

## Chapter 1

### Lessing and the Context of the Study

#### The Argument

The present study is an attempt to make a feminist reading of *The Golden Notebook* by Doris Lessing. The novel represents a number of ideas about the role of women in the mid-twentieth Century western culture. Therefore, the novel contributes to the discussion of feminism even though the author herself denies the novel as a feminist one. The novel's theme, structure, characters and narrative style serve well for the aim of its feminist interpretation.

When the novel was published in 1962, feminism was the current issue. The novel was written at a time when women were beginning to have ambitions for self-realization that came into conflict with their traditional roles. It was a time before instructions had been issued on how to combine domestic happiness with career expectations. The novel was seen by many feminists of the 1960s as an influential work that revealed the experience of women in the society. It has successfully portrayed the relational problems between men and women. The issue of power over sex is brought up in the novel over and over.

Lessing is a pioneer of feminist self-consciousness in its raw state. The very rhythm of her remorseless, circular and outstanding honest narrative reflects the essentially inward-looking perceptions of a woman as opposed to the linear undertaking of a man. Therefore, she has produced a seminal and almost a clinical work in which the protagonist Anna represents all that is most terrifying about the female archetype. As a feminist and a free woman, living a life of what was then striking promiscuity, her protagonist displays some curiously traditional female behavior, which is even more puzzling on re-reading.

Reading *The Golden Notebook* carefully forces one to realize how women writers can be alienated from their own authentic, sensitive and accurate perceptions of sexual politics because nowhere in their culture in which feminism is kept quiescent and latent. They see such perceptions corroborated rather than made targets of anti-feminist criticism, ridicule and disparagement.

This study explores how Lessing focuses on the relationship between men and women in her novel and discusses the meaning of femaleness in the contemporary western culture that gives the novel a feminist touch. Far from being the celebration of women's dependence on men, the novel explores relations between men and women, and seemingly the inescapable female need for opposite sex. The novel breaks a new ground in its open discussion of female sexuality from the point of view of a woman novelist.

This study, thus, discusses Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, which describes the facts why women are considered as the Other. The study is constrained to the investigation of the selected text. The study, however, includes the features of the text, which is related to the theory under discussion.

### **Review of Literature**

Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* has been praised for its fascinating and experimental form and for its subject matter. Various scholars and critics have interpreted the novel from different perspectives such as its complicated structure, the relationship between madness and sanity, and the authors' role in truth presentation.

In a 1962 review for the *New York Times*, Ernest Buckler argues, "one can only salute and marvel at the fecundity of ideas and insight that turns almost every remaining paragraph into a hive of constellated meaning" (158). Although Buckler comments that some of Lessing's discussions about politics are not fully developed and that her exposition of her characters' emotions are at times overdrawn, he

concludes that *The Golden Notebook* stands out significantly due to Lessing's powerful writing when compared to other highly praised novels of the time. Buckler praises her powerful writing and her attempt to tie each and every paragraph together to give a combined meaning of the text.

In another *New York Times* article, written ten years later, Richard Locke observes that of all postwar English novelists, "Lessing is the foremost creative descendant of the great tradition which includes D.H. Lawrence, George Eliot and Conrad" (31). Locke finds the novel to be intelligent but unpretentious, and Lessing shows great "courage to stick to her perceptions and tell home truths." Locke notes that her writing is dense with intelligence and that her stories provide "new information about our inner lives and social evasions" (31). Locke in his quote appreciates the novelist's work calling it to be simple and creative. He further adds that she has shown great courage to write on the topics that were controversial for her time and that her style of writing provides her readers new information about the life of that time.

Sandra Brown, writing in her *Approaches to Teaching Lessing's The Golden Notebook*, states that "the novel can vex readers who are looking for a traditional story, but the form of the novel is far from jumble. This is due to Lessing's individualizing each of Anna's voice through which the author defines the whole: the woman and the modern world" (121-26). Brown, in her quote, tries to address the form of the novel and in doing so, he views that the novel can annoy the readers who are looking for a traditional story. The novelist individualizes each of Anna's voices through four notebooks, which she devices to protect herself against breaking down.

In *Doris Lessing Critical Studies*, John L. Carey addresses the form of Lessing's novel. He claims that without its structural plan, "*The Golden Notebook* could not make comment on the life Lessing desires; without the content the structure

would be grandiose and bare, complicated rather than complex” (20-39). It refers to the form of the novel, which is very complicated and very carefully worked out.

