desire for independence, she actually hankers for male domination:

for some man to arrive in her life, simply her by the hand and lead her off into this new world. But it seemed he did not exist. (APM81)

Her attitude towards her pregnancy is also ambivalent. She dislikes the secrecy and the sickness inherent in it and yet she likes the felling of growth and warmth that is also an in integral part of it. There is a fair with a gigantic Catherine wheel that she can see from her window Lessing develops this wheel into a symbol of her sense of repetition and entrapment. She even wants an abortion. There is a scene with her husband in which she argues that a woman has every right to have an abortion if she wants it and Douglas naturally opposes her. Finally, finding that she is obstinate and is not ready to listen to reason, he tells her that she cannot have an abortion since it is illegal. This, instead of pacifying her, enrages her even more for she at once understands that this:

---anonymous voice of authority is used by men whenever their own personal authority is threatened. She also expressed her anger against a government who presumed to tell women that they should do with their own bodies, it was the final insult to personal liberty. (APM106)
This is the feminist in Lessing speaking. It is not the morality or legality of abortion that is in question, but the feministic principle of it, the curtailing of the individual liberty of women to do what they like with their own bodies.

The second part of the book is devoted to her mother’s plans for the child who has not yet been born. She does not want her mother to have anything to do for it. Finally on the eve of World War II her daughter Eardine is born—another child of violence, since Martha herself born during World War I. In her characteristic way she has an ambivalent attitude towards the child: motherly love and affection for the child and dislike of looking after her on the other. She determines through it all that the best gift she can give to her daughter is freedom. Again, a feminist resolution. She tells her daughter:

Don’t marry young. I’ll stop you marrying young if I have to lock you up.
But I can’t do that…because that would be putting pressure on you and that’s the unforgiveable sin. (APM229)

The fourth part of the novel deals with Martha’s deciding to leave, and then actually leaving, her husband. This she does in order to join party politics. This too is done because she thinks that in doing this she will be able to lead a more meaningful life as a person. She comes into contact with party literature and this opens her eyes to greater “cause.” She discovers an ideal to live for. She comes to believe that her commitment to the “cause” of communism will free her from all domestic and marital responsibilities and duties as well as from all tyrannies of society. When, in order to make her stay with him, Douglas tells him that his mother is coming to persuade her not to leave him, finds that she is frightened:
.....it was not the voice of Douglas, but of society she could see her mother-in-law, her own mother, Mrs. Talbot, the Maynards, massed behinds him. They were all much stronger than she was. (APM340)

All the same, she proves her feministic independence by rejecting male chauvinism leaving her husband. The third novel of the series, continues the theme of feministic independence in a male-dominated society. She thinks that, free of her husband and all domestic responsibilities she will be able at last to lead a life of equality with all as that is the ideal of communism. Yet she feels that she is not a real communist in the truest sense of the word:

There is a type of woman who can never be, as they are likely to put it, “themselves,” with anyone but the man to whom they have permanently or not given their hearts. If the man goes away there is left an empty space filled with shadows. She mourns for the temporary extinct person who brought her “self” to life. She lives with the empty space at her side... unit the next man walks in.( RS46)

But this, as she herself realizes, is a far cry the feminist ideal of independence. In fact it is in flat contradiction of such an ideal.

She develops an ambivalent relationship with the leader, Anton Hesse, a German refugee from Hitler's concentration camps. On one hand his fatherly attitude towards her in telling her to be careful of her health arouses her aggressive self. On the other hand his admission that the problems of women have not been given enough consideration commands her respect. Then she falls ill and their relationship consolidates. She marries him in order to help him in his problem of deportation because of his status as enemy alien. But gradually he becomes a conventional, respectable middle-class citizen instead of the leader as which he had first attracted Martha.
Difference of opinion causes a split within the party. Martha is in for disillusionment. She puts it to herself thus:

Why is it I listen for the echoes of other people in my voice and what I do all the time? The fact is I’m not a person at all; I’m nothing yet – perhaps I never will be. (RS95)

She realizes that she has failed in building a proper feminist ideal of survival in the context of Marxism and the next novel *Land locked* explores another avenue

The fourth novel of the series is *Land locked* (1965). It explores the many different avenues of existing and also managing to continue a feminist ideal of existing, in the context of a war-ridden society. The theme of love is also brought in and also the theme of violence. This latter theme is unavoidable in the context of war which is exclusively the result of male egotism and racial conflict.

