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Reinterpretation of Myth in Doris Lessing's *The Cleft*

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Letter of Recommendation

Rojina Basnet has completed her thesis entitled “Reinterpretation of Myth in Dorris Lessing’s *The Cleft*” under my supervision. She carried out her research from April 2021 to December 2021. I hereby recommend her thesis to be submitted for *viva voce*.

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Letter of Approval

This Thesis entitled " Reinterpretation of Myth in Dorris Lessing's *The Cleft*
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Abstract

*This research work attempts to explore reinterpretation of origin myth through new historicist lens. Doris Lessing's *The Cleft* (2007) presents women as the source and end of humanity. She gives a new perception to the old myth by reinterpreting the myth of origin of human being through new vantage point. Interpretation of myth provides a different type of a critical perspective in understanding the relationship of gender. Since the novel takes post structural stand to reread the Christian origin myth, it gives a new insight by deconstructing the existing male/female as metaphysical pair. Earlier society was influenced by Christianity where women was taken as inferior and definition of the existence of female in the earth was only to serve man, they came from Adam's rib to serve him but Lessing attempts to change Myth where she presents as the first human being and the creator. She puts women as the source and centre of the creative domain. This study uses concepts of myth criticism from Roland Barthes and Northrop Frye by relating to the concept of gender that Simone de Beauvoir has theorized in *The Second Sex* (1949). By looking at the issues from the alternative perspectives of reading history from gender perspectives, the study may use gender theories as and when relevant.*

Keywords: Myth, Gender, Rewriting History, Margin, Women, Sexuality

Introduction

This research paper tries to show how Dorris Lessing in *The Cleft* critiques the Myth of Genesis. In the modern world, the major issue concerns with body and gender, for the world is trying to shift away from patriarchal values. The Bible interpretation where it was so much discouraging or the women who are taken as goddess and worshipped but in reality they are taken as the inferior part of the society. Lessing resists the earlier, patriarchal understanding of human as something that had began with the creation of man. By using a different lens of critical reading, she redraws a new boarder for women and presents a new way of understanding reality. She reinterprets the myth.

Dorris Lessing (1919-2013) is largely concerned with the people involved in the social and political turmoil of the twentieth century. She was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2007. Since society changes over time and period, so do the content and message of this writing. Contemporary fiction basically deals with the horrors of the war, genocide, corruption and also questions about myth and historical past. In contemporary fiction there is always the voice of 'Others'. Up to the nineteenth century the literature was the mirror or the reflection of reality but in contemporary fiction perception is individual.

Lessing is a great writer of the 21st century who has given inspiration to many writers and readers alike to change their lifestyles in a positive way . she has been awarded the David Cohen Memorial Prize for British Literature, International Catalunya Award, S.T. Dupont Golden Pen Award and many more. Her novel *The Cleft* was First published in Great Britain by Fourth Estate in 2007. Her gender-based or gender related novels are highly appreciated and studied by readers.

The Cleft is a contemporary myth or the creation myth which depicts women

as the first humans and challenges the myth of genesis at the same time, in which myth of genesis defines that in the beginning of the creation god created the man named Adam and to help the man he created women from Adam's rib and named Eve. Means according to Christian myth male is always taken as superior and women as inferior. So, Doris Lessing as a contemporary novelist creates the myth, a primitive community of women who live in a coastal wilderness, free from the need, knowledge or complication of men means a society which is free from man. Lessing invites us to imagine a mythical society free from jealousy, sexual intrigue and a society which is free from man. She also defines that in the very beginning women were known as the first creature and they were impregnated by the tides of the moon and bear only female children. *The Cleft* is the story of our earliest ancestors, a slow moving, semi-aquatic race of females.

The Cleft is an exploration of what a primitive world might have been like or how the world began. Lessing claims that the book was inspired by a scientific article in which it was asserted that the basic and primal human stock was probably female. The story deals with the ancient community of women called themselves clefts. They reproduced asexually without assistance of men. The clefts have no need or knowledge of men, childbirth is controlled, like the tides that lap around their feet, through the cycles of the moon, and they only bear female children and when anyone saw that the male child or a 'Monster' was born the others hate her. Not for ever but of course it was terrible thing for them. But with the unheralded birth of a strange new child or a monster, the harmony of their sexless community is suddenly thrown into jeopardy. They will not praise being a mother in which the writer says "the babies were just born, that's all, no one need anything to make them." (11) They lived by the sea and were partially aquatic, they say "we are not afraid of sea, we are sea people

and sea made us.” They did not need a man to produce babies. It means they used to impregnated by the tides of moon and they used to bear only female child but the writer says one day, a cleft gave birth to a male child, which they called a “Monster.”

