CHAPTER- V
THE EMERGENCE OF ANDROGYNOUS WOMEN

“Those who maintain that men have a right to command and women an obligation obey, or that men are fit for government and women unfit, are on the affirmative side of the question, and are bound to show positive evidence for their position or accept that it has been defeated.”

(J.S. Mill, The Subjection of Women 2)

Gender discrimination at the social level minimizes the sphere of women to home only and prohibits their participation in external affairs. The male dominated patriarchal society stereotypes women as inferior and less competent to men in all the social spheres. Lisa S. Price calls it, “sexual terrorism” (31) which forces women to confine themselves at home and smother all of their abilities. Mary Wollstonecraft in her famous book A Vindication of the Rights of Women exposes the mystique where woman has been taken as house mistress and it is considered as the best form for women, “Women, in particular, are rendered weak and wretched by the variety of concurring causes, originating from one hasty conclusion…have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses” (1-2). In fact, patriarchal society frames a structure which victimizes women and works for the disadvantages of their chances of growth. J.S. Mill criticizes such social environment. He states:

The principle that regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong itself, and is now one of the chief obstacles to human improvement; and it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality that doesn’t allow any power or privilege on one side or disability on the other. (1)

With the certain efforts of feminists, women have become aware of political domination that precedes her awareness of male domination in the external affairs. This sense of self knowledge and self confidence lead her from the back position to the front. Doris Lessing has provided her women characters the art of “ratiocination, the ability to reason and underline choice”(Price 78). She is primarily concerned
with sex roles in her novels but as the centre of attention is her woman “as a social being” (Holmquist 141) participating in the different political activities in the male-dominated patriarchal society.

Louise Bogan presents, “women have no wilderness in them, they are provident, instead content in the tight hot cell of their hearts to eat dusty bread” (qtd. in Showalter, FM 24). Doris Lessing exhibits the “andrognous” (Woolf, ROO 84) form of her women in her novels. She targets women’s roles which are strictly defined as they are expected to act passively and repetitively in the course of their lives. “But women’s relationship to power is not exclusively one of victimization. Feminism is, after all, about “transforming the existing power structures...” (Moi 148). Critical attention that starts from home reaches the parliament and the church house for the participation of women in the different social activities. Holmquist refers to significant elements in Lessing’s novels concerning sex roles:

Lessing’s notion of a specific female nature gives rise to a feminist criticism of culture in the sense that women represent a creative, life giving principle which opposes a mechanistic, destructive, male, cultural influence. Through their intuitive, receptive and irrational capacities women can develop a unified consciousness, whereas men stand for the rationalistic, fragmenting mentality....(142)

It shows that according to the patriarchal norms, the main role of a woman is to give birth and to take care of her children. In spite of the fact that women are actually those who play a significant role in reproduction, it does not enable them to attain a prominent role in society because the external social affair, with which man is engaged, is considered quite important.

Patriarchal society is clearly demonstrated in all the selected novels of Doris Lessing for the present research. Male characters in this patriarchal society such as Douglas and Dick have a possibility to “exercise authority and power over women due to their control over the public and political realm of life which determines the conditions of the private lives of women” (Holmquist 57). But, Lessing exposes *Children of Violence* as “the study of the individual conscience in its relation to the
collective” (Lessing, PV 18). This statement made by Lessing, calls for an understanding of the international situation which coincides with the adolescence and growth of Martha Quest. Her adolescence is marked on the international level by the preparation for the Second World War and the spread of communism beyond the boundaries of Soviet Russia. In Central Africa, however, these have had very little effect because the country has not drawn into the political situations of Europe and has still been following the capitalist mode of exploitation and oppression. But Martha comes to participate in the international upheaval through the newly formed communist group in Southern Rhodesia and comes to identify her dissatisfaction with the colonial situations and her struggle for freedom of humanity from the clutches of narrow boundaries of patriarchal societies.

However, feminists asset their views that woman has got a great role to play at both the familial and social fronts. According to Moi, “women are central, not marginal to the process of reproduction”(171). They are paradoxically ‘central’ and ‘marginalized.’ But being oppressed in male hegemony in patriarchal society, they are considered less developed as compared to men, despite “their prominent role in society” (Moi 171). About her interest in politics, Lessing tells in an interview with Jonah Raskin:

I am intensely aware of, and want to write about, politics. I feel that the writer is obligated to dramatize the political conflicts of his time in his fiction. There is an awful lot of bad socialist literature which presents contemporary history mechanically. I wanted to avoid that pitfall…. (qtd. in Ingersoll 15)

Doris Lessing presents women as indispensable part of humanity and therefore demands that women should be treated as equal to men in all the spheres.

Education is the only mean that can bring revolution of change with intelligence and high level of persistence. Doris Lessing shows that Martha has been active for receiving education on all aspects such as language, history, literature and of course on politics. For this, she seeks company of “two intelligent Jewish boys, Joss and Solly Cohen and through them she comes into contact with socialist
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thought as well as the outside world” (Holmquist 155). She borrows books of politics, races and other social issues. Mrs. Quest’s denial of reading such literature makes her more interested in going for different cultural and social issues. Mrs. Quest is shocked to know about Martha’s relationship with the Jewish boys. She exclaims, “what to do with Martha, who seemed bent on behaving so as to make her mother as unhappy as possible”(Lessing, MQ 10). Reading such kind of books is an escape from the clutches of her parents who are the symbol of history of exploitation and poverty. Martha becomes rebellious against her parents and has books on politics all around in her racks, “There were also, lying everywhere, books on ‘politics’ in her parents’ sense of the word, such as the memories of the Lloyd George, or histories of the great war” (Lessing, MQ 27). It, later, develops into a great socialist commitment in her as it leaves a great effect on her mind.

Lessing turns Martha’s education into a political one which has a great ambition for improving the social conditions of poor and marginalized people. However, Martha comes actively in politics in A Proper Marriage and A Ripple from the Storm. But, overall, right from her first novel of Children of Violence, it is fully concentrated on Martha’s life as a communist reactionary. Her activities enable her making her belief stronger, idealistic and self righteous. Lessing’s women characters are so determined to achieve social and political distinction in life that they are not worried of their personal relations. In fact, they sacrifice the social and historic position of women as wives, mothers and daughters and make a way towards a new one that enables them to emerge as androgynous human beings.

Martha Quest, right from her early age, has a keen awareness of the ills of society, where “individuals are crippled through lack of openness and opportunity” (Woolf, TG 34). Her society is middle class where the weak people are exploited. In fact, all blacks and white women are the weakest section of society. Lessing portrays the colonial African society as static. A static society induces boredom in its members. Martha is bored and is angry with this state of affairs. The parrot like talk of her parents and their friends are repulsive to her. She tells them openly “You are loathsome bargaining and calculating…you are disgusting” (Lessing, MQ 12). Martha’s indignation is not an adolescent phenomenon because the adult Martha also
experiences the same disgust. In *A Proper Marriage* talking about the fashionable ladies of the society, she tells Douglas:

Women’s tea parties were driving her crazy.
Gossip, gossip about their servants…
About their doctors…
And the dullness of their husband. (Lessing 276)

Doris Lessing feels that the static nature of the conversations of the colonials is symptomatic of a sickness that has gripped the society under colonial capitalism, where wealth provides them leisure and lethargy. In the opening paragraph of *Martha Quest*, she presents a typical situation through two elderly couples, the Quests and the Van Rensbergs. They are depicted as symbols of changelessness, “Two elderly women sat knitting on the same part of the veranda, which is screened from the sun by a golden shower creeper…and the author informs that they would “remain until sunset, talking, talking incessantly”(Lessing, MQ 1). The steady attitude of the older women exposes the acceptance to the social and patriarchal norms. Lessing explains:

The two women began discussing, as was natural, how they had behaved when young, but with reservations, for Mrs Van Rensberg sensed that her own experience included a good deal that might shock the English lady; so what they exchanged were not the memories of their behaviour, but phrases of their respective traditions. (MQ 8)

On the other side of the ‘same veranda’, there are Mr. Quest and Mr. Van Rensberg, discussing about crops and wealth and the native problem. According to Lessing, the currents of conversation ran, “sleepily on inside Martha, like the movements of her own blood, of which she was not conscious, except as an ache of irritation” (MQ 8). Martha’s irritation is caused by the changelessness of the topic and the situation that evokes the topic. Martha longs for liberation from this. Lessing exposes another form of changelessness which causes ‘claustrophobia’ for the colonials. It arises from the changelessness of the landscape of Africa.
Lessing’s women protagonists have sought a sense of belief which enables them to bring the required changes which are necessary for the growth of women in the society. They all emphasize a certain need to break the old traditions which are aimed to stereotype the image and status of women in society. Through Martha, Lessing presents her disagreement on the perpetuated tradition:

‘Ach,’ said Mrs Van Rensberg, after a pause, ‘it’s not what you read that matters, but how you have.’ And she looked with good-natured affection towards Martha, who was flushed with anger and sunshine. ‘You’ll headache, my girl,’ she added automatically; and Martha added stubbornly to her book, without moving, and her eyes filled tears. (MQ 1)

Not only, Martha Quest, but other protagonists like Julia, Mary and Anna all present their dislike towards the changelessness attitude of older women in the past. Julia’s remark about her father, “I’m not and rock” presents the psychological situation of new women towards the old tradition of changelessness of old women.

Martha’s efforts to get rid of her mother’s influence are the products of her desire to get rid of the society’s influence. She does not want to accept a code of law which reduces her to be a conforming object in society. Halliday and Young call Martha’s efforts as, “looking for the sins and errors of the past” (64). Hence, the fight between Martha and her mother over various issues like friendship with the Cohens, going for dance parties, going alone into the veld, dressing like grownups before time, reading books on sex are all result of the changelessness attitude in behaviour. her reluctance to conform. Everyone in the colonial Africa has accepted life as something inevitable and its problems as something unavoidable and has allowed themselves to be trapped by circumstances. So, Martha is seeking an answer for this inevitable “human condition” in the colonial set up. Martha does not accept whatever her predecessors have accepted as inevitable because she is a sensitive youth; and the whole of the Children of Violence is viewed as a study of a “sensitive youth discovering individuality” (Pratt 120) in the background of the colonial oppressive society, which perpetuates the changelessness attitude among all the generations of women in the patriarchal society.
In fact, Martha tends to break the stereotype images invented by the patriarchal authorities for white women. Lessing condemns the society which restricts the power of imagination and self achievement of women. Holmquist approves her efforts saying, “the grace of imagination…an ideology can lead us…to the promised land of humanism” (64). However, she is reprimanded often, for her association with the Cohen boys. Rambhau M. Badode reveals the psychology of Mrs. Quest and her daughter Martha:

Mrs. Quest’s domineering impulse, it is she who presents a real psychological threat for Martha. She wants to turn Martha into a nice middle class girl and rid her of the ‘silly ideas’ about politics. Representing as she does the conditioning power of conventional attitudes towards sexuality, society and politics. (43)

Her mother always ends her tirade saying, “she did not know what to do with Martha, who seemed bent on behaving so as to make her mother as unhappy as possible” (Lessing, MQ 16). Martha knows well that her mother’s sorrow about her is too personal because Martha’s failure to conform will reflect upon Mrs. Quest’s inability to control and guide her daughter. And for a lady of Mrs. Quest’s stature, it is quite shameful to let a daughter follow her path. Mrs. Quest often tries to bind Martha emotionally through her tears. The only way for Martha to get out of this emotional imprisonment is to wish for a different social order, where everything, her mother has rejected and condemned, will be the norm of life. If it is possible, everyone in her world, the Cohens, the black, the white and the brown will be welcome, except the people like her parents and the Van Rensbergs with “pettiness of vision and small understanding” (Lessing, MQ 17). This selection and rejection is in keeping with the communist’s vision of the future world. In fact, Martha’s ideas are highly based on the ideology of communism.

Lessing shows that her women protagonists have a firm belief in the philosophy of communism because it promises total liberation from the colonial situation, on personal, social and international level. Yuri Sdobnikov remarks:
Communism would put an end to exploitation once and for all, together with every type of social enslavement and the parasitic existence of some men at the expense of others. National oppression would be eradicated. Colonial oppression and bloody wars would disappear forever. (152)

Martha, then, becomes determined to follow communist philosophy and starts making her way in politics. She is in the right age and in the right frame of mind to rebel against the established customs of society. She is a teenager and for Lessing the phenomenon of the young are perennial. The young are always possessed with a deep desire for change and they are self righteous and firm in their belief that they are the possessors of ‘fresh ideas’ that they, their friends and the leaders are all together, new and unsullied creature destined to change the world” (Lessing, PWCLI 87-88). Martha is caught up in that frame of mind; she is very critical and contemptuous of all that is around her and believes that she is right in expressing her contempt.

Breaking the myth of women’s incapability to judge and follow a political philosophy, Martha Quest shows that communism has a profound meaning to her life. She finds it a source of peace and a struggle for equality among all races and different levels of people. In fact, Martha turns herself into a servant of politics and is willing to serve people of all circles of society. She finds herself to be a resolved being in the group when she finds intellectual and emotional communication in the group members. Paulo Freire sees group as symbol of “brotherhood” (Lessing, LL 26). Martha feels quite confident being in the group, “she lived in the group and did not care about the judgments of anyone else. She felt as if she were invisible to anyone but the group” (Lessing, RFS 26). She feels herself so engaged that she is never reminded of her married life and her daughter. Holmquist observes:

Martha wants to most of all disconnect herself from her past and family by joining the group. Her attempts to become a servant of humanity stand for her eagerness to politicize her individual life; by serving humanity Martha wants to get away from keeping up close personal relationships. (84)
Sometimes, she feels that her personal attempts are different from some of other members of the group. However, the group gives her comfort because “as soon as she felt herself surrounded by people to whom ‘personal problems’ were unimportant background to their real responsibilities, her fear vanished” (Lessing, PM 340). Her personal responsibility makes her understand the different roles she is supposed to play as wife, mother and daughter. But, she tries to rise above all the personal aspects. Holmquist states, “Martha’s political identity contains a deep split in which the pain is related to her past to those personal matters that she tries to repress, mainly her relationship to her daughter” (84). Then, the split image of woman which is divided between family and society is exposed through Martha. But, Martha has developed a firm belief in her life to present the best form of woman in external affairs.

Lessing feels the presence of gender oppression in patriarchal society and she tries to liberate women from all the social taboos and mystique of women. She comes to understand communism as a panacea very early in her life. Martha is introduced to the communist politics through the ‘Left Book Club’, which have a few lifeless members in the beginning but become active and purposeful with the starting of the war and the coming of the RAF men and other war exiles from Europe. The Communist group in Southern Rhodesia has had all the innocence and purity that can be desired in such groups. For Martha, it becomes a school of education, from where she masters the initial lessons of universalism, the interconnectedness of things in the world and the doctrine of ‘commitment’. The group was everything for Martha She felt herself enveloped by “a gentle protectiveness” (Lessing, RFS 8) a feeling she has not experienced anywhere before. It is more than a home and a family, where everyone is cared for and closely associated with one another.