This novel deals with the aftermath of the War, the years 1945-49. Martha comes to know much more concretely than before that the problem of survival of an individual, be he male or female is linked with that of surviving during a period of crisis. She is pictured as;“Locked in herself……sticking it out, waiting, keeping herself ready for when life would really begin.” (L 19)

It is from this sense of her being locked within herself that the name of the novel *Land locked* is derived. Her state of mind is depicted through a series of dreams. But, whatever happens, she still relies to find a man. For example, she often dreams of a large house in which she wanders from room to room, but in real life she is looking for a man who would be “like a roof” and identity and unify her fragmented life.
Then she comes into contact with the War at second hand, through her contact with the refuges, like Thomas Stern and Anthen. They too, like her, are misfits in the South African society, and are anxious to settle down in life, with a change for the better. She gets involved with Thomas. She realizes that here for the first time she has come across a man who is deadly serious about his position in life; “would be more serious than anything yet in her life…She was not sure it was what she wanted.” (L 278)

This is always the trouble with her. There is continual Tension in her. She cannot decide anything. Lessing has given her the true feminist spirit of independence on one hand, and on the other she has also made her an impulsive woman, a woman through and through. That is why she needs the support of a man in whatever she does, otherwise she does not feel safe and secure. Yet here, when she meets the ideal man she had been searching for, she is reluctant to submit to him, for fear that she might lose her independence. She does not yet realize the fact that the true feminist ideal visualizes a state of equality, a process of mutual give-and-take in which both the partners gain something and lose something. Lessing tries to reach this ideal again and again, most notably in *The Golden Notebook*, but she can portray it as an essentially impermanent state. Her characters attain it only rarely at times, for a fitful, blissful short time. They do not have the maturity to sustain this state. Martha, at this state, does not have even a glimmer of it. All she thinks of is her own independence and she is ready to pay any price for it. This is an early stage in feminism. It has already been pointed out that Lessing, in spirit, belongs to the second wave of feminism and so does Martha Quest. She does not yet visualize true equality with men. All she can understand is the assertion of own right, at whatever cost to herself. So she sacrifices her own happiness as well as those of others again and again but gains
very little in return. Lessing had understood that independence and gaining one’s own way does not always make for happiness in this life. Experience had taught her this. But Martha has not yet learnt this much-needed lesson.

Anyway, with Thomas Martha, for a time, however short that time might be, achieves an ideal life. Thomas as is not as selfish, as egocentric, as the other men she has, up till now, come across. He is calm, reasonable, and warm-hearted and considerate. It seems as though she can finally settle down happily with him. With Thomas she achieves perfect communion, a communion that demands mutual give and take, mutual sacrifice:

With Thomas, Martha achieves the self-realization for which she has yearned. The intensity of their communion is one of the finest point in the novelistic world of Lessing so far. (M.Rambhau Badode57)

But even with Thomas, in moments of utter bliss, she realizes that she will have to surrender herself, and this is what she is unable to do. The fierce independence of spirit that drives her on and on will not let her give herself up. She realizes that this surrender was what her real self has been demanding from the very beginning, but her feminist urges will not allow her to do:

….her real nature had been put into cold storage for precisely this, but when what she had been waiting for happened at last, then she discovered that creature in her self whom she had cherished in patience fighting and reluctant. (L103)

She keeps on asking herself what will happen if when she loses Thomas. There is a sense of impermanence, of inexorable change, pervading her at this time. This blissful, beautiful and happy state, together with this pervading sense of change, of impermanence, is one that has close parallels with nature, with the change of seasons. This is reflected most artistically, in their surroundings. For Lessing, with the true sensitivity of an artist, has given them a pastoral
environment, or one as near it as one get in modern times. Thomas as is a man who loves nature. He has a nursery of his own. This environment highlights the beauty as well as the impermanent nature of their relationship:

They felt as if they might never see each other again after this afternoon and that while they touched each other, kissed – they held in that moment, everything the other was, had been, ever could be. They felt half-savage with the pain loss. *(L108)*

But, then, Thomas goes to Israel to settle an old score and after he comes back he gets mixed up in a strike by African workers. The strike turns violent. There is panic in the city, and both Thomas and Mr. Quest get killed in the violence. It seems as though Lessing will not let her heroine have peace. She had given Martha happiness, mutual love and mutual adjustment only to snatch it away. So she is once more on her own. She sets out again in search of happiness. It is a case once again of Martha Quest in quest of herself.

This quest however, does not begin at once. Lessing is too much of an artist to tumble in Martha in another man’s bed so soon after she has been so happy with Thomas. She allows her sometime. During this time she is occupying herself by getting Thomas’s manuscript ready for publication. This manuscript contains a mass of information about native life, many Jewish jokes (Thomas was a Jew himself), and reminiscences of his days in Poland.