Without its structural and contextual plan, the novel would not have been considered as Lessing’s best work.

In *Neither Compromise nor Happiness*, Irving Howe argues that Lessing is radically different from other women writers in the sense that she grasps the connection between Anna’s neuroses and the public disorders of the day, and second in that she has no use either for the quavering of the feminist writers or the aggressions of those female novelists whose every sentence leads a charge in the war of the sexes” (qtd. in Hite 60). In short, Howe asserts that writing by and about women is an inferior genre, which Lessing herself has overcome by surpassing apparently typical feminine narrative conventions, subsequently described as the inability to see personal experience in a bigger whole, melodrama or “minute gradations of sensibility” (qtd. in Hite 61). Lessing has transcended typical female writing in that she treated the sphere of personal relations with regard to wider social and political context. As she writes about “what’s real,” she must write the kind of realist novel, to which Howe refers. In doing so, she surpasses expectation, raising above feminine conditions which restrict female authors in general and those female authors who continually deal with the topic of female experience in particular.

In deconstructing the conventional ideological and cultural gender institution in narratives, Lessing is an important female author who offers an oppositional narrative strategy. In this context, being a white South African and a woman, she can be said to display “double marginalization”. She came to England in 1949 to escape the troubles her own country Rhodesia was facing at that time (Blau Duplesis 89). Duplesis praises Lessing calling her an important female author and that she displays

double marginalization because she is a woman and a white South African who came to England in order to leave the unpleasant situation of her native country.

Through the story of Anna, Lessing is able to question the appropriateness of realist forms to represent the fragmented nature of modern reality, and the crises of belief with which intellectuals on the New Left had to grapple. In abandoning the conventional narrative, the novel also explores the relationship between language and ideology and the possibility of the new revolutionary literary form (Joannou 24). Joannou tries to focus on Lessing's treatment of Anna's breakdown or fragmentation. She has been able to show the relationship between language and philosophy when it comes to neglect stereotypical representation of a story.

The previous studies, especially the research done recently, have thrown much light on the understanding about Lessing and her book. There is much room for interpretations to be done from different perspectives. Thus, the present study by analyzing the respective female characters in *The Golden Notebook* attempts to examine the image of women in the novel from the feminist perspectives.

### **Outline of the Study**

This study is divided into four chapters. Each chapter is further divided into its sub-chapters.

The first chapter is related to the context of the study, which has been further sub-divided into three sections. The first section presents various arguments reflecting the feminist interpretation of Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*. Various aspects of the novel such as its theme, structure, characters and narratives provide a platform for its interpretation from the feminist perspective. The thesis statement has been incorporated as the major argument. The concept of Simon de Beauvoir's women as Other has been included as the methodology of research. Related literature review regarding the novel and the author has also been incorporated in the second section of

this chapter. Moreover, the outline of the study has been included under the introductory chapter.

The second chapter focuses on the feminist approach to literature. Authentic websites, thesis, journals, articles and library resources have been used as per the need for the proper analysis of this chapter, which is also used as a guideline for other chapters. The concept of feminism has been embedded in the first section of this chapter. The contextual description of feminism by different critics such as Beasley, Shaw and Lee, Rebecca West and others has been mentioned in this section. The second section includes a brief introduction to Simone de Beauvoir's women as Other. Additionally, the analysis of Lessing's novel from the feminist point of view has been done in the last section of this chapter.

The third chapter has further been sub-divided into four sections. The first section provides various reasons for the study of the novel from the feminist point of view. A brief summary of the novel is also incorporated in the second section of this chapter. The third section includes a brief analysis of women characters of Lessing's work. The last phase of this chapter reveals various facts showing the position of women in the novel that forces its readers to tag them as Other. Various interpretations have been included to show women as inferior to male characters.

Finally, the fourth chapter is a conclusive note that postulates Lessing's novel as a feminist project. It includes various arguments to prove the novel as the feminist one.

## Chapter 2

### Feminist Approach to Literature

#### Feminism: The Concept

Feminism advocates for social, political and economical equality for women, which was originated in 1848 when a group of women gathered at the Seneca Falls Convention to discuss women's rights. Since then, it has occurred in waves, which are characterized by organized, large-scale efforts to increase the rights of women. As a socio-political criticism, cultural movement and moral philosophy, it emerged in the late 1960s with an intention of defining women as an autonomous human being. It also intends to challenge the hierarchy based on male ideology.

