Chapter -1

Introduction

The present research on the works of Doris Lessing, the British Nobel Prize winner of 2007 for Literature, has not been generated from a feminist fervor that tends to condemn all male dominated spheres of writing, but an interest to learn more about women and women writings in the society. The study has been made among seven novels of Lessing consisting of two individual novels namely, The Grass is Singing and The Golden Notebook along with a sequence of five novels namely Martha Quest, A Proper Marriage, Ripple from the Storm, Land Locked and The Four Gated- City which bear the title as Children of Violence, of the same writer, to get a proper perspective of women on the basis of four aspects like,

1) The trauma in their early life, which induces them to become highly liberated.

2) The patriarchal background where they are denied in gaining equality in the culture.

3) The Bildungsroman of a woman, which paves way to merge in the society especially in Communalism.

4) The self realization, in accepting the reality of the past and the present towards the end.

The thesis aims to focus on the individuals [women characters] like Mary Turner in The Grass is Singing, Anna Wulf in The Golden Notebook and Martha Quest in Children of Violence, of Lessing who find very difficult to cope with their family life as they are very much engaged in searching their self identity.

For centuries together women are not portrayed as such with their innate emotions and feelings, but they are presented in the men’s point of view. This has been rightly quoted
by the MP and the poet Kanimozhi, in her speech in the World Classical Tamil Conference held in Coimbatore. *The New Indian Express* described her words on Monday, June 28/2010 in page 5, as,

> Women are portrayed in an obscene way by some male writers. The society seems to accept it too. This should change. Women writers have a greater responsibility to change the society’s views by creating a revolution through their writings. So that the society will change in their outlook of women.

Contradictory to this view, it is true that, the same news item illustrates the truth that a woman can raise out her voice for recognition even in a public gathering very daringly and explicitly at present. One more news item published in the same newspaper talked about the incident which is considered as immoral by the people in general. It said that,

> Johanna Sigurdardottir, 68, Iceland PM, formally married her long-time partner, Jonina Leosdottir, a writer, and the couple submitted a demand for their civil union to be transformed into a marriage, the RUV broad-caster said. Homosexual couples could previously enter into a civil partnership and benefit from the same rights as heterosexual couples. (11)

The second news exposes the fact that today the women are allowed to act independently and they also demand the government to provide its full support to their wish. Currently there are a lot of reservations and benefits for the women in the government which help them to gain equality in the public. Women are enjoying privileges and rights equal to men today. They are in the position to play dual role. In spite of being a homemaker they also try to be successful in their career. Some women are fortunate to have their father or their husband, stand behind as backbone. In many other cases women
try to come out from their family bond or marital bond to achieve success. Indian
government has also framed laws to help and uplift the woman who is suffering from
dowry problem, sexual harassment and other problems. Such notable achievements can
attain success, as the women in the present society attempt to adapt themselves with the
reality of their life. It is also noteworthy to observe that they become shrewd enough to
flight from the injustice done to their forerunners in the past. Therefore they realize that it
is a must for them to focus their study on the woman of the past to get rid of, from the
problems especially caused by the society.

On the other hand, the women in the past were slaves to the males, to the society and
to the tradition. They had no individuality and were not allowed to seek freedom. Her lot
was to remain silent even if she was abused, beaten and violated. There were Scriptures,
Vedas and many holy books insisting the miseries of women. For example, Sita in
Ramayana was asked to get into the holy fire to prove her virginity. Draupathi in
Mahabharata was treated as a materialistic object by the Pandavas. Desdemona was killed
by Othello, her own husband due to suspicion.

In addition to this in Genesis 16:2, Sarah gave permission to her husband Abraham
to engage with her maid, Hagar. She said that, “I pray thee; go in unto that I may obtain
children by her”. The Vedas said that a woman should give birth to a male son. In case of
female baby, she should ask apology to her husband’s family and they also faced Suttee
system and child marriage system. In another place it was mentioned that women and sutras
should be treated alike. By the time of the Sutra period (200 B.C. to 200 A.D.), the woman
had started to lose all her religious rights, rights for education and became her husband’s
property only to beget children for him. Virginia Woolf, the British feminist, in her A Room
of One’s Own spoke about how women were not allowed into the library without a man’s escort. The narrative began with a young woman being shooed off the lawn and being denied to enter into the library. She said that,

But here I was actually at the door which leads into the library itself. I must have opened it, for instantly there issued, like a guardian angel barring the way with the flutter of black gown instead of white wings, a deprecating, silvering, kindly gentleman, who regretted in a low voice as he waved me back that ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction. (17)

Thus the Victorian women were refused to take a dignified place as free independent existents. They were denied with the opportunities to stand with men on a plane of intellectual and professional equality. Commenting on the position of women, Woolf said in the same work as,

Wife-beating, I read, ‘was a recognized right of man, and was practiced without shame by high as well as low…’ Similarly, the historian goes on, ‘the daughter who refused to marry the gentle man of her parents’ choice was liable to be locked up, beaten and flung about the room. (50)

Women in the eighteenth century were under the authority of her father and then of her husband. The knowledge of classical languages or formal school was denied to them. To remain single had been considered as a great misfortune. Divorce was almost unknown. It was obtainable only through church courts and then to be sanctioned by a special Act of Parliament.
In the nineteenth century the trend had been slightly changed. The growth of the factory system and of capitalist agriculture had provided women with the opportunities to be employed. Women had been privileged by coming out of their old means of livelihood by the establishment of the cottage industries. Owing to the invention, new machines had been employed by the big capitalist farmers, but the growth of high farming and big business had turned some of them without occupation. Nevertheless these two revolutions in the nineteenth century had been proved to be reactionary forces in English life and also brought a gradual change in the lives of women. Though they had lost some of the best things in life, they gained an economic independence, which had given them confidence to fight for their legal rights. Furthermore the working class women had aroused envy in the hearts of other women of the higher class. G.M. Trevelyn, the British historian, in his *English Social History* said that,

Members of the leisured class like the Bronte sisters and Florence Nightingale were beginning to feel that the independent factory hand, earning her own bread, was setting an example that might be of value to the ‘Lady’. (369)

In the twentieth century, the concept of the female Bildungsroman was made possible when it became a reality for women in general and for the fictional heroines in particular. The heroines in fiction began to reflect according to the changes in the society. When cultural and social structures appeared to support women’s struggle for independence, possibilities made for them to go out into the world, engage in careers in self-discovery and fulfillment. It was noteworthy that by giving chances to the female protagonist that was the right to speak in their own voices, the twentieth century women writers had not only given
them the capacity to tell their own stories, but also the interpretive power over their own reality and self definition. It was “I” who claimed the heroine identity in process and while she interpreted her own experiences; she claimed both her autonomous self-definition and her femaleness. Her narrative voice gave her for an awareness human wholeness in complexity and change.

Thus it took centuries for women to come up and get identification in the society in general. For this purpose many women writers and revolutionaries had shouldered their part, which ended in enjoying the privileges at their cause. The changing social and political conditions all around the world in the twentieth century also provided them with innumerable sources. For example, Kate Millett, an American Feminist in her Sexual Politics described the relationship between the men and the women. Mary Ellmann, an American writer’s Thinking about Women was an early work of feminist literary criticism and Simone De Beauvoir, a French writer’s The Second Sex gave the detailed analysis of women’s oppression. These writers were the ones who welcomed the literature with their novelties in terms of theme, character and characterization. James Joyce, Lawrence, and Woolf were also among those who reflected the complicated mind of their characters not only in their themes but in their styles as well.