Martha is keenly aware of the problems of her society and seeks an answer for all the maladies of the society. She tries to get the answer from the literature of her favourite authors Tolstoy, Stendhal, Chekov and Dickens. The texts of all these authors provide her good reading material but not the answer she is seeking. They are the Cohen boys, Joss and Solly, who introduce her to the new ways to find a
solution for the issues of equality, races and gender of southern Rhodesia through reading material only. They find her different from the rest of women and capable of something great. Joss liberates her from the farm by offering a job at “Robinson, Daniel and Cohen, his uncle’s office, saying get out of this set up” (Lessing, MQ 90). For the Cohen boys as well as for Martha the veld is a prison from where they all desire to achieve freedom. Martha does not accept the forcing behaviour of the people around her. Rather she believes in a new pattern of living life that desires freedom. Lessing narrates Martha’s attitude:

She flung all the clothes out on to the floor, and then rearranged them to her own taste, though no outsider could have seen any difference; she pushed the bed back to what she imagined had been its position…She continued doing until she was satisfied…. (MQ 104)

It all exhibits the psychological upheaval in the mind of Martha Quest against the restricted position of a woman in a conventional society.

Lessing breaks the psychological phenomenon where, for centuries, human experiences have been synonymous with the masculine experiences, which have made the collective identity of humanity. She places her woman to the centre and defines her as the equal subject to the universe. Lessing resents the belief where only man has the right to power and political hegemony in the society. Martha’s contradictory feelings about the socialist part of the world reveal the strength of woman in the politics and decision making of the country:

Her upbringing, her education, her associates, the newspapers, had all conspired to bring her to the age of twenty-two, an adult, that is, without feeling more about what was going on in the socialist sixth of the world which happened to be the title of one of the books than a profound reluctance to think about it at all. (Lessing, PM 315)

She obviously wants to participate in creating a new world. At one moment, she even realizes her need for some kind of ideology or more precisely, a sense of belonging:
It was as if her eyes had been opened and her ears made to hear; it was like a re-birth. For the first time in her life she had been offered an ideal to live for. But the immediate political emotion of anyone shaken suddenly into thinking is anger: she was filled with rage at having been cheated; she felt as if she had been lied to, led by the nose, made a fool of, all her life. (Lessing, PM 315-16)

Lessing confirms the necessity of the participation of women in politics. She feels that woman needs to defend her right to participate in politics as historically woman has been marginalized and deprived of her right to take admission in political affairs and decision making process of the society. Lessing frees her women from all the cultural institutions and social taboos.

Lessing’s first encounter with social issues is through the ‘Left Book Club,’ (Lessing, UMS 199) an organization that was started by a few people interested in the freedom of the Africans. In the autobiography as well as in Martha Quest, she calls the members of the group as “Spineless Social Democrats” (Lessing, UMS 199). Lessing appreciates all the activity offered by the ‘Book Club’ a group of intellectuals in the barren part of colonial Africa. The other alternative in the colony for young people is to meet, drink, make merry, marry, and settle down into a drab middle class existence of children and servants, gossips and parties. Lessing is attracted to take part in politics due to various reasons. The existence of double standards in the colony, the oppression of the black by the white and the self imprisonment of the whites under the code of white superiority are some of the factors that have compelled her to search for a remedy and she finds communism as a highly promising philosophy designed to eradicate the ills of the world.

Nevertheless, emancipating attempts of women to disrupt the hierarchical order, such as Martha’s involvement in politics and Mary’s involvement in the organisation of farm matters, though only temporal, appear to be successful just for a short period of time. Martha and Mary make their involvement in the political matters, which are originally intended to be reserved only for men. By their participation, both Martha and Mary are able to prove their ability to act on an equal
level to men and to take an active part in their social lives. This behaviour, however, poses a question of how, or to what extent, such attempts are effective and how they may possibly be accepted by bourgeois society:

Martha tries to form an identity in a society where the division of labour between the sexes is strictly defined according to the norms of the bourgeois family, women are confined to domestic life, they are wives, mothers and lovers, whereas men have their main function within the social and political spheres of life. Marriage is a white middle class woman’s way of realizing her social potential...(Holmquist 57).

It is also worth stressing that the social issues and relations are central for the development of female identity. Lessing makes these women not only participate in external affairs but prove their stance of ability. They all courageous women who have sacrificed their lives in self immolation remain the dominant aspect for humanity.

Martha is depicted different, from the beginning to the end, from the rest of the population of the colony. She is independent in her thinking and is rebellious. In an interview given to Roy Newquist, Lessing confirms Jean Pickering’s observation that she has abandoned her education “ostensibly because of an eye infection” (Pickering 2). Lessing admits that she is driven by a “neurotic rebellion” (Lessing, PV 53) against her parents who want her to be brilliant academically. Her rebellion finds expression in her every action. She visits the Cohens, “who are isolated due to their Jewishness” (Lessing, MQ 45). She reads books on sex by Epstein and Havelock Ellis and she reads Marx and Engels who are for her mother the most despicable men. She goes out for hunting and for long walks in the veld, meets the natives, talks to them precisely. Martha has many quarrels with the older women, all arising from her reluctance to conform herself to the expectations of society.

Lessing’s women make efforts to join politics and help in bringing better results for the marginalized people. In Children of Violence series, Lessing attempts to express her experiences of Africa and her growth and understanding of life in its complexities through her characters like Mary Turner, Martha Quest and Anna Wulf.
Lessing shares her quest for freedom, hatred of oppression, sensitivity of mind and the visionary spirit with Martha Quest. Dorothy Brewster sees much more similarity between the two. She says:

The young woman named Martha Quest in the series ‘Children of Violence’ grows up, like her creator Doris Lessing, on a farm in central Africa, has a father and a mother with some traits resembling those ascribed elsewhere by Doris Lessing to her own father and mother, goes at eighteen or so to earn her living in the capital of the colony, as Doris Lessing went to Salisbury and is there shocked and stimulated by new ideas and new relationships in the rapidly changing conditions of the years before and during world war II. We must assume that Doris Lessing in tracing Martha’s development, has not forgotten her own. (511-12)

The similarity again is most striking in their marriages and divorces, in their migration to England and in the sharing of their talents. So, Martha’s interest in social issues and her deep involvement with it are the reflections of her creator’s interest and involvement. The novels unfold Martha Quest’s life from 1936 to 1997, taking through her restless adolescence, eventful and mature adulthood and to her prophetic death in 1997 in a nuclear holocaust. In fact, it shows the contribution of a woman to the society.

Doris Lessing explores “a decade of political certainty where fascism is a clear evil to fight against and communism is an equally clear ideal to fight for” (Schlueter 47). In common with many other British intellectuals in the 1930s and early 1940s, Doris Lessing became a communist as a result of sincere optimistic desires to see the world improved and to have the injustice of a supposedly inhuman competitive system of values eliminated. As a convinced communist, she comes by this conviction in a rather different way from that of most European left-wingers. Her experience of South African politics persuades her that the communists in that country show more ‘moral courage’ than most and this is a quality that she admires. However, “in the postwar years, the old certainties seemed less certain; the issues were less clear-cut. As for so many other left-wing intellectuals, communism no
longer seemed to be the answer. It has been betrayed” (Shapiro 210). To a great extent, her decision to become a communist appears now as naive as many other youthful enthusiasms or commitments.

