CHAPTER-VI
CONCLUSION

It has become evident from the foregoing analysis that Doris Lessing through her novels very acutely presents the cultural and social issues that a woman has to face in the sexist society in the present times. In her writings, there is very sensitive depiction of the way women suffer due to the sexist bias in the patriarchal society which places woman in subordinate position and treats them as second rate citizens. A woman’s existence is seen in relation to the services which she can render to a man. The subordination of woman begins even before her marriage when she is groomed by her parents, and ironically more often by their own mothers who are orthodox in their thinking. The traditional mothers want their daughters to be attractive commodities which can be of use to their husbands in future. But, Doris Lessing’s women resent this ideology and always try to assert their individuality and freedom. Mary Turner (The Grass is Singing), Julia Barr (Retreat to Innocence), Anna Wulf (The Golden Notebook) and Martha Quest (Children of Violence, a series of five novels) all openly revolt against the aberrant masculine demands and take their own decisions. Her new women finally emerge as aware, assertive and intellectually independent. They uphold the feminist assertion that gender discrimination is a cultural not a biological construct.

Lessing shows through her fictional constructs how the double standards which continue to operate throughout a woman’s life start right from her parents’ home. A woman is prevented from realizing her individuality. In a patriarchal society, a female child is brought up under the strict control of her parents with the view that she is to be given to a new master, her husband, who will determine and shape her existence for the rest of her life. Mother wants her daughter to acquire a selfless attitude in life. But, Martha Quest knows that the society around her is hypocritical and intolerant. She becomes aware of how gender discrimination is practiced in her own family when her younger brother with ‘half her brains’ is put in an expensive school whereas she has to go to a local school. The awareness of the biased attitude makes her self-reliant and defiant towards her parents and she decides to seek her
own identity outside the hold of her parental authority. In fact, Lessing has very aptly shown how her female protagonists break the familial myths of women by her intellect and superior knowledge. Her new women deconstruct the mystique which surrounds the image of a traditional woman.

The study also shows how Lessing underscores the consequences of the generation gap and difference of opinion between the traditional mothers and their young daughters. As it has been observed in Children of Violence that Mrs. Quest represents experiences of the past and Martha shows the courage and bold attitude of the young generation. Mrs Quest shows that a woman has no choice but to bow down to social conventions, traditions and moral obligations. Lessing traces various stages in the development of Martha who passes from girlhood to womanhood on a farm in Rhodesia. She adopts the theory of ‘resistance’ developed by C.G. Jung where both mother and daughter have a sense of resistance towards each other. Mrs. Quest wants to shape Martha strictly according to old English traditions and puts many “don’ts” to her choice of dresses and make-up. She does not like that Martha should meet men, especially Jewish shopkeepers and the Cohen boys because she feels that it may bring harm to the safety of her social identity. On the contrary, Martha develops a different attitude towards all these issues. She not only maintains friendship with the Cohen boys but strengthens human relations with them. She borrows books from them and discusses various issues as socialism, racism and communism. Thus, Lessing’s free women do not want to accept the stereotypical images of the women. Rather, they resent the old traditions where woman is dependent on her husband for her existence.

The analysis of Doris Lessing’s selected novels also brings to light how she adopts an ambivalent attitude about motherhood. She presents that her women love to be mothers but not at the cost of their personal life. Anna Wulf, Martha Quest, Molly and Stella take motherhood as a blessing. They become mothers and pursue their career as well. Lessing admires the idea of women who are working women, and love to nurse their children. She views that parenting is a shared responsibility. She advocates the opinion of ‘mature parenting’ and ‘collective childcare.’ She feels that motherhood may not remain a hindrance in the overall development of a
woman, if a man performs his responsibility as being the father of child. In fact, Lessing does not criticise a woman to be a mother but she dislikes the way a male opts out of all responsibilities after marriage and procreation. As a result, woman has to avoid pregnancy for her individual growth and personal identity. Lessing condemns the patriarchal society that believes that it is the prime responsibility of a woman to become mother and look after the child.

Doris Lessing also presents the idea of sisterhood among her women characters. Her women help, suggest, motivate and guide other women in different distress conditions. Anna and Molly in *The Golden Notebook* and Martha and Stella in *Children of Violence* series provide security, support and company to each other without intruding on each other’s privacy or identity. Lessing shows the sense of togetherness and collectiveness among her women characters. They not only financially help but encourage and support each other in all the possible manners. Being together, her women characters discuss, share and criticize man’s hypocritical attitude and various impositions that they have created for them in personal and social life. They confirm their decision to overcome all the familial and social hurdles created by patriarchal society to maximize their growth outside home.