Thus, there are number of writers who have discussed about the condition of women at various centuries, but only a few of them have given the solution to it. One among them is Doris Lessing, who has followers not only readers, prescribes medicine for the trauma through the portrayal of various protagonists in her works. She is one of the most wide-ranging and comprehensive of contemporary novelists. She is generally recognized as one of the most important writers of the twentieth century.
Lessing spent her infancy and a part of childhood in Kermanshah in Persia, then a British colony. Her father, who had been crippled in World War I, was a clerk in the Imperial Bank of Persia and her mother had been a nurse. She moved to Southern Rhodesia, where her father, bought a large part of farm land but failed to make much profit out of it. They lived a life of poverty and not a life of plenty according to the British standard.

Lessing enforced a rigid system of rules and hygiene at home. A strict household towards women and their daughters were enforced by her mother. Installed into a convent school she was said to have been terrified by the emphasis of the nuns. Then she sent to all girls’ school in the capital of Salisbury. From there she dropped out at the age of 13, which was the end of her formal education. At the age of 14, she left the school without matriculating and moved to Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia. She herself regrets that,

I had to be. The school was no good. I read, and when I was interested in something, I followed it up. Whenever I met anyone who knew anything, I would bore them stiff until they told me what they knew. I still have these terrible gaps; things that every child learned at age 14. I have to look up in an encyclopedia. (www.dorislessing.org/biography)

When Lessing was 15, she had left her household in fear of her mother and took a job as a housemaid from where she was fed knowledge through books given by her employer. While working as a housemaid, she began to write stories that dealt with eroticaism which sold to two magazines. At the age of 19 she married Frank Wilson and had
two children that would limit her greatly as a writer. And so she wanted to be free as a writer which induced her to leave the family with two kids.

After leaving her family Lessing had joined in a Communist Party called as the Left Book Club. Gottfried Lessing was the central member of the group. Shortly after she joined, they married and had a son and thereby acquired the last name Lessing. After the marriage she became confused and unsatisfied with the party and left the communist movement as well as her husband. Then she moved to London with her young son where she published her first novel *The Grass is Singing* in 1950 and began her career as a professional author. Then she preferred to educate herself by reading world literature such as the works of Dickens, Scott, Stevenson, Kipling along with those of Lawrence, Stendhal, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. All these authors provided her with a wide perspective on life in terms of human relations.

As a prolific writer, Lessing has written more than fifty books including novels, short stories, reportage, plays, poems, and two librettos. Her wide-range interests and concerns with the new theories of psychiatry, Marxist theory, feminism, racism, Sufism, mysticism and sciences, the destruction of the environment. The fact that she has been claimed as an insistently innovative novelist lies in her wide range of themes, complicated ideas about literary creation and varied forms.

Lessing is the most original and impressive woman novelist in the postwar English literature and she has received high praise from many critics. The *New York Times Book Review* eulogies that Lessing, of all postwar English novelists, was the foremost creative descendant of that great tradition which included George Eliot, and Lawrence. Using detailed realistic descriptions, symbolism and imagery, her strong, straightforward prose
has embraced a number of modern, social, political and psychological questions. However, the immense appeal of Lessing’s fiction rests largely on her treatment of women in modern life, the most thorough and accurate of any in literature. The blurb of the book titled Land Locked (1993), by Lessing describes the lines taken from the British weekly newspaper, The Guardian as,

Doris Lessing has one of those acute, emotional intelligences whose stories provide the key to our personal dilemmas. For some, she is more: almost a seer, able to articulate widely-shared intuitions and fantasies that reach forward into the dark of the future.

Critics argue that, her enlightened portrayal of marriage and motherhood, her anti–apartheid stance, her experimentation with genre has made her, an exciting and often controversial literary figure. In most of her works, Lessing’s focus is on marginal characters, i.e. people living on the fringes of the society. Her writing has been uniformly alerted the fragmented individual to achieve wholeness, and her recent works have identified her as a kind of a prophet for the sensitive. Her literary career spans for more than four decades; consequently her texts, both fiction and nonfiction, are valuable at the most basic level, as the historical records that tackle the central, political, spiritual and psychological questions of the last half of the twentieth century.

Within the forty eight years to be exact of her writing career, Lessing has touched upon every avenue open to a writer. Thus it is considered as a saga of travel which reaches the young and interesting minds abruptly. John Leonard, a book critic of The New York Times, describes Lessing as, “One of the half-dozen most interesting minds to have chosen to write fiction in English in this century.” (www.dorislessing.org/biography). While known
primarily for her novel, Lessing has written short fiction throughout her career, and it forms an integral part of her oeuvre. Her stories are often closely linked with the novels as Claire Sprague asserts in *Critical Essays on Doris Lessing*:

Doris Lessing is not unusual in having begun her career with short stories. She is unusual in having continued to write short stories for a long time after she established her reputation as a novelist....Her short story writing paralleled her novel writing, perhaps her very best novel writing, for a very long time.

(www.dorislessing.org/biography)

Considered among the most significant writers, Lessing explores many important ideologies and social issues of the twentieth century in her prolific body of work especially in the novels. Her oeuvre displays a broad spectrum of interests and concerns, ranging from racism, communism and feminism to psychology and mysticism. She began her career, particularly the writing fiction in the realist mode that focused on the theme of racial injustice. In the past four decades, her work has had a profound lasting influence on both men and women, and the critical acclaim enjoyed by her books has grown to the point where she has been frequently nominated for the Nobel Prize for literature. In her work, she has spoken out courageously for the humanist vision which she associates with the major nineteenth century writers and more recently, for inner psychic phenomena and for mysticism.

Over the years, Lessing has attempted to accommodate what she admires in the novels of the nineteenth century, their climate of ethical judgment to the demands of twentieth century ideas about consciousness and time. After writing the *Children of Violence* series (1951-1959), a formally conventional bildungsroman [novel of education]
she started portraying the growth in consciousness of her heroines. Then she broke a new ground with *The Golden Notebook*, a daring narrative experiment, in which the multiple selves of a contemporary woman are rendered in astonishing depth and detail.

In 1970s and 1980s, Lessing began to explore more fully on the quasi-mystical insight in her “inner-space fiction” and also deals with cosmic fantasies. She has characterized her novel from this period as “inner-space fiction”: an attempt in the spirit of Romanticism to expand human knowledge to encompass regions beyond the control of reason and the ego. Moreover, *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971) is about a man who is wandering the streets of London with no memory of a “normal” life. In the novel *Canopus in Argos: Archives* (vol.1-5, 1979-1984) she expanded the science fiction genre. The series study the post-atomic war development of the human species. She varies in thoughts about colonialism, nuclear war and ecological disaster with observations on the opposition between female and male principles. These works of her reflect Idries Shah, whose writings on Sufi mysticism stress the evolution of consciousness and the belief that individual liberation can come out only if people understand the link between their own fates and the fate of the society.

Lessing published two novels under the pseudonym Jane Somers [*The Dairy of a Good Neighbor*, 1983 and *If the Old Could*, 1984]. They were turned down for publication several times and when published had only small print runs few reviews. When the truth was uncovered, the books were, of course, reprinted too much greater acclaim. She also published *The Good Terrorist* (1985), providing a satirical picture of the need of the contemporary left for total control and the female protagonist’s misdirected martyrdom and subjugation. Her other important novels are *The Summer before the Dark* (1973) and *The
Fifth Child (1988). In the former, the reader at first infers a liberation motif: a woman finally about to fulfill her gift and sexual desires. After the first reading, the contours of the real novel take shape: a ruthless study of the collapse of a woman. It is also a kind of enlightenment through what the doctors would describe as a breakdown. The second one is also concerned with alienation and the dangers inherent in a closed social group. Harriet and David react to the hedonism and embarking on an enthusiastic programme of childbearing and domestic bliss. Their fifth child, however, emerges as a malevolent troll-like and angry figure that quickly disrupts the family idyll. It is also considered as a masterfully realized psychological thriller, where a woman’s repressed or denied aggression against family life is incarnated in a monstrous boy child.