Martha devotes her familial life as she considers it a bar in her political journey. Social conventions seem emerging more powerful due to World War-II. Martha tries to know about the post war approach of the Soviet Union. She starts reading books and newspapers about different political events:

The emotion that gripped her mostly was rage: she was twenty two; she had been born during that revolution, which to say the least, had been important in the world’s development, and yet this was the first time she had been told anything told about it...For, there had been plenty of moments when she might have fitted a few facts together to make a truth. She had not. Her upbringing her education, her associates, the newspapers, had all conspired to bring her to the age of twenty two, an adult this is, without feeling more about what was going on in the socialist sixth of the world—than a profound reluctance to think about it all. (Lessing, PM 315)

Martha is anxious over the changes that have taken place and more over she is not aware of the changes as she has been busy in married life and delivery of her first baby. She is keen on starting again and she starts with meeting people of ‘Help for Our Allies’ committee. She says, “it was like a rebirth. For the first time in her life she had been offered an ideal to live for” (Lessing, PM 315). She feels like going away from her married life and daughter Caroline as she wants to join Communist party. However, the group is formed with Anton Hesse as the head of it. Martha, after her divorce from Douglas and leaving Caroline, starts working actively for the group. She becomes politically more motivated and forgets her personal liabilities. In fact, she has all together turned as a social worker and she does not confirm herself to the castles of social and personal barriers.

Martha’s political ambitions concerning the Communist party irritate her husband a lot. He becomes jealous of her success in the party. Martha goes through
various states of lethargy in her relationship with Douglas. It is necessary for her to escape. Except for that, Martha wants to leave him to be able to live in a different way. Her final outburst of affection speaks for itself:

‘I’m bored, bored, bored, you can’t imagine. I can’t bear it. I haven’t anything in common with Douglas, and I’ve been unhappy all the time …

She said involuntarily, Don’t be so damned dishonest.’

He muttered angrily, ‘I hope you’ll be in a better temper when I come back.’ (Lessing, PM 353)

The war and distance make their marriage even more complicated. Martha’s feelings to Douglas get colder and colder up to the point of hatred “She had never felt anything but repulsion for him” (Lessing, PM 355). Moreover, Martha has a similar attitude to her own child. She is not able to feel real affection to poor Caroline:

...what was wrong with Caroline was that she, Martha, did not feel the right way about her. Do I love her? She asked herself sternly, looking with steady criticism at the little girl. The emotion of love vanished as she examined it. At this moment she felt nothing but the bond of responsibility. (Lessing, PM 294)

In fact, Martha keeps hiding her true feelings in her relationships. She does not express them openly. She feels desperate in her marriage and has many arguments with her mother about the irresponsibility towards Caroline. She always thinks about her future. Lessing tells, “She felt herself to be a hopeless failure; she was good for nothing, not even the simple natural function that every female should achieve like breathing, “being mother” (PM 197). Another fact worth mentioning is that Martha does not hate to be a wife but she wants an ideal human being as her partner. She feels to be “the only cold, sober, isolated person in a moon-drugged city given over to dancing, love and death” (Lessing, PM 203). She hopes that her dreams about her dream husband will come true and she will have a chance to work on her personal feelings and ambitions. Douglas is very glad that his wife does not set “bounds to his freedom” (Lessing, PM 96). However, Martha realizes that the role of a man and a
woman in their personal life is unequal. Therefore she rebels against it, “...who
would be a woman, stuck at home, while the boys go off and have fun” (Lessing,
PM 156). Undoubtedly, the tensions between Martha and Douglas arise due to the
fact that neither of them wants to give in to conformity.

Martha’s first and second divorce reveals the male domination in married life
more clearly. Her first husband Douglas, the reader of the ‘New Statesman’,
provides her a life of suburban idleness, sun downer party, gossips, and visits to, and
visits of genteel and respectable ladies of the society, whose life is equally bored as
Martha’s. His insistence that she should not attend the communist meetings, and that
she should keep the blacks in their place, causes Martha to leave him and she
chooses the party as her “first loyalty” (Lessing, PM 371). In the relationship with
Douglas, Martha is disappointed. She believes that he being a progressive would not
be like other men. But slowly, she realises that his “progressiveness is only external
and that he is a servant of the system who dominates and ill-treats the weak”
(Lessing, RFS 173). Martha’s second marriage also proves the fact that
“progressive” or “no progressive” men are basically the same. They are
domineering. She marries Anton Hesse on the principles of her ideology that “the
group should care for one another” (Lessing, RFS 173). She sees this ideology
practiced when Andrew, a member of the group, marries Maisie who is pregnant
with Binkie’s child. Martha marries Anton, the German, the communist, to make
him respectable and “not an intruder in the African white community” (Lessing, RFS
189). But immediately after marriage, she realizes again that Anton is at heart a
bourgeoisie. He is fastidious about furniture, about the crowd that came into their
house and about Maisie’s baby. Anton gives vent to his anger through silence when
his authority is questioned. Hence Martha’s second divorce also is an act of revolt
against male domination. The other female members too feel that men are
domineering despite their ideology. When pregnant Marjorie is criticized by Mr.
McFarline for attending late party meetings, she retorts, “Petty dictator, that’s what
you are!” (Lessing, RFS 266). It opens the real picture of men of patriarchal society.

Lessing shows that her women are not dependent on men for their external
social identity so, to break this myth, they decide to come out of the stifling bondage
by opting for divorce. She is not concerned with the legal aspects of the divorce, viz., the delays in legal process or rigorous legal clauses which make divorce difficult for women. She is rather concerned with the repercussions of divorce on women. She depicts her women deciding to opt for divorce rather than live a suffocating life of injustice and agony. Martha, Molly and Anna all leave their husbands or break the marriage which does not allow them to be free and to live life in their own way. Lessing depicts that though divorce frees them from the agony and suffering of an unhappy or unjust relationship. However, it does not solve the problem completely and women have to continue to struggle and suffer on various levels – economic, emotional and psychological.

Lessing’s novels raise important questions about women’s freedom as, does a sexist society easily accept a woman’s freedom? Does a woman find real happiness in her new role as divorce? Does she really become free after divorce? Doris Lessing shows how a woman has to struggle to achieve freedom in her life as she, right from her birth to the last, has to face the diverse circumstances which emerge out of the different myths against woman. The real happiness of a woman is in healthy relationship rather than divorce. That is why, Martha, Anna, Julia and Mary develop relation after relation just in the hope of a better one.

During her political journey, Martha does not feel the absence of her family, that she has abandoned because she wants to save the larger family named humanity. Neither her parents’ protest especially her mother’s “registered letter” announcing that she “was no longer her daughter”, nor the thoughts of her own little daughter Caroline and husband Douglas deters her from experiencing the “elation that was part of the group since its formation”(Lessing, PM 8). From this experience of the group as a home, she moves forward and it becomes for her a laboratory from where she emerges as a committed individual. But it does not take her long to understand, that even the “ideologically committed” group is gripped by the “bed rock monsters” (Lessing, PM 96) of customs and traditions which is the byproduct of capitalism. The members may be revolutionaries, but they are all deeply the children of the system that favours oppression and perpetuation of middle class values. A Ripple from the Storm abounds in examples of the bondage to customs and traditions of the
members, ideologically committed to abolish the old order and establish the new, where no one is a slave.

