

Dr T. BHASKARA SUDHA
Asst. Prof. Department of English
St. Joseph's College For Women (A)
Visakhapatnam Andhra Pradesh
India
Email ID: bhaskarasudhas@gmail.com

THE PORTRAYAL OF MARY TURNER AS A RACIST
IN
DORIS LESSINGS THE GRASS IS SINGING

Abstract

Doris Lessing's first novel 'The Grass is Singing' is a clear depiction of hatred, frustration, revenge and humiliation. The author tries to bring about the setting in Africa under the White rule. It is an enthralling chronicle of human disintegration and a beautifully understated critique of the relationship between Black and Whites in the society. Doris Lessing's brings out the caricature of the society through the characters of Mary Turner, who is a wife of white landlord and Moses who is a 'houseboy' of Black community. Through these characters the author depicts the racial discrimination prevailing in Southern Rhodesia under the colonial power of the British rule. The portrayal of Mary Turner as a psychological disintegrated wife of Dick Turner, an incompetent husband, and owner of an ill-fated land in South African is more convincing. This article probes into the character of Mary as strong racist and her attitude towards the blacks who she treats as mere slaves in the beginning of the novel but later falls prey to her own black servant Moses.

Keywords: Racialism, Frustration, Humiliation, Revenge, Psychological disintegration.

Introduction

Doris May Lessing born on October 22nd, 1919 and died in November 17, 2013 was a British writer whose novels and short stories revolve around social issues of the 20th century. She was also the winner of Nobel Prize for Literature in 2007. She published her first volume of an autobiography, 'Under My Skin' and a second volume 'Walking in the Shade' in 1997. 'The Grass is Singing' is her first published novel in the year 1950, which depicts the lives of

Blacks and Whites living in the region of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) under the British colonial power. In 1962 her other novel 'The Golden Notebook' turned her into a feminist role model. Her writings canvas a whole range of genres and conflicts which inherent the changing society.

The novel 'The Grass is Singing' depicts the lives of people who live in Southern Rhodesia under the colonial power of the British. The influence of racial discrimination is so much so that it affects the lives of the characters depicted in the novel. The story revolves around a White family Dick and Mary, who come to live in Rhodesia as landlord of a farm. It centres around the murder of Dick's wife Mary, by her black servant Moses which is portrayed as a crime of hatred and revenge of Blacks towards the White community who always treated them as mere beasts. This novel has a distinguished feature as it opens with the murder mystery and death of Mary the Whiteman's wife, and the local papers and people's reaction towards the murder, and later probes the cause of murder in form of a flashback.

Portrayal of Mary Turner as a Racist

The novel begins with the murder investigation of Mary Turner a white farmer's wife whose is assumed to be killed by her black servant boy Moses. It then continues to probe the cause and action of the murder by a flashback method as how Mary Tuner was before and after marriage with Dick Turner. She had an unhappy childhood, hampered with emotionally weak and aggressive parents. Mary was always away from her parents either in her school days or when she took up her secretarial work. She never had a bonding with her own family. She started to search for a husband who could give her all comfort.

Her search comes to an end when she sees Dick Turner, a struggling farmer at a movie. Both eventually fascinated with each other and get married. After marriage Dick decides to live in Southern Rhodesia, where he owns a farm. Mary being a city girl and so used to city life doesn't feel at home in Dick's rustic farm. Her frustration of her life in a village and her hatred towards the Blacks are well depicted in the novel. She hates her husband Dick for being kind and humble towards the black servant Samson. She finally decides to take control of the household and show her power as a racist towards the black servant Samson, who resigns and leave his job.

She hates anybody who try to patronize her especially their neighbour Charlie Slatter and his wife. Fed up with her husband's ill-fated ventures she tries to earn her own living by going back to the city in search of her old job. But her boss rejects to take her anymore with no options to live for existence she returns to her husband Dick who welcome her once again in his life.

She is so frustrated in her marriage life as Dick was not able to give what she really wanted so rejects him in sexual life also. The intimacy between the couple is no where seen in their life as she covers her frustration in a veil of racism which she projects towards the black servants who work for Dick in the farm.

A time comes in their life when Dick contracts malaria, Mary is forced to nurse him and soothe him in his ill-health. She initially feels not so happy to care for him, but she is also forced to take the charge of the farm supervising the native workers, which she truly hates them. As days pass by, Mary finds a satisfaction and content in controlling the deprived class of Blacks which she hated throughout her life, which clearly a depiction of racial discrimination.

She hated the exposed fleshiness of them, their soft brown bodies....

She could not bear to see them sitting there on the grass

(Pg.94-95 *The Grass is Singing*)

Mary keeps on reminding herself as a woman from privileged class with all powers and her demands for the workers made their lives miserable. The conflict between Mary and the native workers gets strong when she strikes at one of the worker named Moses from black community. He does not strike back but very calmly goes back to work. This incident sows a seed of relationship between the two. She is eventually torn between his strong muscular body and her hatred towards his community. Mary becomes so critical of him and insults him in all possible ways to overcome her feelings for him.

‘I scrubbed it this morning’, said the native slowly, looking at her his eyes smouldering. She said, ‘I said scrub it. Do it at once’. Her voice rose on the last words. (Pg. 145, *The Grass is Singing*)

Moses all of a sudden announces that he is going to leave his job, which in turn Mary doesn't like it and begs him to stay back which he agrees. The intimacy between the two goes to a level where Moses tries to help her wearing a dress, which is seen by Marston, who is hired

to take care of Dick's farm in his absence. Marston orders Moses to leave the house which leaves Mary in a fit. Mary visualizes herself to explain her condition to Dick when he tells her that they are going on a vacation. But she couldn't confess her feeling and her state of mind which she simply says she is ill at heart. In fact, she tries to justify her decision to go with her husband Dick, on a vacation and tries to convince Moses for her deed. But on the contrary Moses is not able to listen to what Mary says and stabs her to death which he never regretted.

Conclusion

Mary Turner almost lived a life of isolation. She was deprived of parental love, and later when she gets married to Dick she is not so happy of his decision to live in a village of black community. Her joy of living in a city is shattered by her husband's decision. So, she is not so well acquainted with the native blacks and her inbuilt hatred towards them leads to such an extent that she loses all temper and treat them as mere beast in the farm and at her house. The bottom line theme of revenge is well weaved through the character of Moses who keeps obeying to the orders and demands of Mary. But inwardly it seems that he is just waiting for an opportunity to put an end to Mary for her resentful behaviour towards his community.

References

Lessing Doris *The Grass is Singing*, A Flamingo Modern Classic London, 1994. Print
Seresin, Indiana. "The Grass is Singing Plot Summary." LitCharts. LitCharts LLC, 20 Jun 2017. Web. 28 Jul 2018.