The term 'feminism' does not have a specific definition due to the fact that the concept has developed into so many different perspectives. In addition, the meaning of the term has been constantly changing and developing over time, making the meaning different from century to century. It has also been discussed that the lack of a clear definition has contributed to special images categorizing feminism and feminists, only to relate feminism to the images, which often relate to hairstyle, attitudes and ways of dressing.

One of the English novelists and journalists Rebecca West has tried to define feminism in a quite sarcastic way as it is quite hard to shortly define what feminism actually involves. Even though the term 'feminism' is commonly used, it is a troublesome term as she argues, "I have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is; I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiates me from a doormat" ( 28). West examines the definition of feminism with irony. She notes that feminism is a broad term, which is hard to define in a specific way. She further adds that she is called a feminist whenever she expresses her general thoughts or feelings, which differentiates her from a doormat.

Though feminism as a movement began in the 1960s, the seeds of it were sown during the Greek period by the dramatist Aristophanes in his drama *Lysistrata* in which he has presented a female character Lysistrata more powerful physically than males. It is a movement popularized in the decade of 1970s to counter the patriarchal society “to equate pen with penis,” to believe a woman as an imperfect man and to promote the conceptions of “a female is female by virtue of certain lack of qualities” (Adhikari 505). It was flourished in the decade of 1970s though its roots were already sown in 1792 when Mary Wollstonecraft advocated the use of reason in order to cope with the evils of patriarchy. Wollstonecraft who wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792 is considered the first feminist writer and philosopher.

In the 1960s, the female literature entered a new and dynamic phase, with the international women’s movement that impressed many of other followers. For instance, Showalter claims, “The contemporary women’s novel observes the traditional forms of nineteenth-century realism, but it also operates in the context of twentieth-century Freudian and Marxist analysis” (35). Showalter tries to say that novel written by women towards the end of the twentieth-century were all about their earlier lives, which gave birth to a new collection of novels written by women. Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark, Doris Lessing and other young writers such as Margaret Drabble, A.S. Byatt and Beryl Bainbridge worked for the renaissance of authentically female writing by providing “women’s view of life, women’s experience” (35). Adding to her statement, Showalter further observes that some young writers along with other famous writers of that time worked for the rebirth of real women’s writing. These writers have insisted upon the right to use vocabularies previously reserved for male writers and to describe formerly taboo areas of female experience.

Many writers who comment on women as a group or on female identity in general assume that women take up a dual position in the definitions given by



dominant forces. They are both part of culture in general and part of women's culture in particular. For instance, Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) states,

Women take up a sub cultural position from which they form a unity and respond with fictional and biographical strategies. A woman writer must balance between marginality and inclusion, but with one overriding goal: Rewriting gender in dominant fiction. Therefore it is not all surprising that one of the major aspects of twentieth century women writers is "critique of story, which is not only a thematic fact but an indication of the moral, ideological and political desire to deconstruct the novel. (qtd.in Blau Duplessis 43)

Showalter examines the role of twentieth-century women writers arguing that they have to be cautious of maintaining the balance between the state of being marginal and the act of including gender related literary texts in dominant fiction.

Talking about feminism, it cannot be seen as a movement encouraging women to take power over men; it is about equality between men and women and valuing both sexes for their own qualities. In the same context, Shaw and Lee asserts in the following lines:

... despite the fact that women are physically weaker than men and maybe more emotional than the opposite sex, they should still be as valued as men are for their features. Even though the sexes differ in many aspects both physically and emotionally, they should still have the same rights and opportunities in life, they are both human beings and nobody should be more valued than the Other. (14-15)

It means that feminism is not a search for women's identity powerful than that of men but it is a commitment to securing rights and opportunities for women equal to those of men.

In this way, feminism is a political theory as well as moral philosophy to react against the patriarchal subjugation of females making them the underdogs.

### **Simon de Beauvoir's Women as Other**

Simon de Beauvoir was a radical French philosopher, writer and political activist whose groundbreaking work tackled the underdog status of women and inspired the feminist movement. Beauvoir's radical feminist and existentialist thought long for a feminine existence equally powerful as that of males. She rejects the patriarchal myths, which are created with the politics of negating female and her existence in a society. As an existentialist, she argues that human beings are not born with any particular values and create an identity only as a result of their circumstances (14). Beauvoir drew on different disciplines to argue that women have been oppressed throughout history, and her book helped to set the feminist movement in motion.