The present research draws attention towards the suffering and agony of married women. She shows how they are marginalized and considered as the ‘other.’ On the contrary, man is privileged and given a superior position. Lessing exposes the hypocrisy, meanness and double standards of men. She shows that although man knows that woman has a great role to play in his life but he exploits her for his personal needs. She is forced to look after his children, home and other familial responsibilities. Martha, for example, condemns the idea of being recognized as sexual object to man, decoration piece, a nursemaid to bring up the children and to shoulder all the responsibilities of the household. Mary explores how a woman feels suffocated and deprived after marriage. After having suffered in marriage, which denies woman any right to be an equal and independent individual, most of her women decide to break the bond of marriage. Leaving their partners, both Anna and Molly are leaving alone. Mary does not bind herself to the traditional and conventional social institution called marriage. Martha also takes divorce from both
of her husbands. All her women want to live according to the needs of their own life. However, as Lessing shows in her novels, divorce does not solve the problem. A single woman is always seen as abnormal and deficient and is looked down upon with suspicion. They look for comfort, understanding and support in the company of other free women. But, they also desire for solace and emotional fulfilment in men. Knowing this fact, Lessing’s women develop friendships and remarry. In fact, Lessing does not criticize marriage but dislikes the consequences after marriage that do not allow women to be recognized as a liberal individuals and equal human beings.

Traditions and social conventions compel Lessing’s women to transgress the stereotypical roles assigned of woman by the patriarchal set-up. Martha’s quest for identity begins right from her childhood and continues even after her marriage to Douglas Knowell. When she realizes that this marriage would threaten her identity and thwarts her pursuit of self-realization and self-actualization, she abandons this relationship. Martha Quest’s decision reflects the unconventional behaviour of an emancipated young woman who does not want to conform to her husband’s aberrant and mystified expectations. Her decision to leave both her husband and her child is socially unacceptable and not accepted by most of the people, including her parents. But Martha’s desire to liberate herself is so strong that she does not even hesitate to abandon her child and husband. In fact, it is her husband’s callous behaviour that makes her to avoid the familial responsibilities of a mother and a wife.

The study also affirms that Lessing’s women are free from all the social taboos related to a woman’s sexual desires and their fulfillment. Her new women do not develop any social or psychological barriers that prevent them from fulfilling their sexual desires. They do not hesitate to have their boyfriends. They go through marriage, divorce, love affair, remarriage and hence they do not bind themselves to the patriarchal notions of marriage. Mary Turner validates it by adopting an extra marital affair with Moses to enjoy free sexual relationship with a strong man. She allows him to enter her life because she finds in him a man who is sensible for her. Julia adopts physical relations with Jan Broad, an elderly person. Martha keeps on having boyfriends throughout her life. Anna Wulf is also not conventional about her
physical relations with men. In fact, Lessing’s women do not passively accept the torturous behaviour of their husbands who use them merely as sex objects.

Lessing defends the rights of women by disrupting the hierarchical order maintained by the patriarchal set up. Martha’s participation in politics, Mary’s involvement in the organization of farm matters and Anna’s excellence in writing delineate Lessing’s efforts to challenge the conventional image of a woman whose only occupation is being an obedient housewife. The involvement of women in worldly matters is considered highly challenging because all the social, political and economic matters are intended to be reserved only for men. Mary, Martha and Anna are able to prove their abilities to act on an equal level to men and to take active part in affairs beyond their household duties. They consider their active participation in social and political issues and relations beyond marriage as the central aspects for the development of their identity. In fact, male dominated society never allows women to grow equally which might be challenging for their social existence. Lessing’s women emerge as ‘Free Women’, who are not only good at homes and offices jobs but social barriers also. Martha, instead of being a docile housewife, prefers to actively join a political group and emerge as a modern and independent young woman.

Lessing underlines in her novels the callousness, hypocrisies and indifference of patriarchal society against women. However, her new women challenge these restrictions imposed on them and create a new world order. We have seen in the foregoing analysis how Lessing presents her women as the boulder-pushers. Mary Turner, Anna Wulf, Martha Quest and Julia Barr are all seekers of truth and fight against cruelty, slavery, and violence to build a balanced and nobler world. Their struggle against stasis and their strong urge for negotiating freedom from patriarchy points at a future where they realize their true selves and assert their identity. Lessing also shows how these new women create a threat to the identity of men who did not allow women to prove their metal in social and political affairs outside their homes.

Lessing also lays great emphasis on education of women which prepares them to take on new professions hitherto denied to them by patriarchy. She shows
how Martha after receiving education takes keen interest in getting knowledge of language, history, literature and politics. She becomes aware of the fact how individuals, particularly women, are crippled through lack of openness and opportunity. Martha’s education helps her in joining politics which helps her to serve a great cause of improving the social conditions of poor and marginalized people. Apart from this, education also improves her capability to work and understand difficult situation of life. Martha does well at typing place in assistant’s job and then in politics. Mary Turner proves to be a hard working woman on farm to earn for the livings of her family. Anna Wulf is excellent at writing and earning enough through her successful novel. Julia Barr also dedicates herself to achieve harmony in the political sphere of South Africa.