They were frightened that they killed the boy. But more monsters were born, and the clefts left them on a rock to die. Eagles which lived nearby saw the dying babies and carried them to the nearby valley where they were fed by the deer, slowly the children gradually grew older and able to fend for themselves. Soon as many boys were rescued by the eagles, there was community of young males or the tribe emerged. So, they learned the ways of wild animals and how to avoid them and then how to kill them for food but they never killed the deer, their friends, whom they associated with gentleness and kindness and with nourishment.

But the clefts never know that on the other side of the mountain was the wonderful valley where the monsters were living. The clefts themselves have the power for becoming pregnant. They themselves have the capacity for becoming pregnant and giving birth without a man by fertilizing wind but they lost this power after a sexual intercourse. One day, a female wandered over to the valley and was raped , the very cruel rape happened that the monsters tied her hands. It was a mass rape and even some children also participate in the rape that one after another which lead her to death, she was raped by the now-adult men. She fled and gave birth to a new, mixed child nine months later.

When she told her story to the rest of the Clefts, the two tribes soon came into contact with each other. The matriarchs of the Clefts, however, feared the "monsters" and decided to try to kill them off. So, *The Cleft* is a strange and controversial novel which challenges the Christian myth or the myth of genesis. In which myth of genesis always takes the male as and superior whereas women as inferior entity and the

existence of female in the earth was only to serve man, women were created from Adam's rib to serve him. But Lessing opposes this view and says discourse is always created by the powerful people. Male or female who came first is itself a biased thing. So, she reinterprets the myth of genesis and puts women at center whereas, male as secondary creature. By subverting the myth of genesis she is claiming the horizontal relationship of male and female also she is mocking at the Christian myth at the same time.

Scholars have studied the issue of gender in the novel. They argue that this novel present the imbalance of power between men and women in which Lessing tries to favor women by bringing the issue of history. Some of the critics have found the historical origin of gender at the foundation of this book. They argue that female is the first human in the development of civilization. In other words, Lessing focuses on woman's self as the beginning of the humanity. For instance, Bedell Geraldine claims that *The Cleft* is the story of our earliest ancestors, a slow-moving, semi-aquatic race of females. The book was inspired by a scientific article in which it was asserted that the basic and primal human stock was probably female. Furthermore, the writer deals with the view that *The Cleft* is an exploration of what a primitive, all-female world might have been like - inhabited by lazy, communal, porpoise-like creatures and of the chaos that ensues when they start, unaccountably, giving birth to boys. Finally, Bedell appreciates the powerful belief of the writer where she conveys her idea that impermanence of any situation in which human beings find themselves and the paradoxically unchanging nature of human relations. (n.pag.).

Similarly, Kline Nancy supports the idea with Lessing that the basic and primal human stock was probably female, and that males came along later, as a kind of cosmic afterthought and questions the view of biblical myth by a Roman senator

where he says the first female was brought forth from the body of a male and as a reply she starts her writing saying, “Adam’s rib, My foot which shows that she appreciates with the view with the writer that the basic and primal human stock was female where males came along later” (n.pag.).

Likewise, Arditti Micheal says that Doris Lessing has been canny enough to anticipate potential criticisms of her latest novel. In a prefatory note, she reveals it was inspired by a scientific claim that the basic and primal human stock was probably female, and that males came along later, as a kind of cosmic afterthought where the writer says women who have no need of men since they are impregnated by a fertile wind, or a wave, or the moon. (n.pag.).

Brevet Anne- Laure narrates that *The Cleft* in the rock most obviously symbolizes female genital parts and it is associated with rites about the natural functions of menstruating and giving birth. It is also the emblem of the tribe: “We are the Cleft and the Cleft is us” (9-10). When it is later destroyed by the tribe of men, the females are bound to leave the place and go with them. The embedded story deals with an ancient community of women called the Clefts living by the sea near a huge rock whose fissure symbolizes their womanhood and where they held human sacrifices. The writer talks about the creation the sacrifices of women which is the natural function of menstruating and giving birth. (n.pag.).

The above mentioned reviews mainly analyzes the text from the perspective of eco-feminism and talks about the suffering of the nature and female. Making a point of departure from these perspectives, the main focus of this research is to show how the text critiques the myth of genesis and the creation through new historicism and myth criticism. My concern of this research is to show how myth defines female. How society defines women and how they are treated by the society.