Beauvoir's historical materialist investigation shows how women have been trapped into dependence on men in every area of their lives, ensuring that they have no real power in culture or society. She highlights how society treated women as legal minors like children. Her central argument is that women have been forced to take a secondary role to men since the earliest times, and that the whole human condition is viewed in male terms and is described in a language that excludes women.

Throughout history, Beauvoir argues that women have been cast as "Other". This is a philosopher's term for that, which is distinct from the human self. In defining women as Other, man is effectively denying her humanity. Beauvoir argues that society views women as Other because they are viewed only in relation to men. They are treated as objects of desire for men, as mothers to their heirs, or the ones

who look after everyone else. She further states that while it is natural for humans to understand themselves in opposition to others, this process is flawed when applied to gender relatives. She claims,

woman is 'The wished for intermediary between nature, the stranger to man, and the fellow being who is too closely identical. She opposes him with neither the hostile silence of nature nor the hard requirement of a reciprocal relation; through a unique privilege. She is a conscious being and yet it seems possible to possess her in flesh. (301)

Beauvoir critically examines the position of women in the society and tries to describe a woman as a mediator, a stranger and a fellow being who objects a man with neither aggression nor her necessity for the mutual relation. She further adds that a woman is a creature who is aware of her own existence. There are still possibilities that men have control over her both physically and mentally.

Beauvoir authored *The Second Sex* in 1949 in which she identifies the myths regarding women, and how these myths have been made manifest in the lives of men. The book was an analysis of why women have always had less power and freedom than men. Her book tackles women's social status from the beginning of civilization to the modern day. It is a milestone in the study of women's experience in society and is regarded by some as marking the birth of feminism. She argues about the positive and the negative where men represent the positive and women represent the negative. This is especially true when it comes to personalities, where men usually are strong and powerful and women are weak and withdrawn. She states, "He is the subject, he is the Absolute and she is the Other" (26). The author adopts the title of Other for women based on the dominance of men over women throughout history. This dominance has been demonstrated in the powerless state that women have experienced due to lack of physical, financial and intellectual independence that have

been solidified through “the code of law that have been set up against her” (300).

Lacking these liberties, women became dependent on men, and at the time of Beauvoir’s writing, it was rarely recognized by men as an equal to women.

Beauvoir states that men seeks in women “the Other as Nature as their fellow beings,” and goes on to point out the disregard men has displayed towards nature as the model of the treatment of women. The Other, according to Beauvoir, is desired by men “not only to possess women but also to be ratified by them” (312). The women have been groomed to remain loyal to the values of men.

Beauvoir argues that women are set up as the Other of men. Masculinity is therefore socially constructed as the universal norm by which social ideas about humanity are defined, discussed and legislated against. Thus, humanity is male and men define women not in themselves but as relative to men. Women are not regarded as an autonomous being. They are defined and differentiated with reference to men and not men with reference to women; women are incidental, inessential as opposed to essential. Men are the subject, men are the absolute, women are the Other.

### **Feminism and Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook***

*The Golden Notebook* was published in 1962, at the time when feminism began to emerge and one year before Betty Friedan’s path-breaking novel *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). It is not surprising therefore that the novel was received as the feminist Bible of the Women’s Liberation Movement. The novel is highly intellectual, politically involved “Free Women” preceded the Women’s Liberation Movement. Several years after *The Golden Notebook* was published, Lessing argued that she was a feminist because women were second-class citizens. Her rejection of a feminist reading of her novel is not the same as rejecting feminism.

Lessing’s penetrating insights into female experience, filtered through the lenses of gender, politics and creativity, anticipated the transformative women’s

liberation movement, rendering of the raw materials of one woman's life as mother, lover, friend and writer.

The novel epitomizes the second wave feminism in which the formal characteristics "align feminist first personal narratives with the political literature of other non-dominant groups" (Lauret 98). In brief, the personal is connected to the political. The protagonists are 'free women' who embody the modernity of the late fifties: they are divorced, take lovers and have a career; they want to lead an independent life and obtain the same liberties men enjoy (Lauret 98).

The feminine consciousness is too complex to be revealed by the mere existing words, which put forth clichés and an incomplete state of affairs. In a postmodern fashion, Anna Wulf says, "It seems to me this fact is another expression of the fragmentation of everything, the painful disintegration of something that is linked with what I feel to be true about language, the thinking of language against the density of our experience" (298). Anna perceives a crisis of language which cannot depict the world and one's experiences objectively.