This book represents considerable progress in Martha’s life. She has been through Communist indoctrination, has found, first, new life in it, and has then been disillusioned by it. She has married a Jew to save him from deportation since Thomas status was that of an “enemy alien,” and found true happiness in this marriage. It looked as if her ship has reached a safe harbour at last. But this was not to be. Lessing does not want her to reach maturity so easily, so the loses
her husband. The next novel, the fourth in the series, The Four-Gated City, is a complex novel with a multiplicity of characters. Not all of these characters are important for us, but, for the sake of convenience, a diagram is given here. (M. Rambhau Badode 63);
*The Four-Gated City* is an ambitious novel. It is constructed in four phases, each phase deals with a particular kind of crisis. Lessing has called it a bildungsroman:

This book is what the Germans call a “Bildungsroman.” We don’t have a word for it. This kind of novel has been out of fashion for some time. This does not mean that there is anything wrong with this kind of novel (655)

Now the idea of bildungsroman has undergone many changed Lessing has adopted Goethe’s idea of the from, that the hero must develop in a perfectly natural and manner of what he is, the hero must be assertive as well as receptive. Actually the term should not be applied to just this one novel, *The Four-Gated City*, but to the entire series because the story of Martha’s growth and development is not confined to this novel alone but to the whole series. We see Martha in this particular novel as already twice-married. So the process of her growth had started in the two previous novels. Why give the title to this one alone? But then, there are many critics who deny her the status of the heroine of a bildungs-roman altogether. Patricia spacks is such a critic. She objects to Martha as the full-fledged heroine of a bildungs-roman because Martha is not an outright rebel at any time:

If Martha Quest, then, figures as a heroine, she must be a heroine of a very peculiar sort. She stands for nothing, defies nothing successfully, cannot endure her condition without self-defeating gestures of escape. She is passive when she should be active, obtuse when she should be perceptive. Her heroism consists merely in her suffering and her rage, not in any hope or promise of effect. (Spacks, Patricia Meyer157)

Different critics thus hold different opinions on the book, but if one takes series as a whole, there is definitely a lot of difference between the fifteen year old girl in the first novel and the old woman whose death is mentioned in a most
casual manner in the Appendix to *The Four-Gated City*. But that is a matter for later consideration, here we are concerned, not with the entire series, but with only one novel in it, the last of them. Goethe had emphasized the organic growth of the protagonist, and this is exactly we find in Martha.

In this novel itself, Phase I deals with a Martha who has come to London. She is unknown there, it is a completely new social environment and she experiments with different levels to which she may, or not, belong. Once more she tries to belong to a group. She joins a group of South African in this effort to belong, to overcome loneliness:

And her heart...well, that was the point, it was always her heart that first fought off the pain of not belonging here, not belonging anywhere, and then resisted, told to be quiet. It quietened and stilled. Her heart as it were came to heel; and after that, the current of her ordinary thought switched off. (TFGC-37)

Here, in this detached frame of mind, she becomes involved with Jack, a South African young man who also has painful memories of his childhood and of his war experiences. These have made him withdraw, like Martha, from all social responsibility and live a life that is centered around irresponsible sexual experiences. In this way he seeks to overcome the “hatred” which his miserable childhood has engendered in him. Involved with Martha, he too discovers, like her, that both love as well as hatred ultimately originate from forces in the human heart that the human heart can control if it has enough of determination. He excitedly reveals this discovery to Martha:

Martha, do you know what I’ve discovered, - making love? I understood what hating is. You say all your life I hate, I love. But then you discover hatred is a sort of wavelength that you can tune into. (TFGC60)
Now this is a characteristic of the Second Wave of Feminism to which Lessing belongs – mutuality. The company of, association with, Martha, has opened the eyes of this lonely young man to the essential truth of his own nature and of human nature itself. This helping of the lover, or rather, the partner, to achieve, to come to, an understanding of his own nature is something that all such unions take to be the ideal, the ultimate achievement of all men and women – self recognition. Martha has been able to achieve this-she has helped another person, her male partner, out of the deep pit of darkness into which he had fallen. The feminist ideal strives towards this, but, needless to say, rarely achieves it.