Doris Lessing in *Retreat to Innocence* has focused more on the acquisition of an authentic self rather than on any possible modality of its survival in the larger context of human history. Julia Barr, being in the conservative society of England, becomes the accompanist of Jan Brod in British politics. Brod is a middle aged Communist who makes his living as a clerk in order to support his writing. His real passion involves a manuscript detailing World War II from a radical perspective. For the sake of learning, Julia offers herself as a secretary to Brod and types his manuscript. It is Brod’s political abilities which attract Julia and later on, she finds herself totally psychologically and physically committed to Jan Brod. Rambhau M. Badode observes, “Julia being blind to historical and political thoughts” offers herself to Brod, as “she feels a great sexual fascination for him” (78). Lessing further exposes the self-divided nature of Julia and her anxiety over her distinct identity through juxtaposition in her mind of the two father images who personify the self-division:

If I were really the daughter of Sir Andrew Barr, I wouldn’t be here at all. It was like a discovery. And, I wouldn’t be with Jan Brod and the incongruity of the two images left her divided and nil. Nothing she was nothing. They can’t be my parents. Who am I then? Supposing I left my flat, supposing I left Betty (her flatmate), supposing I never went back home.- If I walked out of my life, out of myself and found a room in a part of London I’d never been in, who would I be then” (Lessing RTI 126).

Julia’s journey from learning to search her identity as an independent human being shows the innovative attitude of woman towards her self-realization.

Doris Lessing’s women have respect and love for men in politics. Anna, Julia, Martha all feel that women may perform equally to men in politics. So, they expect that they should be given equal chances and social platform which may enable them to stand and serve society equally to men. Julia has already a boyfriend Roger, who
is however a true lover of her beauty. But, when she gets to know of Jan Brod, a Jew Politician, she decides to have him as her man. Lessing shows:

‘Would you keep me with you for the rest of life’ Julia questions.
‘May be not’ He nodes his head.
...
‘It was all out of my love for your philosophy on life and women’ She answers.
He looks down and gets silent…
She breaks the silence…
‘I at least learnt the art of making issues and realizing them soon after but I feel I could do better than….’ (RTI 163)

Julia’s statement shows that woman’s skills, hidden in the social contexts, are primarily broken by the male dominated social structure. Anna’s psychological manifestation and an inclination towards politicians are clearly seen. Martha also develops relations with different politicians both in Africa and England.

Anna notices with increasing distaste and disgust that the official party has a sense of falsification of truth. Because of her work for John Butte, a communist publisher, it is one of her duties in the party office to decide the quality of manuscripts for the publication. She judges it politically and artistically. She is competent to see the exact ways in which falsification takes place. Indeed, it is the world of publishing that makes her join the Communist Party. But Anna soon finds out that the “truth” is not a very highly priced commodity in communist publishing. She is aware of her inconsistency in rejecting her own fiction as unhealthy and also rejecting “healthy’ art when she sees it. Anna says:

What you’ve said sums up everything that is wrong with the party. It’s a crystallization of the intellectual rottenness of the Party that the cry of the nineteenth-century humanism, courage against odds, truth against lies, should be used now to defend the publication of a lousy lying book by a communist firm which will risk nothing at all by publishing it, not even a reputation for integrity. (Lessing, GN 237)
Her sense of fragmentation is such that demands of her a more coherent, a more unifying life than has been possible through dedication to communism. As an enlightened liberal white, Anna is scarcely involved in the fight for racial justice. While as a sensitive, intelligent, and idealistic young woman, she cannot assimilate the inconsistencies and pettiness of communism. Anna feels that party membership and activity can be a meaningful commitment, only if they all feel responsible towards the social development of every human being.

The effect of social responsibilities is so high that Martha urges for knowing the different corners of humanity where politics has great role to play. It is with her parents that Martha discusses politics in her early age. She views humanity as a welfare of human beings and a campaign for peace. Mr. Quest calls her a pacifist, “she played the part against her father’s need, just as for him, she was that group of people in the twenties who refused to honour the war” (Lessing, MQ 25). She argues against everything that irritates her parents and all this makes a solid way towards social services. She narrates:

When both parents said that Hitler was no gentleman, an upstart without principles, Martha found herself defending Hitler too; it was this which made her think a little and question her feeling of being used, her conviction that her parents raised their voices and argued at her, on a complaining and irritable note, insisting that there was going to be another war with Germany and Russia soon- this war was in some way necessary to punish her (Lessing, MQ 26).

It goes on, even when Martha is married. She keeps on searching for the answers she has for herself and social issues. In fact, with the progress of time, Martha develops the quest for social rights for all.

Martha’s political involvement records her progress as an individual. As far as, her public image is concerned; initially, when she joins the party she seems to be a novice and not very assertive about her public presentation. But soon, she emerges as a dedicated and courageous member of the group. Martha distributes the socialist communist paper, “The Watchdog” in coloured quarters and working hectically in
the ‘group’. Martha is so much devoted in the work of the group that she almost identifies herself with the group. Lessing tells the sense of dedication in Martha:

She lived in the group and did not even care about the judgement of anyone else

...

She felt as if it were invisible to anyone but the group.

She emerges as a sensible and dedicated one. (Lessing, RFS 29)

Apart from showing Martha as a sincere worker, Lessing reveals the internal contamination and confusion of the Communist Party. Overall, Lessing presents the colonial left as parroting rhetorical slogans of communism rather than facing the immediate problems heading on and finding out a solution. However, it raises a conflict between Martha Quest and the male members of the party.

Anna Wulf, as a novelist and member of the British Communist Party, proves to be androgynous in political dimensions. Doris Lessing seems highly concerned of Anna Wulf’s political metamorphosis. As, Anna once shows that intelligent communists believe that the party “has been saddled with a group of dead bureaucrats who run it, and that the real work gets done in spite of the center”(Lessing, GN 42). Hence, she along with other communists suffer a profound disillusionment, perhaps best portrayed by the bitter but true comment by Manyrose, a young communist Anna has known in Africa, “only a few months ago we believed that the world was going to change and everything was going to be beautiful and now we know it won’t”(Lessing, GN 44). Anna, in one of her recurring dreams, tells about one particularly apocalyptic vision she has in which she foresees an end to the communist system. Anna, Manyrose and Willi Rodde find it very difficult for communism to last any longer.

Martha’s disillusion with communism is caused by various factors, the main being the hypocrisy of its members. The hypocrisy of all the leaders of the Soviet Union, Study Group and other unorganised groups in Southern Rhodesia is exhibited. Tommy exposes the sham of their attitude to the blacks. The group instructs the members to be cautious when dealing with the blacks or fighting for
their admittance in the group. The group that is formed to support the cause of the natives criticizes the members’ association with the blacks. The members who sell the “watchdog” (Lessing, LL 179) to the natives and coloured in the location are asked to confine themselves only to that work and not to enter into charity works, which the groups feel is what the location people need. The group does not appreciate to encourage Jimmy who has fallen in love with a coloured girl to marry her. Tommy realizes the duplicity of the members, and he is emphatic in exposing the sham of the group about equality. In the group meeting, he says, “I want to say something... there’s something wrong. We say we don’t believe in inequality, we don’t believe in the colour bar and that. But when it gets down to it, we take a decision to behave like everyone else. We say, Don’t let’s upset people” (Lessing, LL 140). The words of Tommy expose the inner realities of the political group. They have ideal agenda and future policies to come in power but in reality the things are different because of some self ambitious members of the group.

