

A Study on Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook

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Abstract:

The paper intends to analyze the detail study of Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook. The novel begins and ends with section which deals with freewoman sections. We come to know that the four notebooks were written for this free woman. The first note book describes about the racial situation in central Africa during World War II. And it also signifies the nostalgic memories that the Anna of the 1957 does not want to meet and shake hands with the Anna of 1950's. The second notebook is the 'Red'. This contains Anna's political activities in London. The third notebook is titled as 'Yellow'. This note book contains the manuscript of the novel's shadow of the third which Anna writes about Ella. The fourth note book named 'Blue' presents Anna's personal diary. Anna's writing analyzes the frustrations of being a freewoman in dominated society. The Golden Note Book can be considered as an attempt to expose the emotion of a woman who chooses to be "free".

Doris Lessing has explored the most significant ideologies and social issues of the twentieth century. Her prolific body of work displays many interests and concerns, ranging from racism, communism, and feminism, to psychology and mysticism. Lessing began her career in the 1950s, writing realist fiction that focused on themes of racial injustice and colonialism. As her writing developed, Lessing began to compose fiction that anticipated many major feminist concerns of the late 1960s and 1970s. Her strong-willed, independent heroines often suffer emotional crises in male-dominated societies and must struggle with dominant sociopolitical constructs to reach higher levels of identity and liberation. A consistent theme cultivated throughout her work is the need for individuals to confront their fundamental assumptions about life in order to transcend preconceived belief systems and acquire self-awareness. Narrative strategies of twentieth-century writing by women are the expression of two systemic elements of female identity: “a psychosexual script and a written by men furiously critical of women...But these attitudes in male writers were taken for granted ,accepted as sound philosophical bases, as quite normal certainly not as woman hating, aggressive or neurotic. It still goes on, of course but thing are better, there is no doubt of it” .(The golden note book ,973,ix-x)

The Golden Note book was published in 1962, at the time when second wave feminism began to emerge and one year before Betty Friedan’s path-breaking novel “The feminine mystique (1963)”.The novel received the feminism bible of the women’s liberation movement. Doris Lessing can be designated as a pioneer in discerning social trends, anticipating rather than merely confirming them. The Golden notebook is highly intellectual, politically involved “free women” preceded the women’s liberation movement.(showalter,1977).In the newly added introduction to the 1972 edition of the Golden Notebook Lessing writes that “ some books are not read in the right way because they have skipped a stage of opinion, assume a crystallization of information in society which has yet attitude that have been created by the women’s Liberation movements already existed”(IX).

In The Golden notebook, the key issue was human relations, especially relationships between men and women as a key image of modern humanity. The golden notebook opens

with a freewomen section describing a conversation among Anna and her friend Molly, Tommy and Richard ,Molly's ex-husband .Richard and Molly always noticed the activity of the modern women molly and Anna gives certain answer about Richard's question of women's Marriage .Thus she says,

of course practically all the men one works are married to nice ordinary dreams women so sad for them. As it happens Marion is a good person, not stupid at all, but she's been married for 15 Year to a man makes her feel stupid.... (26)

The novel begins and ends with the freewomen sections it gives us the impression that the four books are the writing of this free woman Anna who keeps the book hidden in her room and which is read by Tommy alone. Anna has a definite plan about the book .She writes in her black note book as," 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 experiences and the blue notebook to be a diary" (418).Time and necessity of keeping the four notebooks comes up and each time Anna confirms her faith in the purpose of keeping it. In the freewoman section of the novel to Tummy 's queries about its purpose she says," I had been afflicted with an awful feeling of disgust of futility. Perhaps I don't like spreading those emotions (55).

The central character of the novel as started by Lessing in her preface is Anna wulf a novelist who has not published for many years. she lives on the proceeds from her first book, frontiers of war , a story about the racial situation in central Africa during World war II .Frontiers of war is a story with in the story .The story within the story has another stage and another angle of exposition. It is a political scenario of the communist world. The central character Anna wulf gets almost crippled to function like a normal human being she undergoes psychological treatment to come out of her confusions. The black notebook is full of nostalgic memories that the Anna of the 1957 does not want to meet and shake hands with the Anna of 1950's.

The black notebook is divided into two parts the source and money on one she writes the story and on the other she writes the account of the amount of money the novel has brought in .At the end of the 4th section of the black notebook she takes off this division and decides to write on both sides, which indicates that Anna has come out of her self division .

The second notebook is the 'red' .this contains her political activities in London .Anna joins the British communist group well knowing the politics of the inner circle .She writes ,very little in it and whatever she writes is highly critical of the party,

I joined the party was a need for. Wholeness for an end to the split,
divided, unsatisfactory way we all live .Yet joined the party intensified
the split not the business of belonging to an organization whose every
talents on paper, anyway contradiction the ideas of the society we live in
but something much deeper than that (154).