Her experiences with Jack are very like those that she had with Anton. Ordinary life is seen as a life that is divided into compartments and sexual life is seen as an organized whole. It gives an impression of fullness to both of them. This feeling of wholeness is spread beyond time and space, beyond races and culture, beyond individual and society:

Everything moves together, it is just that moment when everything does move together that makes the gears shift up. Yet people regarded sex as the drainer, the emptier instead of the maker of energy… There was a knowledge that was no part of our culture, hinted at merely; you could come across references. (TFGC64)

She comes to Bloomsbury in search of a job. She feels very constricted in this place. Yet she joins a social life. Lynda is the basis got her life in London and her own family members each fulfil one particular need. She is herself a schizophrenic and Mark is a man who tries to understand life with help of reason. It is as if the Coldridge family, each member of it, holds up in a fragmentary way like a mirror or a fragment of a broken mirror, a part of her own self reflected in it. This family has the quality of solidity which she most urgently needs. But after six months in this secure and solid household,
insecurity comes in when Lynda comes on a visit from mental hospital. Here Martha again comes into contact with insecure relationship within the family. Mark is another person she comes into contact with. He too, like Jack, is a person whom Martha helps to define his attitudes. There is a beautiful symbol that both of them visualize the symbol of a city, symbol of security, of the true inner self, which is surrounded by another, a much poorer city that symbolizes the world outside oneself.

Then Colin, Mark’s brother, flees to Russia and his wife commits suicide and Mark and Martha are left to bring up their son Paul. Martha is bound down by what she dislikes very much and has always wanted to avoid – domestic responsibility. She knows now that she cannot leave. A lot of unpleasant events take place. Mark is converted to Communism. He enters the same environment that Martha had done in the past. The only positive thing that happens towards the end of this phase is that when Mrs. Quest announces her decision to visit Martha in England she once more finds herself fighting her past. This is again her individual self trying to assert itself in a true feminist strength. Her childhood memories, all intimately associated with her mother, are full of pain:

She had been blocking off the pain, and had blocked off half of her life with it. Her memory had gone . . . This being (inner self) moved in and out of the kopje . . . she was swallowed in a wash of hot pain. (TFGC216,232)

She realizes that to achieve true inner identity she will have to get rid of this need to be loved, whether by her mother, or by the men she is continually having relationship with. **Phase II** – This is in continuation with, as indeed a narrative must be, her mental state of the foregoing phase. We see Mark
comforting her but she does not want this. She wants “to stop being this helpless creature who clung and needed.” (TFGC284)

It is 1956 and a new phase begins in Martha’s life. Just as Mark begins a new life so does she. In both their cases, a feeling of pain and of disintegration leads to integration within their individual selves and of each with the other. Mark starts on a grand and laborious project of writing a novel. Martha begins another quest for a new, more complete knowledge of herself. It is truly feminist quest.

This phase does not contain much. It is not so rich in events, relationships, developments and events as the foregoing phase. The most important event in it is the Easter Aldermaston to London Peace March gathering. About eight thousand people come together in a protest march against war. Mark in a characteristically ironic manner, connects to the Defence Estimates for the USA in 1961.

**Phase III** – The most important theme of this phase is the relationship between Lynda and Martha. In this relationship Martha discovers the potentialities, the extra-ordinary qualities of human consciousness. Now Lynda is psychotic. She is schizophrenic and spends half her time in a mental home. Martha finds that she can enter into half-mad world and can establish communication with this girl. She is amazed that this avenue of reaching her inner self had been closed to her for all these day:

She was curious and angry with herself that she had not done this before – good God, this door…had been standing here ready for her to walk in any time she wished. (TFGC498)

She makes experiments with her consciousness, with extrasensory perceptions. She submits to experiments that concentrate physical energy to
produce psychic energy. She sees the half-mad Lynda exploring the walls of her room and muttering “why can’t I get out?” She finds a parallel to this in her mind it is as though, she feels, mentally, that she is in a prison, exploring the confines of her own mind and trying to get out. So instead of ridiculing or pitying Lynda she understands her. In the depths of her own consciousness, she finds, lurks violence and hatred. This region, she finds, is dominated by violence and blood-lust. It is as though it is the spirit of evil incarnate, it is what is otherwise called the Devil. But it is something that she shares with the rest of the human race. She finds sadistic traits in herself as well as masochistic ones. She finds different aspects of her own self: a nazi, a racist etc. All these are but different aspects of hatred. But then she also realizes that hatred itself is part of a totality from which it cannot be separated. This totality is something that contains within itself all contradiction, all opposites. She crises in her own mind:

I am what the human race is. I am “The Germans are the mirror and the catalyst of Europe, and also “Dirty Hun, Filthy Nazi”. Is this what all the books call “the pair of opposites”? Love, hate, black, white, good, bad, man, woman –. (TFGC539)

She reaches a kind of psychological enlightenment by recognizing the existence of this force of evil within herself. She reaches a new level of self-realization. This is a very important point in her life:

I’ve seen the underneath of myself which is not me – any more than my surface is me. I am the watcher, the listener…(TFGC553)

Now Martha decides to go on father in her experimentations with her consciousness. She has seen what has happened to Lynda. Lynda hears voices and sees pictures and is declared to be mad. Martha wants to see how far she can go in this direction. She retreats to Paul’s house. Circumstances propagate a
sense of disintegration outside herself with which she has been so concerned for so long.