Myth is always the false story created by the people in power. Myth comes from the Greek *muthos*: simply, something that is said. The opposing term to *muthos* is *logos*, which might be translated as “account” or “discourse,” and which implies a reasoned basis for what is said. *Muthos*, by contrast to *logos*, dwells in the realm of rumor and speculation, of fancy. (195) Some of the myth critics like Roland Bathes, Simone de Beauvoir and Northrop Frye tries to show the fact that how myth functions in the patriarchal society. Roland Bathes a French literary critic declares myth as a man made perspectives. He states that myth as a specific type of speech. Myths are historical tales that implies something about human nature. In his view myth includes speech, films, photography and reality shows. These are myths today. Myths are not only the genre of stories but its presents some set of ideologies, norms and values and presents as universal truth or natural but in reality its only man made perspective. so, in this sense, myth is nothing more than a type of speech and everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse.(39)

Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir argues that myth actually are not true, real and authentic rather they are just designed facts and given the shape of facts or truth and make people believe in it. Myths for women are the cages which ties them. We can see now that the myth is in large part explained by its usefulness to man. She further argues:

Myths had roots in the spontaneous attitude of man toward his own existence and toward the world around him but going beyond the experience toward the transcendent idea was deliberately used by patriarchal society for the purpose of self- justification; through the myths this society imposed its laws and customs upon individuals in a picturesque, effective manner; it is under a mythical form that the group-imperative is indoctrinated into each conscience.

(999)

Man or woman should not be measured by myths rather they should be judges by acts. Jonathan Hart writes:

Frye admits the distinction between mysticism and vision cannot be absolute, but he stands by its spirit. He also admits the visionary aspect of mysticism in his "General Note" but might have mentioned in this early passage in *Fearful Symmetry* that there are mystical and visionary critics because criticism is an art as well as a science (or social science). (275)

He identifies Frye as a visionary critic by tracing his use and vision of vision from his early work to his last words.

Frye's metaphor of vision connects Blake's interest in the Bible and in art as well as his own. He further mentions:

... it is this visionary dimension that allows us to understand Frye's parallel interests in the Bible and literature, keeping their analogical relation alive while maintaining their independence. The Bible is more than a work of art; literature is more than a secular scripture. (278)

The understanding of past is recorded in the religious text while the modern understanding of social relations comes in literature. Actually, religious texts also become a social reality of the time of its production. People can challenge such understanding in the coming days.

Doris Lessing reinterprets the myth of creation as presented in the Bible through *The Cleft* (2007) where she reasserts the logic of the post modernity. She affirms that woman is the first creation in the development of the species. She finds women at the heart of human society. As the creator and initiator, women have played a pivotal role in shaping the destiny of humanity in the early days. However, the

deformed women also appeared in the form of men who later seized the power from them. It was the first step towards the laying of the foundation for patriarchy.

Critiquing patriarchy, *The Cleft* rewrites Christian myth of creation of human beings, presents the creation of world from woman's perspective, and critically assesses the traditional stereotypes about women.

The Cleft questions the myth as it is present in Europe. Lessing discusses how women were victimized by the males and how they were taken to feed the hunger also women were taken as the means of entertainment by saying this. She puts a question over a Myth which always defines male as rational and civilized. As Lessing narrates,

One of her captors stuffed the weed back, and another tied her hands with strands of weed.....The mass rape went on, it went on, they were feeding hungers it seemed they could never sate. Some lads who had gone off into the forest to find fruit came back, saw what was going on, and soon enough understood it and joined in. Then she no longer squirmed and kicked and moaned but lay still, and they understood, but not at once, that she was dead. And then, but not at once, that they had killed her. (47)

The very cruel rape happened that the monsters tied her hands. This time it was a real scream as if she had been doing it all her life. Man always tries to assert their power and control over women from the very beginning. It was a mass rape and even some children participated in the rape that one after another which lead her to death.

Doris Lessing rewrites the Bible in the novel as she writes that Eve is the first human .The Bible says the god created Adam first. In the novel the deformity in the women lead to formation of a masculine society. The first human was woman. Lessing talks about the first men were survived by the eagles because the cleft hated the baby boys which they called monsters. They put the baby boys in the killing rock

but they were being carried over the mountain by the eagles. Lessing narrates:

We are the Eagles, the Eagle, the Children of the Eagle. The Eagles bore us on their wings, they bear us on their breath, they are the wings of the wind, the Great Eagle watches us, he knows us, he is our Father, he hates our enemies, he fights for us against the Clefts. (27)

The god vanishes in the modern reinterpretation as the eagle replaces him. This is the dancing song of very first men. By making such kind of song Lessing defines the role of the eagles in the survival of the men. Though the clefts gave birth to the first men but they would not have been survived without eagles. The first men have very important roles of eagles in their life. In which the song also defines that eagles are their fathers in a sense that they fight with the eagles for them and saved them.

Modern reinterpretation questions and rewrites the myth. The traditionally accepted truths are doubted, examined and put under the test of rationality. In this connection, Roland Bathes writes:

Myth is not an object, a concept, or an idea but a language, a type of speech. It is a mode of signification and is defined by the way in which it utters its message. He cautions that there are no eternal myths; it is human history that converts reality into speech.(639)

He presents the idea that myth is a type of speech defined more by its intention than its literal sense.