Lessing supports change but stands against violence to human beings. Thomas, an ex-communist, who becomes the guide of Martha in politics, leads her to understand the undesirability of violence. “Human life has become so futile and transient. Millions die because somewhere a lunatic decides to do away with them. But still the problems of the world remain the same” (Lessing, LL 202). Thomas who understands this and retires to the remotest village and dedicates his time to writing and helping the natives living there. He teaches her the lesson of dedicated service. Martha, who starts with the noble idea of transforming the world, finds group life as frustrating as the family life in the veld, and her two ideological marriages. She begins to experience it as ‘talking shop’ where so much is discussed but nothing is executed. But still despite the failure of Communism to solve the basic problems of society, Martha profits greatly from it. Her communist association which starts as a group, develops into a home for a short while and then it becomes for her a place of study from where she emerges as an educated and committed woman.

Martha’s feelings lead her to participate in the events of coloured people. They have started raising their issues through different social and entertaining shows,
which is “the first occasion when people of colour, or, as they prefer to be called the Coloured community, have entertained a white audience. It was a landmark in the cultural life of their city. A happy event” (Lessing, PM 360). She participates in political discussion circles and views that racial equality should exist in Rhodesia. Lessing narrates, “This was the first time in her whole life, and she was now twenty-one the first time in a life spent in a colony where nine-tenths of the population were dark skinned-that she had sat in a room with a dark skinned person as an equal” (Lessing, PM 211). However, this fact is soon disproved by a statement in local newspapers saying that “all black men were centuries in evolution behind the white men” (Lessing, PM 214). But, she has opposite perceptions:

...if the blacks were not to revolt..., they must be fed and housed...,” as Mr Player says. However, the Rhodesian policy regarding races is not at all based on the laws of equality, compared to the situation in England. In fact “any expression of a desire for improvement on the part of the natives was immediately described as impertinence, or sedition, or even worse. (Lessing, PM 62)

Mr Player also adds that “it was in no one’s interest that the blacks...should be ill-fed and ill-housed into a condition where they weren’t fit for work” (Lessing, PM 63). Mrs Maynard explains, “If they learn to use arms, they can use them on us. In any case, this business of sending black troops overseas is extremely shortsighted. They are treated as equals in Britain, even by the women” (Lessing, PM 66). Moreover, “The blacks need firm treatment,” she finally remarks (Lessing, PM 67). Martha perceives the country as being “fed on the colour bar and race hatred” (Lessing, PM 316) but surprisingly, race relations during the war seem to be based more on the laws of equality, as all the people not taking into consideration race differences should get together to fight against a common enemy:

The train, that perfect symbol of the country, stood waiting. Behind the engine stretched the coaches; one or two white faces showed from the windows of each. At the extreme end, there was a long truck, like a truck for cattle, confining as many black people as there were whites in the rest
of the train. In between, a couple of ambiguous coaches held Indians and Coloured people, who were allowed to remain provided no white person demanded their seats. (Lessing, PM 141)

Martha’s philosophy on equality among the blacks and whites alienates her from the comfortable place she could enjoy. Even, white people start feeling uncomfortable and threatened by her views. It calls for a hypocritical attitude of the party members towards Martha.

For Doris Lessing, it is absurd that in Southern Rhodesia, society is divided not on the basis of class, but on the question of colour, the oppressed are the coloured and the black. She rejects the oppressors who cannot accept a system that promises justice and equality for all. The comparison of the city with Communism is again evident in the fact that the vision is evoked by the sight of a native worker, driving a team of oxen through the field, and a small black child, naked except for a loin cloth, “tugging at the strings which passed through the nostrils of the leaders of the team” (Lessing, RFS 17). In Martha’s mind, the misery of the natives finds an echo, and she uses utopian fantasy supported by an ideology to get beyond the given present. For Martha, the hard working native and “the naked child” symbolize deprivation and oppression. Hence, she dreams of a world order where children can play and the elders can enjoy.

Martha’s adolescent vision is repeated again in the Ripple from the Storm, when she enjoys the dream with Jasmine. This time it is provoked by the sight of the “small ragged, barefooted black child, pot-bellied with mal-nutrition” (Lessing, RFS 34). Children are the worst hit by industrial revolution. They are employed as unskilled labourers. Most of them are completely mutilated through hard work. In the colony, she finds children suffering, especially the children of the oppressed. They are denied education, and care. Most of them are employed in white homes or in white farms. Their childhood is destroyed. It is worthwhile to note that in Lessing’s ideal city, children are not working, they are “playing”, “running and playing among the flowers and the terraces, through the white pillars and tall trees” (Lessing, LL 17). She emphasizes that childhood is a time to play, not to work.
There is no space for anybody to blossom, because everything is “narrowly defined, and rigidly controlled” (Seligman 5). It is the colour of the skin that decides one’s degree of civilization in the colony and natives are considered low and uncivilized.

Next, Lessing turns from colour to the territorial bar for blacks. Dee Seligman shows how in *Central Africa*, for Africans “freedom of movement was a privilege not a right” (Seligman 5). The Africans who live in the city cannot move freely into the country side. Their movement is restricted by passes, and punishments as shown in Martha Quest, and other volumes of the *Children of Violence*. Often their plights make her feel oppressed. Lessing presents the oppression experienced by the black in their own country and its impact on her in the following excerpt narrating an early morning scene in the streets of Salisbury town:

There was the ringing of hard boots on tarmac and the soft padding of bare feet. She (Martha) stood quite still while past her moved a file of men. First, two policemen in the boots...then perhaps twenty black men and women in various clothing, barefooted and shabby. Then, following these, two more policemen...These people were being taken to the magistrate for being caught at night after curfew, or forgetting to carry one of the passes which were obligatory, or - but there were a dozen reasons, each as flimsy. (Lessing, MQ 184)

Doris Lessing writes in detail about the restrictions which are faced by the natives. This feeling of the “oppression of a police staten” (Lessing, PM 184) adds to the “general moral exhaustion” (Lessing, PM 187) experienced by her in the colony. Lorna Sage finds Lessing highly sympathetic in her treatment of the blacks. She says, “the blacks are drawn as people who are inquisitive, gifted, independent, freedom loving, truly human, able to create things of great material and cultural values” (Lessing, Preface vi). Lessing herself states in her autobiography that the “white people have been given ordinary decent human warmth by black when they needed it” (Lessing, UMS 218). The sense of social acceptance of healthy relationship has been initiated but white men seem insecure even through the human and kind acts of blacks.
Martha dedicates all her energy for her services to the party. But, meanwhile she realizes that party is not able to overcome all the shortcomings of the society. She starts realizing her dissatisfaction when the group fails to achieve its functions and targets due to the lack of devotion of party members. Holmquist exposes the truth, “She begins to realize her dissatisfaction when the group fails politically: there are only two people left beside Martha. She continues, however, to be involved in the leftist movements. Her involvement is based on a need to find alternatives to the oppressive family patterns she has experienced” (88). Finally, in Landlocked, she realizes that her role in society is not fulfilled so she leaves South Africa and moves to England.