This is because the Coldridge house which for ever and ever has been a symbol of safety and security, has to be sold, for various reasons, to be government. In this matter it becomes a symbol of disintegration in society:

…..there seemed to be no centre in the house, nothing to hold together (as there had been once when it was a real family house?…This was the real truth of what went on not only here but everywhere: everything declined and frayed and came- to pieces in one’s hands….a mass of fragments like a smashed mirror, (TFGC553)

Mark, meanwhile has married as is leaving for North Africa with his wife Rita. Martha returns to her sessions. She has not consulted any psychiatrist. She has conducted her experiments on her own. In a truly feministic way, she has asserted her independent spirit in this. She herself is responsible for whatever happens to her.

Her experiments make the psychiatrists realize that schizophrenia is not so much of a sickness as a partial realization of man’s higher faculties. But all this comes in the Appendix. This portion gives a view the future. Here there are documents written between 1995-2000. But before this comes the visionary aspect of Martha. Through mental exercises she has by now developed clairvoyance and has visions of a place that is like an earthly paradise. It is this part of the book that has made the critics trace the influence of mysticism and Sufism in Lessing. This in fact is supported by the passage from a Sufi prophet Idries Shah as the epigraph to the fourth phase of the novel. It is a long passage in which the Sufi follower is writing about extra-sensory perception. He argues that extra-sensory perception is possible with different physical organs and that these organs develop in human beings as the need for them arises. It is the
gradual developing of these mental states that is looked upon as madness by the ordinary men:

What ordinary people regard as sporadic and occasional bursts of telepathic and prophetic power are seen by the Sufi as nothing less than the first stirrings of these same organs…. So essential is this more rarified evolution that our future depends on it. (TFGC448)

In fulfillment of this prophecy, children have been born who are clairvoyants. But comes a catastrophe at the end of the seventies and after the catastrophe Martha’s life in Faris is land is hopeful all the children born after the catastrophe are mutants having extra-sensory like telepathy, clairvoyance. A dream world is realized. The children, seven of them are in contact with a different level of existence. Martha looks upon these children as guardians of the future. They are assured creatures, no one will treat them as mad or half-mad:

It was as if the veil between this world and another had worn so thin that people from the sun could walk together and be companions. (TFGC643)

These mutant children are children of violence, yet it is they who have the possibility of a higher of consciousness and will be able to take the human race forward. In an interview after the publication of this book, Lessing had said:

What interests me more than anything is how our minds are changing. The substance of life receives shocks all the time, every place…Inevitably the mind changes. (66)

The book had been dominated by a symbol, the symbol of a four-gated city that was kept green and colourful by a host of gardeners. It was Mark and Martha, both together, who created this vision of a city. It symbolized the human mind. It is as if this vision has now become reality. Martha’s record of her year spent on the island gives that reality:
It was during this year that many of us walking alone or in groups along the cliffs or beside the inland streams met and talked to people who were not of our company… It was as if the face of the world’s horror could be turned around to show us the smile of an angel. (TFGC643)

It can easily be seen that the novel is, as Lessing claimed, a bildungsroman in the sense in which Goethe originally took it, though not in the later sense in which the hero of such a novel takes a very active part. Martha in contrast, is a passive heroine. Her careen throughout this novel, and indeed, throughout the entire series, bears alit what Goethe says Count Jarno explains to Wilhelm Meister that the growth in a man’s nature should be an organic growth and not the result of outward actions. Lessing sees to have agreed. She endorsed this view because it fitted in with her feminist ideal. The Second Wave feminists argued for equality with men on all levels, economic, social, legal etc. Lessing has created a heroine who not only conforms to the feminist ideal but goes a step beyond it. She not only develops herself, but helps her male partners develop also. In spite of dwelling in a male-dominated society, in spite of being subjected to male chauvinism in her life she, again and again in her relationship, helps her lover or her husband, understand himself. At the end, when she is alone, then all by herself, she has fitted herself to take the human race onwards. Indeed feminism can have no better vision than this.
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