In addition, Lessing has written several nonfiction works, including books about cats, love since childhood. The autobiographical, Under My Skin (1994) and Walking in the Shade (1997) represented a new peak in her writing. She recalls not only her life but the entire epoch: England in the last days of the empire. The work Under My Skin received the James Tait Black Prize for best biography. In June 1995 she received an Honorary Degree from Harvard University. Also in 1995, she visited South Africa to see her daughter and grandchildren, and to promote her autobiography. It was her first visit since being forcibly removed in 1956 for her political views. Ironically, she is welcomed now as a writer acclaimed for the very topics for which she was banished 40 years ago.

Lessing collaborated with the illustrator Charlie Adlard to create the unique and unusual graphic novel, Playing the Game. After being out of print in the U.S. for more than 30 years, Going Home and In Pursuit of the English were republished by Harper Collins in 1996. These two fascinating and important books give rare insight into Lessing’s
personality, life and views. In 1996, her novel, *Love Again* had been published by Harper Collins. She did not make any personal appearances to promote the book. In an interview she described the frustration she felt during a worldwide tour to promote her autobiography:

I told my publishers it would be far more useful for everyone if I stayed at home, writing another book. But they wouldn’t listen. This time round I stamped my little foot and said I would not move from my house and would do only one interview. (www.dorislessing.org/biography)

But the honors keep coming to her. She had been on the list of nominees for the Nobel Prize for literature and Britain’s writer’s Guild Award for Fiction in 1996.

Later in the same year, Harper Collins published a compilation of three of her plays; *Play with a Tiger*, *The Singing Door* and *Each His Own Wilderness*. In an unexplained move, Harper Collins only published this volume in the U.K. and it was not available in the U.S., to the disappointment of her North American readers. In 1997 she collaborated with Philip Glass for the second time, providing the libretto for the opera *The Marriages between Zones Three, Four and Five* which premiered in Heidelberg, Germany in May, *Walking in the Shade*, the anxiously awaited second volume of her autobiography, was published in October and was nominated for the 1997 National Book Critics Circle Award in the biography and autobiography category. This is the final volume of her autobiography.

The vision of global catastrophe forcing mankind to return to a more primitive life has had special appeal for Lessing. Her new novel, titled *Mara and Dann* related to this vision has been published in U.S. on January 1999 and in U.K. on April 1999. Her recent fiction includes *Ben, in the World* (2000), a sequel to *The Fifth Child*, and *The Sweetest Dream* (2001), which follow the fortunes of a family through the twentieth century, set in

In May 1999 Lessing would be presented with the XI Annual International Catalunya Award, an award by the government of Catalunya. December 31 1999: In the U.K.’s last Honours List before the new Millennium, Lessing was appointed as a Companion of Honour, an exclusive order for those who have done conspicuous national service. In January, 2000 the National Portrait Gallery in London unveiled Leonard McComb’s portrait of Lessing. In 2001, she was awarded the Prince of Asturias Prize in Literature, one of Spain’s most important distinctions for her brilliant literary works in defense of freedom. She also received the David Cohen British Literature Prize.

To be noted, Lessing won the 2007 Nobel Prize for Literature and stands as the 11th woman to win this literature’s most prestigious prize in its 106th year history. She is best known for her 1962 modern post feminist masterpiece, *The Golden Notebook*. Announcing the award, the Swedish academy described Lessing as an epicist of the female experience, who with skepticism, fire and the visionary power has subjected a divided civilization to scrutiny. On 11th October, 2007 the award was announced and she was making as the winner of the literature and the third oldest Nobel Laureate in any category. Lessing, who was shopping at the time of the noble announcement, was typically irreverent in her response to the news. “I’ve won all the prizes in Europe; I’m delighted to win them all, the whole lot,” (www.dorislessing.org/biography) she said to the reporters gathered outside her home in North London. Her longtime agent, Jonathan Clowes, was absolutely
delighted at the news of the award worth £76,000, which was, he said, “very well-deserved.” (www. dorislessing.org/biography) Speaking to Reuters, her editor at the Fourth Estate, Nicholas Pearson, called it thrilling and claimed that her early books, “Changed the face of literature through the description of the inner lives of women.”(www. dorislessing.org/biography) Jane Friedman, the chief executive of Harper Collins described her as “an icon for women.” (www. dorislessing.org/biography). She is now considered to be the oldest person to win the Nobel Literature Prize. She is the second British writer to win the Nobel Prize after Harold Pinter.

As her writing developed in receiving awards, Lessing began focusing on strong-willed, independent heroines who suffer from emotional crisis in male-dominated societies, anticipating many of the major feminist concerns of the late 1960s and 1970s. The major unifying theme of her work explored the need of an individual to confront his or her most fundamental assumptions about life as a way of avoiding preconceived belief systems and achieving psychic and emotional wholeness. She wrote candidly about the inner lives of women and rejected the notion that they should abandon their marriage and children through her protagonists in her novels.

To provide evidence to this concept, Lessing published her first novel The Grass is Singing, relatively an uncomplicated work which deals with Mary Turner, the protagonist’s elaborate flashback of childhood, her acceptance of her unmarried state, her intentional, and desperate grasping for emotional stability by marrying Dick Turner, a white farmer, who struggles to make a living off a sun-baked farm in South Africa. The title has been derived from the phrase found in the lines from 354 to 386 of the poem in section V titled What the Thunder Said of T.S.Eliot, the literary and social critic’s The Waste Land. Throughout the
novel, Lessing threads together the images from this poem which she quotes as the front piece of her *The Grass is Singing* as,

> In this decayed hole among the mountains
> In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing
> Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel
> There is the empty chapel, only the wind’s home.
> It has no windows, and the door swings’
> Dry bones can harm no one.
> Only a cock stood on the rooftree
> Co co rico, co co rico
> In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust
> Bringing rain
> Ganga was sunken, and the limp, leaves
> Waited for rain, while the black clouds
> Gathered for distant, over Himavant.
> The jungle crouched, humped in silence.
> Then spoke the thunder.

The poem presents the disillusionment of a generation and is considered by most of the critics as a sort of poetic equivalent of Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West*. The seeming disjointedness of the poem represents the state of western civilization after World War I (1914-18). Eliot’s *The Waste Land* succeeds eminently in presenting the sordidness and disillusionment of the early twentieth century. The last section of the poem *What the Thunder Said* marks the end of the wasted time and the beginning of a new life after
sacrificial death. It is one of the more jubilant and reviving images used in this section dealing with destruction’s power over growth.

Closely connected with it is the second epitaph from an anonymous source i.e. by the failures and misfits of a civilization that one can best judge its weaknesses. Taken together, these two epitaphs give meaning and significance to what Lessing portrays about life in a farming district in a bush in Southern Rhodesia [now Zimbabwe] in the 1940s. Using a newspaper report to document the murder of a white farmer’s wife by her native servant, Lessing explores the race relations in Southern Africa by depicting the primary issues surrounding the murder and the society in which it takes place.