Lessing's "free women" lead independent lives, providing for themselves and their child, but in the end they seem fragmented and helpless, still highly "unfree" by their dependency upon men. The novel touches on feminist issues that were only just beginning to be debated at the time it was published. It probes women's identities, the value of male and female relationships, the ability of language to accurately communicate experience and the purpose of literature. The theme of the alienated female artist who suffers from a writer's block and who attempts to create order out of the modern chaos. It was taken up by American feminists who saw the struggle with traditional modes of representation and language as a condition for social change. The novel deals with women's sexuality and questioned assumptions about their relationships with men.

Feminists have responded to the consciousness raising aspect of the novel. Each of Anna's four notebooks reflects a different area of her life, and her experiences, that lead to a larger statement about flawed society as a whole. The idea behind consciousness-raising is that the personal experiences of women should not be separated from the political state of society.

The novel reveals the peculiar problem of the woman writer working in climate of assumptions and sympathies about women and sex roles, which do not support female authenticity. Rebecca West has claimed in her essay "*And They All Lived Unhappily Ever After*" in this way:

We have an elegant sufficiency of women novelists, and they give us a great deal of evidence which will enable us to make up our minds whether the feminist pioneers have been disappointed in their hope that, if women were admitted to the universities and the professions and commerce and industry and exercised the vote and were eligible for both Houses of Parliament, they would not only be able to earn their own livings and develop their minds and live candidly, but might also be luckier in love than their mothers and grandmothers, and would take it better if they were unlucky. But this evidence is not forthcoming. After a course in Contemporary Women Novelists, it is as if one heard a massive female choir singing... "Oh, don't deceive me, oh never leave me, how could you use a poor maiden so?" (301)

West claimed that the feminist reform had not contributed to a change in the fundamental way women viewed themselves. She expresses her thoughts on the situation of the women writers where their voices are compared to a singing group.

To sum up, the issue of feminism in the novel is the interesting one. The readers can find the degree of irony Lessing intends in describing the women

characters as 'free women'. They are free in the sense of having affairs, but at heart, they are bound by the generally accepted principles and behaviours of the society.

## Chapter 3

### Women in Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*

#### Why Feminism

*The Golden Notebook* touches on feminist issues that were just beginning to be debated at the time it was published. The novel by Lessing is a powerful critique on women issues. Along with women's dependence on men in the novel is shown the devastating effect of being rejected by them.

In the novel, Lessing examines the role of the 1950s women, and in doing so, stimulates feminist thoughts and ideas. She does this partially by presenting her characters, her so-called free women, Anna and Molly, in an endless series of unfulfilling relationships with men. Lessing has successfully portrayed the relational problems between men and women, and embedded those problems in the current affairs of the time. Additionally, she also deals with women's emancipation and difficulties that went along with it.

The novel reveals fragmentation of the whole social groups including women. In general, female alienation is reflected in three aspects: sexual experience, motherhood and intelligence. The relationship between women and children is also a big issue in the crusade of feminism. Feminism has successfully given women the equality to parental rights, but the rights only cannot produce harmonious relationship between women and children without the father's protection. She writes about the conflicts between the maternal and erotic life, of the responsibility that can keep a suicidal mother alive amidst of breakdown and of the efforts to conduct a career while rearing a child. Children in the novel are shown to be reared and grown up all by their mothers while their father figures are shown busy with their own business matters. They are barely ever around their own children and they do not have so much interest in their families.



The protagonist of the novel, Anna, confronts the conflict between her need for freedom and the restrictions of motherhood. The conflict between motherhood and her own needs is vividly embodied in a few scenes in her diary where she forces herself out of bed with her lover in order to get her daughter ready off to school. A woman writer struggling towards living an authentic life in the modern world is the focus of action in the novel, which supports the idea of the feminist reading of the text. Thus, through the portrayal of women like Anna, Molly, Ella, Julia and Marion, Lessing suggests what it means to be a free woman in the complex and fragmented socio-political atmosphere of mid-twentieth century.