The whole tone of the section is reflects the atmosphere of the community circle. Majority of the party members were dissatisfied when thousand of party workers were ranged as traitor communism. They were disillusioned by the activities of the party .But they remained impassive. Anna wulf decides to leave the party. She informs her decision to Michael, her lover, who against her apprehension supports her decision. She pastes many newspaper cutting in the red notebook .It may suggest that the entire world goes violent to uphold the high ideals of freedom.

The third notebook is titled as yellow notebook .This notebook contains the manuscript of novel, shadow of the third which Anna writes about Ella, a journalist of woman's magazine. There are many striking similarities between Anna and Ella. The critics conclude that Ella is Anna's alter ego. Ella like Anna, is a writer, divorcee with a child .Anna has a daughter Janet and Ella ,has a son Michael .Anna and Ella ,both were involved in the political activities .And about all one who suffers from a sense of confusion and alienation .through the character of Anna and Ella ,Doris Lessing

reflects herself .Doris Lessing is also a divorcee with a son and she also involves in a political activities .Even though Lessing denies the elements of autobiography in the novel the striking parallelism is too strong to ignore them.

Shadow of the Third as the title suggests the presence of a third person in the life of Ella. Ella meets Paul, a doctor at a party. They fall in love with each other. But year later their intimacy is disturbed by Paul's reference of his wife Muriel. Ella made envy about Paul's wife .Ella begins to think of her as rival to Paul's affection. A feeling of jealousy begins to dominate her .At first Ella does not think about her. She knows her attitude to his women is despicable. She feels triumph over her, pleasure that she has taken Paul from her. She becomes possessive for him.

When Ella becomes conscious of her emotion she is so appalled and ashamed that she buries it fast yet the shadow of the third grows again and it becomes impossible for Ella not to think about it. She thinks a great deal about the invisible women to whom Paul returns. now it is not out of triumph but envy .Ella builds up a picture of the woman which has nothing to do with the real woman .It slowly becomes the shadow of Ella her alter self .Ella Finds, a story to write,

A woman, loved by a man who criticizes her throughout their long relationship for being unfaithful to him and for longing for the social life which his jealousy bars her from and for being career woman. He has betrayal a real love and loves a counterfeit ... whom he has betrayed and rejected (440-441)

In this above story, Ella doesn't write, because she is afraid, because it might be true. Ella analysis herself again she finds other story. It reflects the real love of the women .she becomes jealous of her lover's wife. But she refused it. Through her characterization Ella says" I'm not jealous, I 've been jealous." (441).

In Ella's mind the emotional tie up with Paul is so intense. When she realizes that for Paul thinks his wife is still the most important woman in his life. Ella tries to identify herself with Muriel. In her dreams, Ella becomes Paul's wife. She imagines that she becomes a reflection of her own fragmentation. Once, Paul tells about her wife, while Ella looking at the

street she thinks “probably, they were all like this all in fragments not one of them a whole family” (205).

Later, she realizes that Paul has completely left her Muriel ,yet she waits for him after day, dresses for him ,cooks for him still helping that one-day he would drop in .she realizes that her frustrations are due to the absence of a real man in her life. She realizes that the cost of freedom. That affects her in emotional frustration. Ten years of her frustrating experience with Paul makes her think of the position of a free woman in the world. The last section of yellow notebook contains a series eighteen in number of short stories of women who long for the right man. But every attempt fails miserably leaving her desperate and emotionally barren.

The fourth notebook is titled the blue note book. It is Anna’s personal diary. She records everything in it and turns them into fiction. She looks at fiction as an escape from reality. The material that goes into the making of this diary is all connected with her life .She keeps in it a record with Mrs. Mark the psychoanalyst who helps her to analyze the cause of the writer’s block. A close study of the entries of the blue notebook reveals the source of the novel. Anna is writing about Ella in **The shadow of the Third**.

Anna’s long affairs with Michael and then his leaving her deeply affect her. For eighteen months she does not make any entry in the blue notebook except short scribing. She wanted this book to be the most truthful of the notebook. The moment she realizes its impossibility due to her frustration with relationship she stops recording for time being. One of the special features noticeable in the blue notebook is the presence of heavy black lines. The reason that Anna gives for it is that,

I drew that line because

I didn’t want to write it

As if writing about it sucks

me even further into danger (42).

The last section of the note book she consists of her meet with the American writer Saul green. He helps her to terms with her ideological confusion regarding the role of the writer in society, with the problem of subjective in writing. Her writing is analyzing the frustrations of being a free woman in male dominated society. The cured Anna binds up all her notebook. Anna gets ready to write herself in one book, named **The Golden Note book**. The theme of fragmentation and unity thus achieves it finality in the golden note book with a self- healed Anna deciding to write.

Lessing's writing is always remarkable for the intensity and the sincerity of her feeling expressed .The golden note book can be considered as the last word on the problems of woman in a dominated society. A free woman can relate only to a free man but the society possesses only a male code. **The Golden Note Book** is just an attempt to expose the emotions of a woman who chooses to be "**free**".

Works Cited

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