In an attempt to reinterpret myth, Lessing debunks the binary, first comer vs. later comer. The concept treats man /Adam as the first comer, while women/ Eve is the late comer. At the domestic level, Women are always supposed to remain passive to their husbands, and always have to treat them as the heads of the family. Patriarchy always treats women weaker and they always need a support of man. But whatever

myth defines women as they came from the rib of a man and their existence in the earth is only to serve man and women must remain silent when a man makes a certain decision. But in reality women are always strong, independent with moral courage and their capacity to go through sorrow and pain, their way of showing love and affection, these qualities of woman has always proved herself the superior. Lessing narrates:

The boys in their flimsy shelters by the forest's edge found themselves helpless as the wind tossed them over and over, or threw them into the river. They could not find any place in their lovely valley where they could be safe. Up on the mountain no eagles could fly – most were killed or hurt in those long days and nights of the Noise. The boys crept up the mountain, keeping as low as they could to the ground, and went over the top, among the smashed eagles' nests and hurt birds, and found their way to the caves above the shore where the girls welcomed them, being glad of their presence. They were all distraught with fear and with knowledge of their helplessness. (139)

Here Lessing tries to claim that women are very powerful and kind, they are like the Mother Earth which provides food, medicine, cure, shelter and life to all human beings as well as animals and plants. Similarly, the Clefts also helped the boys when they were in trouble they girls welcomed them and provided shelter, also they were glad of their presence.

From the very beginning women are dominated by males, they are treated as worthless and useless also they are taken as their property and feel superior to women, which is not true. Lessing narrates:

Have you ever thought how strange it is that you have nipples on those flat places in front there? You can't call them breasts, can you? Why have nipples

at all when they are not good for anything? You can't feed a babe with them, they are useless. (17)

Any man who thinks women are worthless and inferior is the epitome of stupidity because in reality man are nothing without women.

Dorris Lessing talks about myth as source of social and religious understand. She presents the case of boys running after girl and elderly women for intercourse.

Lessing narrates:

They were of all sizes, some children, some already past middle age, and these were the ones worst damaged, when they had been 'pets'. All of them naked, and seeing them there, the monsters, with their squirts pointed at her, she spat the weed out of her mouth and screamed, and this time it was a real scream, as if she had been doing it all her life. (46)

The relationship between man and women is primarily guided by physical pleasure. As a driving force to bring two sexes together, pleasure commodifies women's body as a site of pleasure only. So, the men run, fight and kill each other for this pleasure.

In the modern world, the major issue concerns with body and gender. Because the world is trying to shift away from patriarchal values but The Bible interpretation where it was so much discouraging. As Lessing points out, "I have always found it entertaining that females are worshipped as goddesses, while in ordinary life they are kept secondary and thought inferior"(27). Female are taken as goddess and worshipped but in reality men always tries to oppress and dominate women for their own benefits. They are taken as the inferior part of the society. Lessing resists the earlier, patriarchal understanding of human as something that had began with the creation of man.

Women never celebrated the birth of monsters or the male child neither they

feed them with their milk. But for the first time when Astre copulated with the males and gave birth to male child, the two girls went to valley where monsters were growing. Lessing narrates:

The boys watched, and when they saw the blood running seemed to understand. The doe again fed the baby and then went off into the forest, while the baby cried. Crying for its mother: so Astre understood, and did not know if she was weeping for herself or for all the little babies (who were probably here, all around her) once left without mothers, or even mothers' milk. (73)

This was the first time the baby was born after the sexual intercourse, and after this the clefts lost the ability to give birth to a child without males. This was the time the peace and harmony of the clefts sexless community is suddenly thrown into jeopardy.

Women are the creator so, to imagine a world without women is impossible. Only a woman has strength to cope up with so much pain and create a life. To nurture a child and make a good human being. A woman can do what a man can do but the question is do a male can get pregnant and give birth? Lessing writes:

Yes, I know you cannot give birth, only we Clefts can give birth, and you despise us, yes, you do, but without us there would be no Monsters, there would be no one at all. Have you ever thought of that? We Clefts make all the people, Clefts and Monsters. If there were no Clefts, what would happen – have you really thought about that? (16)

Only a woman can almost die and give birth at the same time. Males are only able to see this beautiful world because women kept them in their Uterus for nine months and take care of them. but despite all the facts even to this day, women are facing a lots of violence, tortures and abuses.

Women have an inner inclination towards the beauty. The sense of

organization, of house and the society appears first in their mind. The aesthetic sense of life primarily develops in women than in men. This idea directly opposes the biblical narrative of aesthetics and coherence, where God and Adam place themselves in the center. They dictate Eve as the one from the margin. Lessing rewrites this understanding in the cleft:

The girls looked inside the shelters and found a filthy mess of bones, fruit rinds, discarded weed bandages. They tore branches from the trees and used them as brooms. This was in itself remarkable since there were no trees near the Clefts' shore. The rubbish cleft was swept into a big pile and added to it were the bones and bits of flesh from the place where fish was brought to the eagles. This pile was swept to the river's edge, then into the cleansing flow. The males caught fish, cut it up with knives made from shells, looked for fruit in the trees, made sure the girls, and the baby when it cried, were fed. They brought fresh grass for the doe, and petted the doe and the baby. (74-5)

Lessing tries to define that, the first priority for a woman is always a family and a society, only a woman has that ability to manage family and their work at the same time. Here, the writer says that the girls sweep the rubbish a big pile, the bones and flesh which fish and eagles brought. They tore the branches from trees and used as brooms. Women have the aesthetic sense of life, that they have the ability to make everything beautiful.