Set in the days of apartheid [institutionalized racism]; the novel *The Grass is Singing* explores the themes relating to the day-to-day lives of individuals both black and white, as well as the slow simmering nature of revenge and an individual’s need for self-delusion to avoid facing uncomfortable truths. For many English and American readers *The Grass is Singing* is the candid dramatic presentation of apartheid, with horror emphasized through the matter of fact i.e., even by well intentioned whites who have emigrated from England to Rhodesia. The views of the British weekly newspaper, *Independent on Sunday*’s given in the blurb of the book titled *The Grass is Singing* (1994) say that,

*The Grass is Singing* focuses on the blighted life of a woman whose spirit is destroyed by a disastrous marriage and by an environment to which she couldn’t respond. More than any other white African writer of her generation, Doris Lessing is aware of the seductive cruelty of colonialism, and is one of our strongest, fiercest voices against injustice, racism and sexual hypocrisy.
The novel is a bleak and terrifying analysis of a failed marriage, the febrile neurosis of white sexuality, and the fear of black power and energy that Lessing saw as underlying the white colonial experience of Africa. Written in a relentless but devastatingly powerful prose, the novel’s treatment of the tragic decline of Mary and Dick Turner’s fortunes becomes a metaphor for the whole white presence in Africa. The novel is peppered with passages of startling and shocking honesty about the fault lines in the white psyche. It was filmed in Zambia in 1981 by a Swedish company.

The critical reception of The Grass is Singing is overwhelming favorable with critics pointing out that not only the expected parallels with Eliot-atmospheric conditions, especially the thunder, integrally tied in with Mary’s deterioration and death but also with Lady Chatterley’s Lover (1928) by Lawrence an author with whom Lessing has often been compared and discussed. Mary Turner unlike any of Lessing’s later female protagonists demonstrates no desire for or understanding of the nature of freedom—real or imagined in a person’s life.

The novel was set in Southern Rhodesia. British settlers arrived in the land, which was to become Rhodesia in the late 1890s; the Africans resisted them but by 1898 the British had won. In 1911, the British divided the country into Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia. It became a self-governing British Colony in 1923. Northern Rhodesia became independent as Zambia in 1963. However, the white-dominated the government in Southern Rhodesia. Many countries imposed economic sanctions and these, together with internal guerrilla activity, forced the Rhodesian government to negotiate with the main black Africans which kindled the Britain to recognize the independence of Southern Rhodesia, now called Zimbabwe.
Lessing brought the manuscript of *The Grass is Singing* with her, when she left Southern Rhodesia and came to England in 1950. When it was first published, it created an impact whose reverberations make the readers feeling still, and immediately established itself as a landmark in the twentieth century literature. The novel is a superb evocation of Africa’s majestic beauty, an intense psychological portrait of lives in confusion, a passionate exploration of the ideology of white supremacy. The theme of the novel centers on Mary Turner, who is incapable of any self respect or authority, fears Moses and the relationship gradually changes to the point where he is dominant, with his power taking on the same malevolent nature. Though Moses takes revenge for the treatment he has suffered, he knows that he cannot escape from the punishment. Mary, in fearing anything personal between herself and Moses, ironically has taunted Moses sexually. Before her marriage, Mary Turner has never had any direct contact with blacks but like other whites has developed a code of behavior towards them in general. This code suggests that blacks are not trustworthy and whites should not get too close to them and that the system could never be alerted without wreaking chaos upon the nation.

The characterization in the novel is sometimes limited to stereotypes, but in the psychological portrayal of a haunted, driven woman, Lessing is excellent in portraying the picture of Mary. She does as good a job as a non-native, even one growing up in such a milieu, could have reasonably been expected to do. While the whites in the novel have the economic and political power, the blacks have the moral edge, in most respects and these aspects make her novel to be realistically a successful first one.

*The Grass is Singing* displays the suffering of an individual in a world which she finds hard to fit in. When it was first published, the book created a great deal of
controversy due to the demonstration of the inequalities and injustices practiced upon the black by a “civilized country” in the twentieth century. The novel embodies certain dichotomies such as farm and city, dream and waking life, feeling and reason, sound and silence, name and character; the divisions which have been frequently used by Lessing throughout her literary career. Furthermore, the work fuses diverse genres ranging from detective to mystery and romantic to realistic novel. Nevertheless, the most important aspect of the novel is that it is psychological and it focuses on the crises of an individual who is caught up in contradictory feelings and desires.

The novel *The Grass is Singing* begins with a newspaper headline that points out the murder of Mary Turner by her black servant, Moses, and it continues to unfold the mysteries about the murder and the deep layers in the character of Mary Turner. It says that,

Mary Turner, wife of Richard Turner, a farmer at Ngesi, was found murdered on the front verandah of their homestead yesterday morning. The houseboy, who has been arrested, has confessed to the crime. No motive has been discovered. It is thought he was in search of valuables. (GS, 9)

Thus the first chapter of the book focuses on this murder and the general atmosphere in the white world in Zimbabwe, where the whole action of the novel is set. The omniscient narrator takes the role of the collective conscious, that is, the white British settlers in South Africa, and the narrator reflects the opinion of these colonizers about the mysterious murder of Mary Turner. In the following chapters the point of view shifts from the collective to the individual and gets into the mind of Mary Turner. The novel begins to tell the life of Mary in a chronological order focusing on her unhappy childhood, and then the happy days in town, her desperate marriage at the age of thirty, coming to the village as a result of
her marriage to Dick, the broken illusions of both, Mary’s brutal treatment towards the natives, the economic collapse of the couple and the sale of the farm to Charlie Slatter, her mental breakdown and lastly her murder by Moses in the end where the circular structure of the novel is completed.

In the background of the novel, there is the brutal discrimination practiced against the black by the white British settlers and it is possible to read the novel as a social critique. Thus, she displays that she has much deeper intentions while constructing the novel, which cannot be taken simply as a portrayal of racial conflict but also obviously detects the clash between the white and the black, yet this forms a background in the novel for an individual who deteriorates day by day owing to her failure of balancing her own desires with the intentions of the society. Thus the conflict between the society and the individual can be noticed from the beginning of the novel.

Using a newspaper article to document the murder of a white farmer’s wife by her native servant, Lessing addresses the human tendency to generalize, sensationalize, and confirm their worst assumptions, fears, and beliefs. The article clipping itself is followed by the narrator’s exploration of the situation following the murder before the reader even encounters the character’s point of view. These narrative explorations throughout the remainder of chapter one, direct the reader to the primary issues surrounding the murder and the society in which it takes place. In the end, all of the participants implicate themselves in wrongdoing and lack of respect for human dignity occurs.

The rest in the chapter provides extended flashbacks up to murder. Chapter two returns to Mary’s childhood, and she remains the focus of more chapters than other characters. Most importantly, Lessing shows how successfully Mary lives in the city by
herself and returns to it when she temporarily flees her husband. The distinctive omniscient narrative voice encourages the readers to interpret the events from an ever-widening understanding of viewpoints. From this point, readers see Mary’s quickening disintegration in her growing dreams and visions of plants overtaking the farm. Only in the last chapter do readers encounter the key player’s actions leading up to the murder. The narrator warns that personal emotions are impossible to decipher and so Moses’ motives for the murder remain ambiguous. His actions are viewed from the standpoint of someone’s observation than from within his mind.

Lessing’s political knowledge appears throughout the novel in which she develops the characters that represent various roles of farming in the early twentieth century. Charlie Slatter is the successful character who takes over the land by the end of the story and sympathy is not directed towards him. Instead Dick Turner appears as a tragic character who gains readers’ sympathy because not only does he want to own the land but also defines his own self-worth by it. He treats the natives more humanely but the injustices are enhanced by his wife’s treatment of the natives. Mary enters into her marriage life and discovers how much she dislikes farming and presence of natives and Dick’s overlook on his wife’s treatment of the natives indicates both marriage concerns and perpetuate practices of injustice. Mary recognizes too late that she has fallen into the same situation as her mother causes greater hopelessness and distance between them. As their spousal relationship grows more distance, she hides the changing interaction occurring between her and Moses, particularly when the ambiguous sexual undercurrent grows.

