SUMMARY

“The feminine mystique permits, even encourages, women to ignore the question of their identity “Who am I” by saying, “Tom’s wife…Mary’s mother”

(Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* 126).

Historically, woman has been stereotyped and mystified. She has simply been considered as a housewife, docile figure, source of physical pleasure, psychologically less developed than man, intellectually inferior, a failure in social liabilities, someone who is dependent on man for her existence, etc. The patriarchal society has always advocated for the supremacy of man in the family and emphasised woman’s dependence on man in all matters denying her freedom, dignity and equality of status. The ideological construction of patriarchy has always presented man as superior to woman. This ideology is partly the result of theology and religious practices. *The Holy Bible* states that wife should submit to her husband as to the lord. It has developed different myths that woman is created out of a man and he is the master of woman. Woman is slave to man and she has come to this world to look after his children and to give love to him. Ironically, she does everything since morning to evening, plays different roles but she does not enjoy the infinite possibilities. She is denied the political, legal, economic and cultural liberty.

In fact, women have been relegated to the position of other, marginalized and, in a metaphorical sense, colonized, forced to pursue guerrilla warfare against imperial domination from positions deeply imbedded in, yet fundamentally alienated from that imperial power. This is not the end of injustice or denial of human rights to woman. There are other mystiques also as man underestimates woman and believes that she may easily be caged, broken, forsaken, uprooted and trapped. Her roles are limited to the home and include cooking, loving, providing entertainment for her husband and looking after the children. Her existence has been categorized as fettered, unstable and migratory, narrow, conventional, intolerant, fragile, emotional, sentimental and sensitive that she may easily be confused and
misled. She has no right to participate in political, social or decision making process. She is dependent on man for her all needs. So, woman has to suffer due to the gender discrimination and male hegemony in the patriarchal society.

For breaking the existing myths and stereotypical image of women, Christine de Pizan in her book The City of Ladies and Legend of Good Women and Plato in Republic raised a voice against the social tyranny against woman and showed equality in sexes as the ideal form of humanity. Later, with the revival of learning in the Renaissance, there came many winds of change in human thought and action. But, still, it did not bring any marked change in the status of women. Below the aristocratic level, woman’s education did not advance. The idealization of women, frequently restored to imaginary portrayal, has remained an unrealized dream in real life. Right up to the Victorian age, the novelistic plots were mostly based on the idea of female chastity as a kind of citadel under attack, making the novels extended account of repeated sexual invasions and defenses. Fragile, emotional and sentimental women were presented as pretty dolls with little capacity for intelligence or action.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, women emerged as personalities in cultured society, though not so in politics. In the middle of 18th century, there was fashionable circle of women intellectuals known as the Blue Stocking in London. At the end of the century, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97) made her well made appeal for women’s education in A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792). Industrial upsurge in 19th century provided more opportunity for women for economic independence though at a low level. Women of a strong character began to open up the professions hitherto closed to them. Women emerged as writers and journalists, as the remarkable succession of women novelists in the century shows. Women also entered the medical profession and finally women came to be entitled to the same education as men. Virginia Woolf emerged as a main Spokesperson for women’s cause in the early decades of the twentieth century. Her effort, as an exercise in consciousness raising, is pioneering. She can be called the pioneer of feminist awareness in British women. She in her theoretical works Room of One’s Own or in Three Guineas stressed the need for social, political, academic and economic
independence of women and developed the concept of the androgynous mind that includes all the aspects of femininity and masculinity.

Since 1945, the struggle for women’s rights has gained momentum. The sexual revolution has helped women to challenge many of the so-called stereotypes related to them. Among novelists, female novelists of the twentieth century, Jeanette Winterson, Angela Carter, Iris Murdoch, Murial Spark, Doris Lessing and Margaret Drabble have raised the issue of womanhood in their fiction. Her contemporary women writers also have produced politically correct models that might contribute to the emancipation of women. They have spoken a language which portrays the heart of women and challenge the masculine-based social norms. In fact, all these authors have followed the woman’s point of view in their writing. Then, there comes a strong voice of womanhood in the web of different social barriers for women. Each of women writers longs to write a book powered with an intellectual and moral passion strong enough to create order or to create a new way of looking at life.

In fact, all the feminists desire and struggle to achieve social emancipation of women. The feminists argue that all the gender differences and inequalities are based on social difference not the biological ones. Doris Lessing has made an effort to explore the real potential of a woman both at home and outside. In fact, she is well focused on female self-definition in spite of the position they have been pushed to by patriarchy. She has succeeded in doing this through her different female protagonists like Mary (Grass is Singing), Julia Barr (Retreat to Innocence), Martha Quest (Children of Violence, a series of five novels Martha Quest, A Proper Marriage, Ripple from the Storm, Landlocked and Four Gated City) and Anna Wulf (The Golden Notebook). She has placed them in positions where they are not only seen but heard, where they are not the passive but active participant in decision taking. Women, all through history, have been held down by patriarchy, tradition, and the colonial ideologies. She challenges the myth that man is the more important figure and woman is born to serve him, love him, be protected by him, and assist in reproduction. She attempts to deconstruct those patriarchal norms that discriminate against the woman relegating her to the background. By doing so, she attempts to
move the woman from the margin to the centre. She shows brilliantly how Martha Quest matures socially and politically as a person. Doris Lessing starts her journey from the childhood and shows her development through different stages of Martha’s life. In fact, all her women protagonists are brave enough to challenge the patriarchal norms and create a space for stamping their identity.