Lessing defines that not only the clefts but also the early man were equally feared from the females because neither they were accepted in the clefts community nor they get love and care from their mothers. Lessing states:

They were hungry for touch and tenderness; and the girls, who on their own shore did not go in much for this kind of affection, were surprised and pleased.

Apart from these scenes of . . . yes, let us call it love, were the very early Monsters, who had been badly hurt by the Clefts. They feared the females, and tried to keep away from them. The girls feared them, because of the emotions they felt. Shame? (76)

When Maire and Astre went to the valley of monsters, for the first time the monsters and the clefts feel for each other. The girls were also surprised and pleased for this kind of affection which they never experienced before that, the young males tried to be close to the girls, nuzzling and hugging and even licking. This kind of feelings brings man and women together.

Lessing claims that though man view women as inherently distinct from themselves, treated as different creatures and exploits but the female never ran away from their responsibilities. So, the clefts are the nature, they are the creator. Lessing narrates:

One after another she held those stiff tubes in her hand until they emptied themselves, and then just as she had been brought here by a need, now she had to leave . . . had to, and followed by them all, she walked towards the mountain. She did not run. Running was not what Clefts did. (66)

We always see a kind of male domination and a certain kind of ideology around our society and in this kind of ideology, men are always superior to women and they treat women as a part of men's property, also they are controlled by a man.

Lessing tries to explain that the two girls Maire and Astre were revolting with the whole community. In a sense that, when they gave birth to the monsters they were asked to throw the babies into the sea by the Old Clefts, but they ignored and ran from there. Lessing narrates:

The next thing that happened was sudden and violent. Two of the young Clefts

gave birth, to Monsters, at the same time. They were on the rocks near to the sea. The Old Clefts called to them to throw the new babes into the sea, but at once Astre and Maire were there, just as the babies were being cut free from their mothers, who were shouting their repulsion and their fear of their infants. Maire, her own New One in one arm, held a new baby Monster in the other; Astre snatched up a babe, and the two went as fast as they could – remember that running was not something they were used to – to the Killing Rock. (83)

For the first time the two girls were going beyond their tradition and ignoring the rules of their community, which they never did before. Means they realized that throwing the babies or keeping them away from their mother was not good. But this kind of things were not accepted by the Old Clefts so they had to go away from there.

Revolution occurred among the clefts when some of the young women started making relations with the boys. Rebellion always takes place when the two parties acts differently and they have different kinds of thoughts. Likewise, the same condition occurred among the clefts when the young clefts had developed intimate relation with the boys. Visiting the boys and giving birth to a child after a intercourse had become normal for the young clefts. But the old clefts think that the girls were challenging the rules and breaking their culture. The old clefts do not want any change so they wanted to kill those young girls and the males. Now the clefts who lived peacefully and happily earlier became a big enemy. Lessing narrates:

Perhaps the Old Shes thought that maybe there would not be any more Monsters born. An appropriate kind of thought for their slow old minds: ‘If no Monsters born recently then perhaps there won’t be any more.

Very well: some things were clear. The Old Ones 120The Cleft wanted Maire

and Astre to go right away, with their allies, the new kind of babies and children, and the Old Females' girls would go too. They planned to get rid of the new people who had new thoughts and who gave birth to the new children. Then the rule of the Old Shes would be unchallenged and there would be no more girls like Maire and Astre, and no 'new ones'. (120-21)

The old clefts does not want more monsters to be born because their assumption was that the young girls who used to be very friendly or they used to live in a community peacefully now they started to questioning in their activities means they started treating each other as an enemy. So as Lessing writes, not only their plan was to kill the males but also everyone who wants to challenge their rules. No matter they are their own girls or the new kinds of babies and children.

Revolution naturally occurs among the women when they begin to develop a sort of attraction and kindness to men. Still, a group of purist women show their presence in the society to maintain that the boys are deformed and unnecessary humans for them. To illustrate the idea, Lessing writes:

When the girls did come running down the mountain they were welcomed with a hundred embraces but also with warnings: they must keep a watch for predators. This visit went well, the boys were delighted, and the girls too, before they suddenly and as far as the boys were concerned inexplicably, took themselves off back to their shore. There they settled in caves near Maire and Astre, and this made a territorial. The Cleft statement of the fact that there were two parties now among the Clefts. (90-1)

In the society of the cleft, they divided into two parties. Means the clefts who rejected the males earlier, among them some females started visiting them. Some of the puritans women started showing love and affection towards males. As Lessing

defines, that when the girls came running down the mountain they were welcomed with a hundred embrace, some of the girls started enjoying the company of males but some still rejected them so, the fact was that there were two parties among the clefts.