The novel is written in the third person’s point of view with some limited perspective. To be specific, the narration focuses with complete exclusivity on the thoughts,
feelings and motivations of its white characters. The black characters, who are secondary in narration, receive little or no attention on their thoughts, feelings and motivations. In short, the novel’s focus on the white characters is a manifestation of the characters’ limited awareness. They are fully aware of only themselves, with the black characters being perceived solely through that awareness. This is particularly true of Mary. The self-absorbed nature of her deeply ingrained, racism is stylistically echoed in the narrative’s almost total absorption with her particular thoughts, feelings, attitudes and reactions.

The setting in *The Grass is Singing* plays a vital role in the action, and manifests on several levels, the first being political and social. The novel is set at the time and in the place [late 1940’s South Africa], where the minority white population power over the majority black population. The powers manifest on every level like economic, political and interpersonal. The relationships and attitudes of the white and black characters in *The Grass is Singing* are therefore a microcosm of pervasive societal attitudes in general. The other levels of manifestation of the novel’s setting are in climate and physical environment, which have direct impact on the mental, emotional, and spiritual development of its central characters, in particular Mary. In particular the omnipresent heat and dryness of rural South Africa prove extremely challenging to Mary, to the point that they become oppressive, her struggles to overcome them become obsessive, and she ultimately finds herself overpowered. Thus the lives of Mary, her husband and Moses are all essentially destroyed in a metaphorical way by apartheid and its rules and its attitudes.

The novel’s structure is similar to that of other stories that have a murder mystery component. It starts with the murder and then examines its detail circumstances, relationships and incidents that led to do it. In general, the purpose of this structural
technique is to coop a powerful sense of curiosity in the reader’s mind from the beginning. He or she is on some level, impelled to read further into the novel in order to answer the questions posed by its beginning like, who is the guilty party, why did the murder happen, and what is relevant about the obviously carefully chosen detail or clues that have been laid down. Thus all these features are specifically fulfilled in The Grass is Singing and make this first novel to be practically a victorious one.

Generally the female protagonists in Lessing’s major works are complex human beings filled with destruction and confusion. Her women frequently appear as helpless onlookers, sensitive to conditions around them, longing to act, to take control, yet compelled by their dependent natures and narrowly defined social roles to remain passive observers. Their dilemma may fill them with rage and resentment, stoic resignation or coldness and apathy. Compromises and adjustments are frequently made with a sense of loss. The drive to overcome inner divisions may lead them to madness to withdrawal or towards greater involvement with life through intense personal relations, artistic or political activity or deep self-analysis. The supreme example of the divided women who is fragmented between her emotional needs and her intellect is Anna Wulf, the protagonist of Lessing’s most psychological complex novel, The Golden Notebook. Malcolm Bradbury writes in a mail:

At the beginning of the Sixties, this vast, frank, complicated novel helped to sustain British fiction’s reputation for courageous, ambitious, experimental writing. It captured the heady mix of the time when not just novels but political certainties were dissolving. Soon a world wide best seller it is still her finest work. (www.bookrags.com/The Golden Notebook)
The Golden Notebook has generally been acclaimed as Lessing’s masterpiece. It is a complex maze of differing perspectives on the same woman’s life and circumstances as in The Grass is Singing. Bold and illuminating, The Golden Notebook is a portrait of the intellectual and moral climate of 1950’s, a society on the brink of feminism and a powerful account of a woman searching for her own personal and political identity. The blurb of The Golden Notebook, (2002) describes the words of Natasha Walter a British writer in the Independence, a monthly magazine as,

Her greatest work…shows the power of the female imagination at full throttle. It doesn’t bear a simple political message but it does rip off the masks that women were accustomed to wear, and it shows up the dangers and difficulties that women encounter if they try to live a free life in a man’s world. She is one of the finest writers of the century.

The novel is not a feminist treaty, nor a political diary of the break up British communism, but intensely an individual story of one woman’s struggle to reconcile her own life with the political and philosophical atmosphere of her age. It is a spectacularly an intimate journey through the mind of Anna Wulf, a young novelist. It tells the story of Anna Wulf and her efforts to maintain a semblance of sanity in a world that seems to be falling apart. She is a free woman, financially comfortable with the success of her bestselling novel, emotionally self sufficient and committed to her bohemian lifestyle of passionate politics and frequent affairs. But she is terrified of the chaos all around her: the violence and suffering across the world, her writers block, the way her mind feels like in its cracking up. So in an attempt to make sense of the chaos she begins to record her life in four coloured notebooks.
Lessing’s original intent was to write a short formal novel that would enclose the rest of her material in the book, but since the formal novel was ridiculous, she split up the material into four, each concerned with the different aspects of one woman’s life, and then in turn divided each notebook into four parts namely: the black which addresses her problems as a writer and basically covers her own experience in colonial Africa; the red includes the political information and her time spent as a Communist; the yellow her relationships and emotions contains a partial manuscript of a novel as well as ideas for other short stories and novel; and the blue becomes a diary which pictures her everyday events. After the fourth installment of these notebooks, Anna decides to give up her attempt to separate her life and tries to incorporate all of her experiences into one record which she refers to as the golden notebook. Thus The Golden Notebook holds the key to her renaissance and recovery, both as a writer and a person. Hence the reader can either read from page one to the end of the book, or, if the reader wishes, he/she can read all the parts of each notebook and Free Women together; either way, the conclusion is that The Golden Notebook is a complex, infinitely rewarding work.

Thus the Free Women is superficially written by Anna as a work of fiction, which mainly deals with a character of Anna Wulf with some major parallels between herself and Lessing. All the four notebooks are written in the first person and cover roughly the period from 1950 to 1957 and the fifth notebook [the “golden” one] deals only with the events of 1957. Lessing herself explains about the presentation of the four notebooks through the heroine Anna to the therapist, Mother Sugar as follows:

I keep four notebooks, a black notebook, which is to do with Anna Wulf the writer; a red notebook, concerned with politics; a yellow notebook, in which
I make stories out of my experience; and a blue notebook which tries to be a
diary. (GN, 418)

In the conversation with Tommy on the topic of her four notebooks, Anna also says that she
keeps the four notebooks instead of one as it may cause some kind of mess.

Lessing has not always been content with the ways her books have been read and so
she has expressed her disquiet in interviews, and other publications. Her struggle to deal
with her readers’ interpretations of her work is well illustrated in The Golden Notebook. She
is so concerned with what she regards as misinterpretations of this novel, and she gave an
interview to Florence Howe in 1966 specially because, she wrote to say things about in The
Golden Notebook to American readers. And she also wrote a preface to the novel for the
1971 edition, explaining her intentions and deploiring the interferences of her readers. She
tries to console herself for her anxiety that how far apart the intention of the author and the
comprehension of the reader can be, with the thought that a book is a living thing which can
bear many kinds of fruits. She ends the Preface as:

It is not only childish of a writer to want readers to see what he sees, to
understand the shape and aim of a novel as he sees it- his wanting this
means that he has not understood a most fundamental point. Which is that
the book is alive and potent and fructifying and to promote thought and
discussion only when its plan and shape and intention are not understood.