In London, Martha feels that reputation of Communist Party is all different as people feel it a source of social services abandoning the personal responsibilities as in family, being father, mother, daughter, son and husband. Martha tells:

But for us (Communists) it went without saying that the family was a dreadful tyranny, a doomed institution, a kind of mechanism for destroying everyone. And so abolished the family. We were all corrupted and rained, we knew that but the children would be saved. We were not right. Isn’t it funny? Do you know how many people have become communists simply because of that; because communism would do away with the family? But communism has done no such thing, it’s done the opposite. (Lessing, FGC 68)

Communist party reminds Martha of the approach of her parents towards family and life. Here, it seems an exclusion from all the ideals of homely life. Communism gives her an excuse to abandon her role in family. In the last novel of Children of Violence, she gets actively involved in politics. In Coleridge family, she decides to accomplish Colin in all the possible ways. He is a scientist but is accused to be a communist also. She says, “She would have to support one or the other—because there would be no middle place. Well, then she would be a patriot and a coward rather than a traitor and a coward” (Lessing, FGC 190-191). Undoubtedly, it increases her abilities to form a new shape of intelligence that leads towards the
various forms of a woman for the welfare of society and the nation through her participation in decision making process for the welfare of the people and the country.

Lessing develops a sense of humanism in all the women characters of her novels. In *The Small Personal Voice*, she says, that “the result of having been a communist is to be a humanist” (23). She feels that humanism is responsibility to humanity, which is equivalent to commitment to humanity. The last novel of *The Children of Violence* reveals this commitment to humanism. *The Four Gated City* deals with Martha’s life in London. Unlike her author, Martha does not join the communist party on arrival in London. In fact, she never wants to expose the fact that she is in any way associated with it. But standing as an outsider she watches politics and its influence upon people, through the mirror of the Radlette Street, house of the Coleridge family. The defection of Collin, as a communist supporter, spells disaster to the family. Sally Sarah, Collin’s wife commits suicide, his son Paul becomes a misfit, Mark, his brother whose secretary and mistress Martha becomes, turns a reactionary, his wife Lynda a neurotic, his son an introvert, his mother goes out of sense for a time and all the other members suffer equally from setbacks. Martha witnesses all this and understands for the first time the consequences of commitment to an ideology that is not supported by the political situation in a country.

Doris Lessing lays claim to the fact that communism as practiced in the communist bloc is a corrupt version of Marxism which is the answer for the eternal longing of man for justice and equality. Collin’s defense of himself as “not a communist but a Marxist” (Lessing, FGC 45) is highly important in Lessing’s later stand. She denounces communism which has become imperialistic and destructive but upholds the idealistic vision of Marxism. *Children of Violence* exposes Lessing’s society and the colonial Southern Rhodesia where the blacks as well as the whites experience oppression. The oppression of the white is caused by their conformity, isolation and reluctance to change. The blacks of course suffer from apartheid. Experiencing this oppression Lessing through Martha Quest looks for an escape and finds in Marxism the desired ideology to liberate humanity. Fired by enthusiasm she
accepts it, but soon she learns that it liberates only in theory because the people who constitute the group are all confirmed bourgeoisie, who preach change but resent it. Though disillusioned by it, she emerges as a deeply committed individual dedicated to humanism.

Lessing shows that new women experience the sense of otherness in the patriarchal society. Observing the environment of Southern Rhodesian society, Anna and Molly feel that it is totally inhuman act against one sex of the universe and “woman is the victim of it” (Karl, 144). They have androgynous attitude in life. Molly says to Anna:

‘It’s all very odd, isn’t it, Anna?’

...’I keep telling you,’ said Molly, her voice thrill, ‘I’ll never forgive you if you throw that talent away. I mean it. I’ve done it, and I can’t stand watching you-I’ve messed with painting and dancing and acting and scribbling, and now, you’re so talented, Anna. Why? I simply don’t understand.’ (Lessing, GN 27)

In the twentieth century, social possibilities are greater and the image of the “free woman” often promiscuous, often intellectual, priding herself on being emotionally undemanding but often seen none the less as ‘castrating’ has been established in fiction by men and women authors alike. Anna has earned her income in the past; it derives from the royalties of her successful first novel; so, for some time at least, she can work at what she pleases, regardless of pay. The liberalization of divorce has come as a great help to save women from endless oppression, or torture in marriage. And now apart from the usual grounds of adultery, cruelty, greed etc., divorce can be granted on the mutual-consent basis, if both the partners agree and are bent upon final separation; in America this is known as “no-fault” divorce.

Lessing shows that the political and social situations prove to be a wall of prevention in the self discovery of woman. Anna finds nothing to write but patterns of defeat, death, irony. She fails to force patterns of happiness of simple life, but finally finds it possible to accept the pattern of self-knowledge which means
unhappiness or at least a dryness, and by searching in this negative patterns, she can, she hopes, twist a positive pattern into shape. And by conceiving of a man and a woman, “both at the end of their tether” (Lessing, GN 324), “both cracking up because of a deliberate attempt to transcend their own limits” (Lessing, GN 326), a “new kind of strength” (Lessing, GN 327) is found. The self-knowledge which seems to be at the heart of Mrs. Lessing’s theme in The Golden Notebook is necessary for mental equilibrium and emotional stability. It is, at least in the case of Anna Wulf, who is among the capable human beings of the group. Through writing, public writing, such as a novel, not private writing, such as the notebooks – Anna is able to relate meaningfully again to the world and to those she knows.

Doris Lessing exposes the experience by women through the oppressed blacks and the dominations of the dwellers. She desires freedom for the white from claustrophobia caused by conformity and liberty for the white women from male domination. She longs for the deliverance of the blacks whom she considers equally capable human beings. She feels their oppression and isolation and envisages a land where they will be free and treated as human beings and equals. Children of Violence is noted for the vision, Lessing has for the society. It is expressed through her recurring dream of the “City” where equality and integrity are the norm. The influence behind the vision of the city is a matter of dispute among the critics. Roberta Rubenstein observes, “Martha Quest has obviously matured and changed from the first to the final volume of the series, but the image of the city itself has remained more or less constant” (Rubenstein 127). Critics, Ellen Cronan Rose and Mary Ann Singleton, enforce the spiritual and cosmological aspects through mysticism and humanism. Lessing’s dissatisfaction with her contemporary society and the vision is inspired by her desire to build an ideal society. However, right from the initial stage her vision is inspired by an ideology that envisages a society where humanity will reach its full swing through equality and justice.

Lessing particularly speaks about the feverish excitement of Mrs. Quest and her elaborate preparation before “mail days” to highlight the desperate necessity of such visits to women folk. The town folks, like the farm district people, apart from visiting and socializing, frequent day clubs and night clubs, organizing meetings and
discussion groups, try to understand the international problems and developments in England. The racial problems in their colony worry them. In *A Proper Marriage*, Lessing narrates the frustration of Martha with life:

Martha was on the point of sliding off into those familiar reflections about what the women of the past had felt about it, when she was brought up short by the thought of her father. He had put the problem quite clearly; she must face it…We don’t imagine that rushing off to earn one’s living as a typist is going to make any difference…(358)

Lessing throws light on the colonial middle class life as lived in the town. In their conversations, “money chimed like the regulator of a machine’s” (Lessing 277) and money gives them a sense of security which is written on their faces. In fact, Martha tries to bring economic independence for all.

Martha notices, in the old and the young, the same expressions she has seen in the farm population. Mr. and Mrs. Maynard; Mr. and Mrs. Anderson; Mrs. Gunn and the senior crowd at the sports club, all seem to her, repeating the same saga of the farm; boredom and claustrophobia. Africa does not have space enough for the young to grow. Julia Barr also has the same psychological perspective on the opportunities in Africa. She cries heavily:

‘Oh, well, I don’t know,’ said Julia aloud, going out and shutting the door. She sleeps in the day and works half the night…All the same, I should be working too, I suppose.’