Lessing tries to claim that clefts were the first social producers of life. They were the first to initiate the social relations and the moral values. Lessing narrates:

Astre and Maire sat on the log, with the boys around them, and they spoke sentences, slowly, carefully, easy to hear and repeat. It was already evident that two languages were developing, one being learned from these new arrivals, and one high and childish, which was how the very first community of boys had to speak. They spoke like children, even as little children, and how they did dislike what they heard from each other. Maire and Astre had to be there, to teach them language, teach them how to keep their shelters clean – and to mate with them when their tubes grew alert and pointed at the girls.

(75)

The writer tries to blur the patriarchal ideology which always defines men as rational and civilized. This shows that how the girls teach them about the first males and inspired them in many ways. They also taught them the language and discipline. The first males who were grew up with the eagles, they does not know how to speak or they were not well mannered. In fact, the girls taught them about the sanitation like how to keep shelters clean and how to act properly.

Woman in her life has heavier responsibilities than men. Women can tackle with every problem very easily. They can fulfill each and every responsibility properly. In comparison to women man are always irresponsible in which they often take things for granted. Women have the courage to accomplish each and every task properly either its family or work. So, women are the creators and protectors. Lessing

writes:

Just as there were continual complaints by the Clefts about the dangers the little boys were expected to face, so there were complaints from the Clefts, specifically about the great river. The little boys should not be allowed to go near the river, said the women. Oh, how the females hated that river valley. That comes clear and insistent from the chronicles and songs of the time. Most of all they hated the river itself, which was dangerous to them, not only to the infants and small children. The theme 'How few we are, how easily we die' – the words of a song – is reiterated. Many had died in that river. (155)

Lessing tries to define that how much the Clefts were worried about the small babies. Many infants were died in the river because of the young men's carelessness. So, the Clefts want the safety of the child. Child were grown up in the valley with the males but they were not treated properly as a result many had died in the river.

The sense of parenting developed among the clefts and the monsters. The males realized the facial resemblance between father and baby, when the girls came to stay with the males in their valley, males were in an amazement that the face of the baby was matching with them which means the sense of fatherhood was initiated that they kept looking and touching the child which never had before because neither the father has any part in the child development nor the clefts know who the father is.

Lessing narrates:

Then the father, beginning to realise what these matched faces meant, snatched the child from Maire and ran off to the river bank. All followed, watching as the youth knelt by the river where it made a pool, and looked down at himself and then at the child, mirrored there too. Then he handed the child back to Maire and walked, as it were blindly, certainly unsteadily, to the

great log where he sat down. Maire sat by him, with the First One, and he kept looking at her, then at the child, then putting up his hands to touch his face. He was in a fever of wonderment – as they all were. (99-100)

As Lessing defines, they snatched the baby from her mother and took to the river to mirror the baby where they found the similarities between them and the baby. They were so much wondered and for the first time they show love towards the child. Also, they started to realize what these matched faces meant.

Lessing explains that the cleft who always lived in the peace and harmony. Child birth was controlled. Their peaceful community was endangered. In the way that, the clefts who have their own capacity to give birth to a child. In which they have no need of men but their sexless society was in threat when young clefts started showing compassion towards male. It was unbearable to the old clefts. So one day, the old cleft decided to visit the valley the girls were attracted to. Lessing describes the scene thus:

The young ones were begging her to turn back, but she persisted and that in itself had to make us wonder. Perhaps it was only because she had no conception of walking such a distance that she could make herself go on. At the foot of the mountain she did let herself down out of those supporting arms, and sit, moaning, but then she dragged herself up. Often on her hands and knees, she crawled up the mountainside. By now the eagles screamed around her, and flapped down close to her and away. She screamed at them, they screamed at her, these enemies who had wanted to kill each other. What could she be thinking of these birds, taller than she was, birds who could lift a young Cleft off the rocks and drop her into the waves? (109)

Eagle is presented as a symbol of patriarch and clefts as matriarch. They always treats

each other as enemy because the clefts who use to throw the deformed babies in the killing rock thinking that eagles might have killed them but these all babies were saved because of the eagles, the eagles did not kill them rather they kept them safely. So the monsters use to think eagles as a father but clefts as enemies also we can see that the eagles who use to lift a young cleft off the rocks and drop into the waves was angry with the old clefts means they were against the old clefts.