(GN, 20-21)

The Golden Notebook, an international acclaimed novel, has been generally regarded
as Lessing’s masterpiece because of its rich contents and complicated form. It has received
high praise and it has been translated into many languages. The 1950s was a period of
upheaval in the world. Military competition [mainly between USA and USSR by producing and testing nuclear weapons], the Korean War, McCarthy’s anti-communist movement in America, and Stalin’s purges in USSR, all these formed a violent, split and fragmented world. As a result the novels reflect violence, terror, and chaos. Harold Bloom, an American literary critic, in his Modern Critical Views—Doris Lessing, describes what Lessing put it in a May 1966 interview by Florence Howe. He says that, “the period in which The Golden Notebook takes place is a time when everything is cracking up… It had been falling apart since the bomb dropped on Hiroshima.” (78)

In such a social environment lives our protagonist Anna, a woman in her thirties who gets divorced from her husband. Anna, Lessing’s strong willed, highly individualized heroine is the main protagonist of the novel who struggles to coop with life as a liberated woman. W. Ellen Brooks, the novelist and feminist, in the article, “The Image of Woman in Lessing’s The Golden Notebook” depicts Anna as “the protagonist of ‘The Golden Notebook’ as she struggles to transcend her divided self and archetypal female roles in orders to emerge as more aware of liberated women” (105)

Anna is an independent woman both economically and emotionally. She strives to bring up her daughter Janet alone. Financially, the income from her first successful novel enables her to live a comfortable life; thus, at a time, she can enjoy what she likes without worrying about earning a living. But at present she is suffering from writer’s block and is driven to the brink of a breakdown when her five-year love affair with Michael ends. While she undergoes psychoanalysis, she keeps separate notebooks to deal with various aspects of her life as a means to escape from fragmentation, particularly possibility of madness. She is convinced that the division of her life into four notebooks
will stave off the chaos of contemporary existence and enable her to retain a concept of wholeness. Thus Anna creates an artificial and imposed form of split personality to guard herself. Her different phases of life, on one hand, explain and reinforce her anxiety and her unease in her inner world, and on the other hand, highlight the theme, which serves as a thread to connect disintegrated plots.

The novel The Golden Notebook is considered as a feminist classic by some scholars but notably not by the author herself, who later wrote that its theme of mental breakdowns as a means of healing and freeing one’s self from illusions. She also regrets that critics failed to appreciate the exceptional structure of the novel. The novel is structured around a frame story that focuses on the lives of Anna and her friend Molly. This frame story, in the fiction Free Women is followed by excerpts from Anna’s notebooks. She senses the lack of order, lack of coherence and pattern in her life and so she opens up her split psyche into four note books, each of which addresses one particular part of Anna’s life. The Shadow of the Third, closely mirrors Anna’s own life, the blue notebook attempts to keep a day-to-day factual record of her life.

Anna is one of the most consciously self analytical and questioning characters in this fiction. Highly intelligent and sensitive, she is deeply involved with the modern world and very responsive to its atmosphere of violence and personal betrayals. She is a young novelist divorced with a young child and disillusioned by unsatisfactory relationships which make her to feel her life is falling apart. Since the novel offers such a variety of perspectives on Anna’s circumstances with successive layers of actual events, it is difficult at times to determine exactly what happens. The ending of the novel The Golden Notebook for
example, offers at least two interpretations as to what Anna does after she attains psychic wholeness.

The point is that Lessing probes deeply into the psyche of Anna as a means of getting and restoring wholeness. Through constant self-analysis Anna re-evaluates her life in Africa, with all its injustice, hatred, native heroes and villains. Her faithfulness to Communism like Lessing’s, most probably began as idealism but both Anna and Lessing subsequently left the party before the general exodus in 1956 and the pressures felt by Anna in the party tend only to fragmentize her further.

The frame story of the Free Women is told from the third person point of view. It is, however told through Anna’s view point. The reader is given insight on what Anna feels as her thoughts and emotions. The thoughts and emotions of other characters are presented through Anna. In Anna’s notebooks, however, a different view is used. The black notebook for instance, is written from Anna’s first person point of view. While speaking Anna refers herself as “I”. The red and blue notebooks are also written from the first person point of view. The yellow notebook, which tells the story of Ella and Paul, is told from the third person point of view. In the yellow notebook, the events are told through Ella’s viewpoint. The golden notebook is also written from Anna’s first person point of view. Unlike the rest of the novel, however this notebook is written in almost a stream of consciousness style. The action and happenings in this section seem dreamlike and even disconnected in some points.

The characters that appear in The Shadow of the Third are mostly identical to the characters in The Golden Notebook: Anna is Ella in terms of their both being heroines and blocked writers; Michael is Paul in terms of their both being unfaithful lovers of the heroines; Molly is Julia in terms of their both being the heroines’ female friends; Janet is
Michael in terms of their both being the heroines’ children. However, towards the end of the novel, Ella becomes someone else, as if she integrates herself by becoming a real “Free Woman”. Ella’s integration is shown by her potential ability in writing and she is considered as a “Free Woman” because she becomes completely sexless and enables to be free from men’s control. Anna sees Ella detaching herself from others and she does not want to attend the party even which she has to. Ella herself says like: “If I’m thinking of what to wear, that means that I really want to go? How odd. Perhaps I do want to go? After all, I’m always doing this, saying I won’t do something, then I change my mind.” (GN, 165-166)

As a means of regaining psychic equilibrium, Anna consults a Jungian psychoanalyst, Mrs. Marks, who also called “Mother Sugar”. She assists Anna in eliminating her frightful nightmares through encouraging her to use the medium as a writer. Anna thereafter descends into her private hell in which she frantically attempts to use writing as a further form of therapy. She begins to regain her sanity only from such compulsive, private uses of language. Her notebooks depict how belief or doctrine will provide a full understanding of the whole person. The socialist, realist and aesthetics of Marxism and Leninism, clearly present in Lessing’s early work up to the publication of The Golden Notebook, particularly in the chapters of red notebook.

In her dairy, Anna writes about the division of roles dealt by women. She refers to this division as the injustice to woman and indicates that it can cause a form of impersonal frustration and this frustration sometimes taken out on the husbands, boyfriends or children of the women. Anna fights against this frustration and struggles with the conflicting roles of being a mother and a mistress. She is also consumed by the details of running a house and home as well as holding down a job. The events of Anna’s life are not only divided into four
notebooks, but are also interspersed with her fictional writing. Her book explores how to successfully read or interpret the fiction that represents life. In 1971, Lessing first published a preface to *The Golden Notebook* in which she laments a number of themes left unaddressed by critics. She discusses how she hoped to “shape a book which would make its own comment, a wordless statement: to talk through the way it was shaped.” (GN, 13). This statement clearly indicates Lessing’s intent to create a form that best reflects the theme.

The main theme of the novel is based on the idea of a person who becomes fragmented. Anna’s fragmentation is evidenced by her four notebooks. In reality, it is this experience as a whole keeps Anna from being a healthy person and able to integrate the individual parts of herself in her final notebook, the golden notebook that Anna is able to live in the process of healing. In addition to Anna’s personal, the idea of the division of the person is seen in other characters on a more general sense. Tommy, for instance, fights against being torn apart by the desires of his parents. His father wants him to be a businessman while his mother wants him to stay from this lifestyle. Although he tries to come to his own conclusion in his life but finds no answers to his questions and attempts suicide. There are varieties of settings included in the novel. The black notebook sections of the novel are set in Africa while the majority of the remainder is set in London, England. Sequences of action occur in Molly’s flat. Perhaps the most important set in this novel is the room in Anna’s flat, which she sets up as her writing room. It is in this room she works on her notebooks and does most of her living. She has covered the walls of this room with newspaper clippings.

In a word, the novel *The Golden Notebook* by Lessing can be best described as complex. It is structured in a complex form intended to mimic the complexity of the life of
the main character, Anna. Although complex, the form is actually an attempt by Anna to simplify and compartmentalize what she sees as disorder and chaos in her world. The main plot focuses on Anna’s quest for wholeness but at the same time addresses difficult issues such as gender relations, love and marriage, suicide, child rearing and politics. In short Lessing depicts Anna as a fascinatingly self destructive character and therefore the novel is considered to be a fascinating and powerful one deals about a woman fighting to stay sane in a truly crazy world.