After the first and introductory chapter, the second chapter explores that the family environment and parents of a woman affect the psychological development of woman right from her birth to the teen age and later period of maturity in life. Family turns out to be a source of woman’s oppression. Gender discrimination takes place right after the birth of a female child. The behaviour of the parents always remains different towards male and female child. A female child is not provided the due care and status in the family. Rather, she is restricted by various social norms. Father of a girl child becomes over conscious of her security as he relates it with his own social and masculine reputation. Among all this, mother emerges as a hurdle in the individual, social and psychological growth of her daughter. Mrs Quest in *Children of Violence* wants to minimize the liberty of her daughter so that she can become a good daughter, wife and mother who fulfills all the stereotype expectations of a patriarchal society. On the contrary, her daughter, Martha Quest wants to get rid of her mother’s world. She does not want to follow the old trend where woman is bound to the kindness and mercy of her husband for her individual and social existence.

Lessing shows that it is not motherhood which is a hindrance in acquiring career successfully but the casual and careless approach of father towards the child. Because the indifferent and careless attitude of father leads woman towards hatred for child bearing and pregnancy. She views that child bearing should be a responsibility for both mother and father. In fact, her women characters condemn the idea of pregnancy as a compulsion for women. She dislikes the behaviour of father towards the child and mother. She neglects the view point that it is mother who is solely responsible for the upbringing of a child.

Further, we will draw our attention towards Lessing’s ideal definition of an extended family for its members. In fact, she develops a sense of sisterhood among
women characters in her novels. These women help, suggest, motivate and guide one another about different challenging situations about life. They feel free to discuss all the issues associated with women, as their existence, man-woman relationship and livelihood. Among them, there is a sense of solidarity and no place for hatred and jealousy. They collectively oppose the certain issues such as male’s hegemonic attitude and patriarchal norms which mutilate identity of women. Finally, they emerge as members of a family who are true, committed and loyal to one another.

Third chapter underlines how Doris Lessing disapproves marriage as a traditional bond and woman as a private property of man. She shows that how a woman is forced to idealize marriage as a necessity for companionship, life long relationship and for influencing faith and commitment to her husband’s superiority. Contrary to this, her new women demand for the equality in relationship and condemn the patriarchal ideology which considers a woman a source of sexual gratification and someone to look after her husband, children and home. Lessing does not view marriage as evil but she does not appreciate the social environment where a husband is considered superior to her wife, economically the master of his home and physically dominant. Martha Quest, Julia Barr and Anna Wulf with their radical abilities make their own pattern of living and emancipate themselves from the social and psychological hurdles created by the patriarchal norms against them.

Lessing in her novels shows that her women desire to achieve harmony in man-woman relationship. Her women protagonists do not want to be recognized as housewives only who are subordinate, submissive and dependant for their existence. Lessing’s women do not hate to be wives but they do not like to get ready for any compromise on the aspect of individuality, equality, independence and self realization in the name of marriage. They want to maintain their individuality and independence even after marriage. But, when they find it hard to sustain the social implications of marriage, they take divorce or desert their husbands.

The fourth chapter shows that Lessing’s women are not neurotic and frustrated housewives rather they are skilled and intelligent women who are equal to men at different fronts of life. They are not ready to accept the lies, myths, injustice,
inequality, betrayal, suffering, contradictions, slavery, violence, suffocation, strangulation, double standards, callousness and hypocrisies of male hegemonic patriarchal society. Mary Turner in spite of all her circumstances proves herself a committed worker and provides economic assistance to her husband. Anna Wulf always criticizes the biased attitude of society. Martha Quest makes her best efforts to liberate women from all the social complications which undermine their capabilities outside the home. Julia Barr also works to establish a new identity of woman in the different social circles of society.

Doris Lessing presents the conscious, active and liberated women who do not submit themselves to the norms and myths of the patriarchal society. They are the boulder pushers who stand and fight against the social barriers created by the male hegemonic society. Lessing’s women are economically independent and self reliant. Martha first works as a typist, then as a social thinker and finally as a member of the political group. Anna Wulf is a good typist and successful author. Mary Turner also works equally to her husband in the fields. In fact, all these self-courageous women are motivated and highly energetic.

The fifth chapter shows that Doris Lessing’s women are well educated. They have androgynous capabilities. Lessing breaks the political myth that women are not competent to be the part of the decision making group of the society. Rather, she presents her women as more capable and sensible in decision making process of the society. Her women, coming out of the social bondages of their marriage, motherhood and daughterhood, prove their skills in the political groups of the Southern Rhodesia. Martha Quest, Julia Barr and Anna Wulf prove their sense of commitment towards the social services through their active participation in the political activities. They, finally, emerge out of the all the complexities and conflicts set up against women.

Lessing highlights that her women struggle hard to achieve the opportunities to participate in the external affairs. They strive to remove gender and class oppressions. They want to bring liberty, equality and fraternity for the welfare of the marginalized. Martha Quest becomes determined to have a sense of liberty, equality and humanity for the blacks of Southern Rhodesia. She presents the political and
social policies which concentrate on the basic needs of the blacks as of food, house, clothes and above all a sense of equality and humanity for them. In fact, she shows kindness as one of the features of her women protagonists. Finally, Lessing posits that her women are competent or reliable to pursue their careers outside their homes. With their abilities, they liberate themselves from the masculine superiority in politics.

Thus, the present study communicates the ideological commitment of the author to the values and principles of feminism. Having resolved to expose and oppose the different mystiques about women, Lessing makes a narrative of resistance and an assertion of feminist consciousness in her novels. She makes ardent advocacy for a social change to alleviate the physical and mental burdens of women. She stands for humanitarianism and expresses indefinite compassion for the marginalized and oppressed. She through her novels opposes the socio-cultural mores and values that have restricted women to limited roles in family affairs. She points out the different familial and social issues such as gender discrimination, mother-child alienation and incompatible marriages. Finally, Lessing with her introspection and honest appraisal enables her women to liberate themselves from all the familial and social mystiques about them.