Lessing attempts to question over the myth or the bible which defines that women is made from the bones and flesh of man Means, women are created from the man but Lessing challenges this belief, where she presents as the first human being as female and the creator. She puts women as the source and centre of the creative domain. Lessing narrates:

And, of course, the babies being born. They were just born, that's all, no one did anything to make them. I think we thought the moon made them, or a big fish, but it is hard to remember what we thought, it was such a dream. How we thought has never been part of our story, only what happened. (11)

The first human being or the clefts have no need or knowledge of men and they do not need a man to give birth. They called themselves the sea creatures and sea made them.

Christianity or the Bible always defines women as irrational and irresponsible creature. Whereas, male as cultured and trustworthy. In a sense that, Bible claims that Eve ate the forbidden fruit of the Garden Of Eden, also she shared it with her husband Adam. Means, this religious book tries to convey the message that women did not have knowledge and because of women god punished them. Lessing states:

When the boys appeared on the mountain top the girls had already begun their descent away from them. Then, taking a good look, they stopped in surprise.

The boys wore their narrow aprons of feathers and leaves. If some of the girls

had visited the valley before they would have seen the boys naked, perhaps just come from the river – seen them in their Monster guise. Now what they feared, or perhaps desired, was hidden. The truth was, these girls hardly recognised the Squirts, these smiling young males, decorated, and their hair combed long and sleek. Maire had given the boys combs, made from the skeletons of fish, and told them how to care for their hair. (125-26)

The above lines define that clefts were more civilized than the boys so, they taught the boys about cleanliness like how to make shelters clean and even they taught them language. The girls were the teacher, friend and instructor for the boys. Before that the boys used to live naked they have no sense about clothes and even does not know how to speak. So, Lessing challenges the Bible myth which always valorizes males and defines as males rational creature.

Man will never know the pain and suffering of women, they never know like what is giving birth. During pregnancy a women's body changes completely and so does her life. Man never knows this pain because they never carry the babies in their womb and give a birth to another life in pain. So they are always harsh and irresponsible. Women are always helpful, honest and kind hearted in comparison of males. Lessing narrates:

People were remembering old myths: surely things had been better when males had not been needed to make children? The moon, or the ocean, or even great fish had impregnated females, or even the spirit of the cleft itself. Now women over-ready for mating sat around uselessly on the rocks and talked about the men. They waited, that was all. When they talked of the men, and the missing boys, there was foreboding. When they talked of the men, and the missing boys, there was foreboding. They knew what a careless lot the men

were. 'If they had to carry the babes swelling in their wombs, and then give birth in pain they would not be so careless, risking life . . .' 'Do not you care about us, Horsa, do not you care?' (239)

People started remembering the old myths and especially, female are talking about the life was far better before when the males were not needed to make children. Because women have sacrificed everything for the males but the males never valued them instead they ran away from them.

Lessing defines that though the young clefts used to visit the monsters valley, the old clefts still were not ready to accept the monsters neither they forgive the girls who ran away leaving the old clefts. The group of the old women always think that the boys are the enemy to them in which their own girls were breaking the rules, enjoying the company of males. In a sense that the girls were on and off visiting the males, they used to return when they were pregnant. But these kind of activities were always intolerable among the old clefts. Lessing notes:

The old, slow, suspicious mind understood one simple fact: everything that had happened to change the old ways, caused such division and malice between the different parts of the Clefts, was because of the Monsters. It was as simple as that: the Monsters were the enemy. And now they had to be got rid of. The Old She sent one of her girls to tell Maire to come and see her. She sent nods and smiles to Maire who was sitting in the mouth of her cave. Maire merely nodded back. She was in no hurry to go. She did not want to seem obedient to the Old Females, whom she suspected of wishing (and plotting) harm. (115)

Now the old clefts started making plan which could destroy not only the males but a lot of girls because they begin to think that this kind of activities like the girls visiting

to the males changed the old ways and the rules. Which divided clefts in two parts and started suspecting in each other activities. As Lessing defines these kinds of actions was always unbearable for the old Clefts and they wanted to get rid of.

Generally women are treated as weaker and ugly and their body as flesh. But Doris Lessing in the novel compares herself with a man and explains herself beautiful. She defines that the early females used to give birth to a female child but one day when one of the clefts gave birth to a male they were surprised to see a bumps and lumps and a pipe in front of them. Means they saw a male child as a deformed version of human creation and started calling them monsters. Lessing writes:

You get angry when I say Monsters, but just look at yourself. Look at yourself – and look at me. Go on, look. I am not wearing the red flower belt so you can see how I am. Now look at The Cleft, we are the same, *The Cleft* and the Clefts. No wonder you cover yourselves there, but we do not have to. We are nice to look at, like one of those shells we can pick off a rock after a storm. Beautiful – you taught us that word and I like to use it. I am beautiful, just like *The Cleft* with its pretty red flowers. But you are all bumps and lumps and the thing like a pipe which is sometimes like a sea squirt. Can you wonder that when the first babes like you were born we put them out for the eagles? (11-12)

She compares herself to a man and saying beautiful. She is saying monsters with bumps and lumps and defining herself as pretty red flowers. They also put them to die in the killing thinking that eagles might kill or throw them into sea.