After deconstructing the various familial and social myths about women, Lessing also challenges the stereotype that women are less intelligent and hence they are failures in political affairs and are not interested in the public issue of the day. She breaks the myth of patriarchal society that women are not interested in national and international affairs and they are only interested in family and home. Martha shows keenness in political discourses and becomes politically active after her marriage. However, her political activity is resented by her husband, for he obviously feels endangered by her growing freedom and understanding of political affairs. In spite of this, she very actively participates in political discussion circles and other social events. Throughout her journey in politics, Martha brings harmonious policies to end racism and gender discriminations from Southern Rhodesia. Thus, Lessing breaks the stereotype that women are less intelligent than men and are not successful in politics.

Lessing relates in her novels the emergence of new woman who takes on the world with dignity, self control and intelligence. Martha, by joining Communist party and actively participation in its programmes, gains the social reputation and proves her ability as a woman in contributing towards the governance of a country. After joining politics, she watches from very close the discriminations prevalent in Southern African society. She confronts the power crisis in Africa where white men
are most afraid of women and blacks as they also have the efficiency to control and run the worldly system.

Lessing shows through her novels that politics may help woman to prepare ‘human favoured’ policies. Martha, in fact, by joining politics, desires to achieve harmony and justice for all mankind. She has given her women a power of politics; a stance to sustain and develop in modern society. Her initial creative impulse is to capture all the complexity, the vigour and conflict of ideas in action, and to evolve something true and credible from an experience which must essentially be so rough and apparently formless and unshaped. Finally, Lessing’s new women remove various psychological social and political hurdles created by patriarchy which have hampered the development of a woman.

For Doris Lessing’s new women, national development and participation in making decisions for the development of the country is very important. They believe that right to equality and justice should exist in Southern Rhodesia. As far as Martha’s involvement in politics is concerned, it proves her ability and skills as a woman and it threatens the patriarchal hegemonic system. The discussion of Anna Wulf, Martha Quest and Julia Barr on politics and the policies of the political parties is a witness of their ability in political affairs. In fact, through their participation in political activities they want to participate in creating a new world order which is free of racism and sexual discriminations.

Lessing shows her deep rooted belief in the androgynous capabilities of woman which she thinks help her in challenging the ills of patriarchal society. It is because of her attempts to deconstruct the stereotypical expectations about her women subjects, Lessing emerges as a demystifier, a critical observer of age old social process and systems, an outsider who could reveal the activist and a radical who confronts all the social conventions of the patriarchy. Her concept of the ‘androgynous mind’ makes her brave enough to face the different forms of oppression, exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and systematic violence against woman. In fact, the entwinement lays a cornerstone for all of Lessing’s early works, in which personal development of women is always determined by their participation and activity in various socio-political affairs.
The present work not only highlights Lessing’s focus in her novels on the reductive and confined gender identity of women in the patriarchal society but also on her attempt to show that the struggle and the quest for self-awareness of women is an issue which concerns ‘everyone’ and goes beyond the sphere of sexual identity. She believes that the body may be enclosed by biology but the mind is possibly not. She calls for an inquiry into what is typically considered private practice and personal concern, such as the family, sexuality, the body, to balance what has seemed to be a masculine pre-occupation with ‘public.’ She develops a polemic and recuperative work. Anna Wulf desires to remove the tag of ‘other’ from the identity of woman. In fact, Lessing wants her women to be, individually and socially, recognized as equal to other human beings. She decries the gender differences that exist in the patriarchal society.

Thus, the form of an ideal woman as visualised by the feminists is reflected in the novels of Lessing. She presents her women characters as the successful wives, sisters, daughters and human beings. She desperately wants them to follow the substantial universal rule of change and growth with time. Roles of women are far from being a celebration of women’s independence from men. Her novels explore relation between men and women, and the seemingly inescapable female need for the opposite sex. The relationships described are usually troubled and abrasive but, throughout, what is important to her women characters is not to be liberated from marriage, a ritual bond between man and woman, but to enhance the quality of marriage. Anna, Martha and Julia’s efforts to re-establish the relations with their men show that they do not dislike being wives. Rather, they criticize the misogynistic attitude of their partners. Being a woman writer she is able to delve into the inner recesses of the hearts of the women which are unknown otherwise due to so many cultural apprehensions and social taboos. Lessing also presents certain aspects which inhibit the direct correspondence with the inner thoughts of women. How their modesty and prudery, as also the vulnerability and frailty which have been socially added to them, create an opaque screen that does not allow us to know women for their individuality.