…

Julia was hungry. She left the flat and went down into the street, towards the park. ‘I’ll walk and I’ll walk,’ she thought. I’ll walk by myself until I’m tired and don’t care about anything.’ (Lessing, RTI 24)

In African society, the women can think only of one thing, to get married and the only job opportunity opened for them is to become typist or a secretary to a firm, and that too before marriage. This environment brings hatred among the women protagonists of Lessing. Doris Lessing exposes these tendencies in the society with a
view to express the reason for Martha’s search for freedom through putting new policies for each group of the society.

Martha sees around her a society of deprivation of chances to women, which according to communism is the result of the capitalist system. In the capitalist system, relationship is based upon the relations of production. In the pre-industrial period women enjoy equality with men, because in the work of economic production women take part, since production takes place mainly in the home stead. But with the development of modern Industry, women could not participate in the work on an equal basis with men because “most occupations were segregated by sex” (qtd. in Brewster 77). In a society, dominated by economic interest women are truncated to a lesser position. In the middle class society, which lived on “profit”(Bottomore 92) women become a mere shadow of the men.

In the Quest family even though Mrs. Quest dominates, her life is centered round the pivotal point, Mr. Quest. Her day is regulated by his medical/medicine hours. Her interest is curbed by his whims and silence. Her frustrations at not having been able to attend the “victory day celebration at the end of the World War I because of an ill husband” (Lessing, LL 71) expresses the silent domination of a male centered society. Another feature of male domination is the inability of the men to accept failure. The classic example is Mr. Quest himself. He turns from a soldier to farmer; despite all the hard work, there is no success in life for him. In a society that is success oriented, he finds refuge in sickness and silence and avoids company as much as possible. Martha understands this, and tells her mother that most of his sickness is imaginary and that, she, Mrs. Quest, is responsible for his illness, because she encourages him to be ill, for illness saves them both from a sense of failure.

Lessing has shown that how participation of women comes up as the first ideological problem in the group. It becomes the issue of Communism that has never given adequate importance to woman or woman’s questions. From the time of Rosa Luxumberg this aspect is pointed out as one of the flaws of Communism. Lenin has answered Luxurnberg that the liberation of humanity would settle all the differences
between sexes. It may sound contradictory that Lessing in her novels acts as the champion of women. Her *The Golden Note Book* is considered to be one of the first novels that express many female emotions and problems.

Lessing in this respect seems to support the views of Lenin. Probably this is the reason why Martha, Lessing’s autobiographical protagonist, does not share with Jasmine and Marjorie their concern and overenthusiasm for women’s liberation, or their anger at their comrades who call women, “bourgeois” (Lessing, LL 285). When Jasmine painfully reports to Martha about the RAF men’s attitude to women, using cosmetics, Martha says, “obviously we are” (Lessing, LL 289). She does not believe like Marjarie that after the war the “women will have to fight a separate war to free themselves from male domination” (Lessing, LL 266), but like Lenin, she believes that communism will settle all the problems faced by society without sex bar. The second instance of the problem caused by ideology in the group is the failure of Maisie’s and Andrew’s marriage. It is a highly idealized marriage and they are leading a happy married life, till the news of the coming of Binkie to town from service. This changes Maisie’s attitude towards Andrew, and she finds her loyalty divided between Binkie and Andrew. But, Andrew like a true Marxist is indifferent to her tension, and leaves the matter for her to decide. He tells her, “we’ll see him, tell him where he stands and get it over” (Lessing, LL 233). It is Maisie who first voices the group’s dissatisfaction with the ideology.

Maisie finds communism as “something silly” (Lessing, LL 234) and accuses the members of “self righteousness” (Lessing, LL 238). About Andrew’s condescending nature, she says, “you know how he talks, I might be a child” and again she says, “yes, and he’s always right, always, no one can ever be right but him” (Lessing, LL 235). Maisie’s attack of communist personality is accentuated by Martha’s description of Anton. Anton who is all fire and fury for communism is quite another person in private life. He cannot tolerate Maisie nor Andrew’s decision to marry her. It looks strange then that Anton the upholder of communism could not share the idealist views of Athen, who says to Tommy:
But, comrade Tommy, don’t you see what selfishness it all is—my child, my son, my daughter, don’t you see, that’s all finished now?

…

Well, it will soon be finished in the world. What it is just: a baby is being born. A new human being. That’s all comrades. (Lessing, LL 185)

But he still can continue to insist that a “communist must consider himself a dead man on leave. . . and that in himself he is nothing, but in so far as he represents the suppressed working class people he is everything” (Lessing, LL 37). Lessing exposes the reality of male dominated society whose main function is to perpetuates stereotypes of woman that they are weak and incompetent being. She shows the internal desire of women to perform in the external affairs of society as well.

Martha emerges from oppression of patriarchy by participating in politics. She involves herself in the activities of the communist group and works for the upliftment of the poor and oppressed people. She “becomes violently pro-native and attempts anything that will lead to substantial personal values” (Karl 282). Her intellectual friendship with a dedicated member of the group, Anton Hesse, finally leads to their marriage. However, she observes that “a new personality had been born in Anton with the marriage” (Lessing, RFS 239) that he is not a mature, composed and integrated person as he pretended to be. Martha discovers that their ideas on most matters do not coincide. She finds that he has compartmentalized his life into various parts and gives more importance to the communist group above others. The sexual side of her marriage is full of disappointments. However, she never expresses it to Anton, and remains kind, loving and caring towards him. She learns that Anton has deceived her by hiding the truth of his first marriage with Grete, whose memories always haunt him and now he constantly discusses her with Martha. Martha longs for wholeness, closeness, depth and truth in her relationship with Anton, but he treats her “as if she did not exist” (Lessing, LL 273). It is not a marriage at all for Martha, and she decides that once the war is over “we will go our ways” (Lessing, LL 247). Martha cherishes companionship, affection and respect in her conjugal relationship. But its reciprocity is repeatedly denied to her.
Consequently, she is gradually drawn towards Thomas and develops extra-marital relations with him.

Lessing presents that how success in politics becomes the identity of her women rather than the triumph of her skills over household works. N. Sharda Iyer says, “It is not surprising that Lessing should have identified with the Communist party in Britain” (46). In *Retreat to Innocence, The Grass is Singing, Children of Violence* and *The Golden Notebook* are woven around her protagonists’ involvement in political issues. She attends politics not merely as a social identity but to achieve a distinctive approach on women’s role in politics through human justice and equality. Martha’s abilities to sustain and achieve political consciousness lead her to develop human psychology and triumph over external affairs successfully. Her sense of dedication helps her to achieve political succession.

Thus, Doris Lessing has placed the feminine consciousness of her women characters at the very center of his spectrum and goes to examine a whole drama of conflicts and tensions with its psychological and socio-political implications. Rising above from all the implications and highly complex spectrums constituted by the forces of the family, society, politics and history, women characters of Doris Lessing present the androgynous image of women who are highly competent and intelligent and who can show their superiority at all the corners of life being politicians, editors, writers, owners and workers. Anna Wulf, Martha Quest, Julia Barr and Mary Turner all have a sense of exploration in the field of politics and other external affairs. Their self motivated attitude towards learning the basics of politics lead them towards the emancipation of women from all the social bondages.