Most critics feel that Lessing’s The Golden Notebook is unquestionably a major one. In the same way, the final volume of Children of Violence, series The Four Gated City, often singled out for particular acclaim because of its apocalyptic and psychic elements. Thus these two major works of Lessing epitomize the two conflicting tendencies or demands which women have had to confront and resolve or choose between in their art. On the one hand, The Golden Notebook, with its innovative use of diary entries to project the reality of the heroine’s subjective inner life, is nearly a pure expression of feminine consciousness of the need to create a fictional world which honestly reflects the truths of feminine experience as they differ in substance and quality from the male. And on the other hand Children of Violence, modeled after the nineteenth century epic novels which portray the life of a heroine against a background of social and historical change, expresses the need to move beyond the limits of subjective feminine consciousness to a perspective which induces and speaks meaningfully to all of human knowledge and experience. That a single writer in a single decade produces two such different works with ambiguities and conflicts besetting in every women who takes seriously both in her art and in her feminity.
The *Children of Violence* series, a quintet of novels, trace the life of Martha Quest, from her childhood in Southern Africa at the end of the First World War, through adolescence, youth and marriage shaped by the Second World War. The series establish Lessing as a great radical writer. In her *Children of Violence* [five volumes running about eighteen hundred pages] in many respects Lessing has observed a study of the individual conscience in its relations with the collective. Many critics find autobiographical parallels especially in the first volume of the series. Such parallels do exist for Martha Quest like Lessing, was born in 1919, grew up in rural Rhodesia, married twice [with obviously intentional parallels in the names of Lessing’s and Martha Quest’s husbands], became a Communist and later left the party and immigrated to England in 1949. Citing such parallels is one matter; trying to equate author with protagonist is quite another and what Lessing has done in the series is to take elements of her own early and later life and transform them into a sequence fully equal to recent saga.

Lessing’s five-part sequence was published over a period of some seventeen years, with the first three parts published in fairly rapid succession (1952, 1954, 1958), a seven-year gap until the next volume (1965), and four more until the culminating volume (1969). The *New York Times* in the blurb of the book, *A Proper Marriage* (2002) by Lessing describes as, “The *Children of Violence* series gives an astounding compression of a total, coherent vision, as if Doris Lessing knew all along where it would end.” In this series Lessing deals with the quest of an individual woman to define and find herself a niche in a male dominated society. Her focus on women’s perspective earned for her the name feminist and despite her many denials. She is one of the early powerful voices in the new wave of
feminism. She has created the powerful character Martha, with a keen awareness of the problems of society and the enthusiasm to fight against it.

The first novel in the sequence, Martha Quest (1952), resembles a conventional Bildungsroman or an initiation novel. It is set in Zambesia [Zimbabwe], Africa at the beginning of the 20th century and it ends in 1939. It deals with the sexual and intellectual awakening of its protagonist Martha, the central character of the series. It is essentially a story of a rebel, named Martha, a girl of fifteen. She lives in an impoverished African farm with her parents. She is a girl of passionate vitality, avid for experience and for self-knowledge, bitterly resentful of the conventional narrowness of her home life. She has to quit her formal schooling due to an eye-sickness, but she is eager to learn and spend most of her time in reading. She has two friends in the city, two Jewish boys who are bibliophiles like her from whom she borrows books on sociology, sexuality and politics. She acquires her values and beliefs from the literature she reads and she is not only a socialist but also an atheist.

The contemporary novelist, Joanna Frye says that Lessing’s protagonist, Martha, in the series of Children of Violence, is an apt example for the problems of a female Bildungsroman and its relationship to sexual ideology in his Living Stories, Telling Lives: Women and the Novel in Contemporary Experience. He explains that it is problematic because the traditional Bildungsroman is in a male form, but the fate of Martha indicates few appropriate adult roles for women to grow into. Nevertheless, it has to be accepted that the Children of Violence is a strong example of a female Bildungsroman, and Lessing shows brilliantly how Martha matures individually as well as socially a person. A Bildungsroman is a highly suggestive genre for studying formation of Martha’s character precisely because
the genre has been identified with the development of character from early adolescence to young adulthood, the period when the person works out questions of identity, career, and marriage.

The background to Martha’s story is Africa that was Lessing’s birthplace: the tough, spacious and yet circumscribed life in the farms, the corrosive atmosphere of racial fears and the superficial democracy and sophistication of city life. Martha Quest fascinates by the depth and realism of its insight but always at its centre is the figure of Martha, a character in the grand manner, conceived in sympathetic understanding but drawn with an unerringly objective. She is a young woman of intelligence and passion in open-nerved tough with herself of her fearful times. Martha at the age of fifteen is too-confining and too-gentle at home. She grows up in Southern Rhodesia with a dissatisfied mother and a hard-working father whose struggle is that of getting by. She has a very complicated relationship with her mother, who is a controlling and rather a cold person. So in fact she is ostensibly rejected by her own mother. Luckily, Martha is closer to her father with whom she sometimes has rather intimate discussions; yet he is more emotionally absent than present in her life. She thus has no choice but to distance herself in turn from her parents. Thus she also grows up with open space, the open bowl of brilliant blue sky always far above her head, the endless plain of space stretched until the earth rounds itself off. She is given vision in days spent in the bush, in exploration both physical and mental. The Sunday Times in the blurb of Lessing’s novel titled The Ripple from the Storm (1993) describes the character of Martha effectively as,

Through Martha, Doris Lessing’s best – known and most powerful character, we are drawn into the lives of a group of middle-class white South Africans who are idealistically in love with the Soviet Union,
convinced that they can bring about the revolution which will end the racist system, eliminate poverty and give women true equality. Against this background, the interplay of personal relationships and the passions, jealousies and weaknesses which defy party discipline make absorbing reading. Lessing conveys the emotions, aspirations and constant self-questioning of Martha Quest with astonishing clarity.

Like Lessing, Martha has been an omnivorous reader, and much of her reading has focused on a naive understanding of liberation and justice. She in time joins a leftist clique where she meets a Jewish youth with whom she has her first sexual experience; she then meets and marries Douglas Knowell [a close similarity in name to that of Lessing’s first husband, Frank Wisdom]. Finally on her own she starts to lead a very different life; not only does she start dating men but she also spends most nights out partying. Interestingly, Martha is torn between two opposite poles of living: a serious life of social commitment and a superficial life of pleasure and dancing. Thus, two different ways of telling Martha’s story run parallel throughout the novel.

A Proper Marriage (1954), the second volume in the sequence, explores the marriage which fails and the political involvement of Martha. It shows how her rebellious temperament reacted to her new life. It traces the life of Martha from her childhood in Africa to adulthood in an imagined post-nuclear Britain. It also describes Martha who is beginning to realize that her marriage has been a terrible. Already the first of matrimony has begun to fade; sensuality has become dulled by habit, blissful motherhood now seems no more than a tiresome chore. As a result, Martha’s political consciousness begins to dawn and seize independence for the first time and she chooses to make life of her own.
The novel also presents the young couple as socially active, Martha as pregnant, and her husband as a fighter in the first year of World War II. It tells that Martha begins to realize that her marriage has been a terrible mistake and thus the first passionate of matrimony has begun to fade. Martha’s political consciousness begins to dawn and expects independence for the first time and she chooses to make her life own. After the baby is born to Martha, she becomes politically active and especially her mother’s interference in her life makes her to leave her husband.

The third volume, *A Ripple from the Storm* (1958), shows the failure of that political involvement and her active connection with European refugees. One of the refugees, a Jew named as Anton Hesse [whose name parallels that of Lessing’s second husband, Gottfried Lessing], becomes Martha’s second husband. He is a Communist, and he rules the left-wing group of which Martha is a part. But this loveless marriage too is doomed to failure and the left-wing group splits into militants [such as Martha and Anton], moderates [roughly equivalent to Social Democrats], and the Labor party [affiliated with the white labor unions].