Man are always brought up in patriarchal mindset which dictates them to achieve knowledge and develop the society by neglecting and dominating women as a weak creature and they always think that they have come into existence first. Myth

and the history is always biased which is written from the perspective of man in which the story created by male histories defines that the earliest ancestors were male and if it is asked how they reproduced themselves then they reply that eagles hatched them out of their eggs. These kinds of stories made by males are quite humorous and controversial. Lessing tells:

A tale expressing some kind of deep psychological truth. It is now believed that the earliest ancestors were male, and if it is asked how they reproduced themselves, then the reply is that the eagles hatched them out of their eggs. After all, it cannot be for nothing that respect for the great birds is expressed in a hundred myths about our origins. It is much easier to believe that eagles, or even deer, were our progenitors, than that the people were in their beginnings entirely female, and the males a later achievement. After all, why do males have breasts and nipples if not that once they were of practical use? They could have given birth from their navels. There are many possibilities, all more credible than that females came first. And there is something inherently implausible about males as subsidiary arrivals: it is evident that males are by nature and designed by Nature to be first.' (142-43)

It is easy for the male society to believe that they are the offspring of animals and birds but they cannot accept the fact that their ancestors as female because it devalue their self-esteem. But Lessing encounters with such a biased tales and gives biological evidence that female came first.

Women's first priority is always their house and children they are always worried about their child's health and safety. They are always serious and genuine in their every role in which men always lacks to fulfill their roles. Lessing talks about the male involvement in the violent, that they were involved in the dangerous games

like a dangerous swim and sometimes if a log or the branches was travelling along in the flow, they might catch it and hold on and use for ride and the children were copying them which was very dangerous for the child. Clefts were complaining the males that not to try the harmful activities but neither were they taking their child seriously nor they were listening to the complaints of the clefts. Lessing writes:

There was no suggestion that the promised discussion would take place: the incident with the damaged little boy had to do in place of the reproaches the women had planned. That night there was no feasting. There was some mating but nothing like last night, though the moon stood there above them. In the early morning the women woke to find there was not one male to be seen. Hard to avoid the thought that the men had seen the women, their females, asleep and silent, and stolen off silently, so as to – escape? Yes, almost certainly, that was what they had done. The women decided to give up. (161)

The women are getting disappointed and sad because of the rude behavior of men. They were ignoring whatever women are saying to them; rather they think that women are over reacting to the situation. Patriarchy always interprets the definition of women in a dominating manner. Like, Women are described to be strong spirited emotional creatures, which lack high intellect. This is the patriarchal politics of underestimation of the feminine values and characteristics to enable a rise and significance in the men's position.

Lessing claims that the squirts were tired by women's feelings and their demand but still they were dependent on the clefts because of their self-centeredness. They were so much obsessed with the thoughts and the body of the clefts. Because the clefts were the teacher of the monsters who taught them the language and the healthful living. So, the males know that only the clefts can nurture the infants

properly. Lessing writes:

This confused him, the sheer force of it – the compulsion. A compulsion that he must think, he must accept that he was careless and irresponsible, just as she said he was. Yet these accusations of her always, and always had, made him stubborn and resisting, but he could not today tell her he was not listening, and that she always nagged and complained, because he was secretly thinking that she was right. (191)

The males were ignoring the clefts or whatever the clefts say to them was not taken seriously, even they know that clefts were right. Because what society teaches is that woman should always obey and respect the males and whatever wrong or right they say should be followed by females. But at the same, time even if female is right the man should not do it or listen to her, this is because of the self- pride which man always carries with them.

The males always try to think themselves as superior to women and try to rule them and treat them in a disrespectful manner. When the babies are hurt or when the boys fell and broke a leg or arm males sent them to women's shore and ask females to heal them as they are considered as healers and caregivers but when the females tries to control those mischievous boys they behave rudely to the clefts. Lessing narrates: "Some kind of central command or authority, it seemed, the girls were demanding and when they tried to assume control of the young boys, they were told they were just Clefts, and must shut up" (221). This shows the notion that women in patriarchal societies are considered inferior and they do not have any rights to say something to anyone especially they must shut up while a man commands anything. They want women in a need when they are in problem but they do not want any suggestion from women, means they want a control over women.

Lessing rewrites the discourses of myth created by the males or the patriarchal society in *The Cleft*. Lessing breaks down the stereotype which always defines women as secondary part of the society. She defines women as nature and creature and exposes that female had the ability to reproduce without the help of monsters. Means, they did not have to depend on males for babies and reproduction. Babies were simply born by the help of the moon or a big fish made them.

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