*Landlocked* (1965) the fourth volume, opens with Martha standing with her back to a window, the African sun streaming down, dividing her back into heat and shadow and it also begins nearly the end of the war. The scene is Southern Africa in all its contradictions: rich, despoiled land and underbred cities. It is on this scene, notably on Martha Quest, that hope seems to be placed. Yet with the richness of Lessing’s understanding and irony, the failure of a way of life affects and in turn is affected by the personal qualities of her characters. The couple Martha and Anton is married but they have separate identities and lives. A variety of other refugees are brought into the novel, especially Thomas Stern, a Jew from Poland, with whom Martha has her one meaningful romantic and sexual relationship. Stern leaves for
Israel, returns to Africa, and dies of a fever when he goes out into the wilderness to live with the natives. Many others from Martha’s earlier life also die in this novel, including her father. Martha and Anton are divorced, she finds herself increasingly out of touch with the younger radicals, and she plans to immigrate to England.

The fifth volume, The Four- Gated City (1969), was set in Post-War Britain. It is in fact a synthesis of humanism and feminism, convention and experimentation, unlike anything previously written by a man or woman. The seeds of its brilliance originally lie in the flaws which led Lessing temporarily to abandon the series. Martha, in the novel, is living in London and working as the secretary mistress of Mark Coleridge, a noted writer. Postwar London is described as relentlessly bleak, chaotic and economically deprived. The title for this novel comes from the vision of Martha which she has in the first novel in the sequence in which she sees a golden city with tree-lined, four-gated and dignified, where the black and the white and the brown lived as equals with no hatred or violence.

Such a Utopian vision becomes inverted at the end of The Four- Gated City, because Coleridge plans a Utopian sanctuary in Africa, ironically for those who survive the ultimate battle. The readers are told that the British Isles are destroyed in the 1970s and in the powerful closing pages of the novel, that the earth itself is destroyed in the 1990s through either atomic weaponry or nerve gas or both. Thus the series ends with an apocalyptic vision of the future. The book finishes like a science fiction story with its bloody end to an epoch created a stir upon publication, with claims that the novel promoted communism. The blurb of the book titled The Four- Gated City reveals the words taken from The Times as,

As a novelist, Doris Lessing has always been a loner, blessedly above fashions, rules and schools. Rightly in The Four- Gated City, she will have
nothing to do with the barriers between the novel, science fiction, journalism and autobiography nervously observed by lesser writers. One is struck by the strength of her writing, her sense of the relation between the individual and society, the consistency of her creative energy which makes other exponents of the roman fleuve look like old men pottering in a garden. A fine novelist, one of the best in this century.

With the five-part series ranging from its initial realistic portrayal of a romantically inclined teenage girl down through the final pages, it is quite obviously difficult to speak of all five parts as a unified piece of work in terms. Yet there are elements that tie together all five, aside from Lessing’s clear intention all along of showing how Martha’s youthful vision also becomes a part of her middle-aged years. For despite whatever experiences may be in Martha’s life, she at all times remains an independent seeker after heroines in the name of “freedom,” imagined or real. Much of Martha’s childhood is spent trying individual identity and values. This is also her concern as she moves beyond friends, husbands, groups, and countries to her final years in England.

Hence through the five volumes of Children of Violence, Lessing follows the growth process of a single protagonist which is considered as a rich source for the evolution of the twentieth century female Bildungsroman. Moreover, this extended work is held together by the consciousness of the heroine, Martha, whose growth is followed from adolescence to maturity. Lessing breaks through the boundaries of the heroine’s quest beyond the years normally allotted to the male hero. More than the quest itself the circuitous route by which Martha eventually comes to self-knowledge gives meaning to the nature of the heroine’s
lengthy journey and provides a cohesive structure to the grand scheme of Lessing’s ambitious work.

This shows that Lessing’s works are considered to be the works of an exile. Her heroines are not simply vehicles for social criticism but they are just trumpets for certain. Initially she was criticized by some commentators, for her “unfeminine” depictions of female anger and discontent, but now she is often commented for her candid portrayals of female characters, who struggle with their roles and the division between their emotional and intellectual needs. Ellen W. Brooks, in “The Image of Woman in Lessing’s The Golden Notebook”, describes Lessing’s appeal in her fiction that her theme,

rests largely on her treatment of woman in modern life, the most thorough and accurate of any in literature. Her achievement is all the more significant in that so few writers have presented women with whom one can identify-complex, intelligent, questioning women who are not content with the status quo, who rebel against the established order. (www.enotes.com/doris-lessing-criticism/lessing-doris/137956/golden-notebook)

Lessing’s works contain a wide range of topics from gender to politics, role of family to space, society and the problems of the individual. Owing to her treatment of the woman characters in her novels, she has been considered to be a feminist though she never claimed to be one. As far as her works are concerned, Lessing is varied and prolific both in style and theme. For her, creating fiction is to be true to one’s vision and to be given a very special set of experiences through incorporating the feminine perspective into the mainstream of literary tradition and to find place for feminine power and creativity in a world which best ignores and at worst forbids them. In pursuing this goal Lessing has
considered herself as a “humanist” than a “feminist”. As a white South African, she is an outsider to European society; as a socialist, she prohibits herself from re-entering Africa, as a woman, she is left out of a male-dominated culture; and as an artist, she is relegated to the outside of the collective of which she and her characters strive so hard to be a part.

Thus the first chapter “Introduction” in this thesis, contains a detail description of the novelist’s background, her techniques, style and themes of her works especially in *The Grass is Singing*, *The Golden Notebook*, and *Children of Violence*. It also portrays her as a restless creator, who is working passionately with curiosity and enthusiasm in successfully juxtaposing the individual against the society and picturing the conflicts of the individual struggling to survive in the modern world.

The second chapter “Remorse and Self-Loathing Heroines” depicts Lessing’s heroines, Mary Turner in *The Grass is Singing*, Anna Wulf in *The Golden Notebook*, and Martha Quest in the *Children of Violence*, highly individualized characters’ struggle in their early life and their adolescence which kindle their spirit in searching for their identity. Especially the section turns back to the childhood of Lessing’s protagonists displaying all their conflicts and the motives which buried unconsciously and demonstrates their psychological tribulations from the beginning of their life.

The third chapter “Female Logos in Patriarchal World” deals with the distresses in the patriarchal background which induces the female characters to fight against the disloyalty of men and rise against the economic dependency. It focuses on the marriage life which takes the heroines back to their past, which they have experienced the suppression for a long time. The struggle against their economic situations and their failure in
receiving the recognition stresses them to face with the latent fear, which tends to lead a life like their mothers.

The fourth chapter “Mapping the Socio Feminine Consciousness” focuses on the involvement of the protagonists of Lessing in the society especially in Communism presented in these three novels. It also talks about the heroines who feel to do something for the betterment of the people around them. It thrashes out their firm belief, that by joining the communist group, they can see the change in the society as for the first time they observe people preparing to do more than talking about the problems.

The fifth chapter “Awareness in Celebrating the Humanity” deals with the attainment of maturity in accepting the past and the facts of the present after their realization about the reality of the world. Perhaps the most important aspect of this chapter is heroines’ endeavor to recognize life as what it is.

The sixth chapter “Summing up” sums up the findings of the previous chapters and provides scope for further research in the same area.

Thus the study attempts to analyze the individuals, especially the protagonists namely Mary, Anna and Martha who have taken great effort to attain wholeness in their life and also accept the world as it is by adapting themselves in reality in the selected novels of Lessing.