The novel mainly records the life experiences of Anna, whose mental collapsing is a final result of female alienating in capitalism. The two most important themes present in a feminist novel, family and relationships, are successfully embedded in *The Golden Notebook*. One of the famous feminist works as mentioned earlier *The Second Sex* by Simon de Beauvoir uses similar themes to explain and clarify different aspects of women's lives. These two themes are the most common ones since women are more often associated to family and relationships than men are. Lessing focuses on the relationships between men and women in the middle of the twentieth century, but she also discusses the meaning of femaleness in the contemporary western culture or more exactly what it means to be a woman and what certain behaviors are expected from women.

Anna is a woman oppressed by male dominance in society, and this dominance affects her economic or social rights. For example, she is constantly fighting against the role of women in the political field. She finds repressed and depressed women who are housewives in her work at the party and the same happens with Ella who finds them in the magazine where she works. This feminist point of view is reinforced by some quotes in the novel such as "free women," said Anna,

Wryly. She added, with anger new to Molly so that she earned another quick scrutinizing glance from her friend. The word 'free' at that time could mean unmarried. But pointing at this, it is a bit strange that the only moment in which Anna and Molly are alone, they do not stop talking about men. When she says 'free', she means to be free of having sexual satisfaction, and to be allowed to tell it, but doing this meant to have problems with men. Women were prohibited to talk about sex but men were not. To end with this quotation, she is saying the word 'free' because it is the first time she is free since she had her child, and attacks Richard saying that he has Marion "the good wife bound, hand and foot, to take care of your children while you are doing whatever you want" (234). So here Anna is showing that women at that time were useless and they only served to take care of their children.

A fairly clear argument that supports the idea that this novel can be read as a feminist text, in which women in the novel are rarely seen as individuals. At one point, Anna says, "They still define us in terms of relationships with men..." (26) meaning that a woman is nothing except from 'something' that is going to marry a man and belong to him for the rest of her life. It clearly shows that this is a feminist novel built on a real life where women are inferior to men, especially in a relationship but also when it comes to other things, for instance, work and family life.

### **The Story**

*The Golden Notebook* is a novel which records several years in the life of a woman exploring her past, digging down into her soul to discover who she truly is, what her life has been, and how she will cope with the future. The novel speaks about war, Stalin, communism, feminism and sexuality. It is a novel in four parts that reflects the narrator's feelings about communism, and includes a novel within a novel, a personal diary, and then the final depiction wherein the previous three become one, glorious, *Golden Notebook*.

It is a story of divorced single mothers, Anna and her friend Molly. Anna works as a novelist in 1950s London. She has written a successful novel, "Frontiers of War", of which she still receives royalties and therefore is free to do volunteer work for the party. Molly is a minor actress in the theatre. Both Molly and Anna are dealing with problems related to their love life as well as motherhood. Both are entrusted with the care of a child, Janet and Tommy respectively. After a year of separation, two women catch up with each other and soon it becomes clear that Tommy is a worrisome teenager and that Anna is dealing with a writer's block (50).

In the novel, the key issue is human relations, especially between men and women as a key image of modern humanity. The novel opens with a 'Free Women' section describing a conversation among Anna and her friend, Molly, Tommy and Richard (Molly's ex-husband). The book intersperses segments of an ostensibly realistic narrative of the lives of Molly and Anna, their children, ex-husbands and lovers, entitled free women. A woman writer struggling towards living an authentic life in the modern world is the focus of action for the complex novel. Living in London on the royalties from her novel, Anna cares for her thirteen-year-old daughter, Janet. In her role as mother, Anna finds emotional stability and meaning. Some of the best scenes in the book involve Anna and her daughter.

The nature of friendship between Anna and Molly is one of the central subjects of the novel. Both women are divorced, and both are committed to rearing a child while living a life which is outside the traditional boundaries of society. Both women believe in the non-materialistic values of a life-style which leaves them open to experiences in the world. They sense that their friendship is one of the key factors which enabled them to survive in this life-style.

Anna is worried that her bad experiences and relationships with wrong men are going to drive her crazy. She tries to take control of her life and resolve her

writer's block by writing in four different notebooks "and not one because, as she recognizes, she has to separate things off from each other, out of fear of chaos, of formlessness-of breakdown" (Schlueter 24). The division of the self and need for unification is the central theme of the novel, with the notebooks illustrating Anna's fragmentation. The black notebook, which is to do with Anna, the writer. Anna's title for this notebook is "The Dark". The pages are subdivided into source and money, and pertain to her published novel 'The Frontiers of War'. It becomes the notebook where Anna tells the story of her time in Central Africa that inspired her novel. As Anna loses her ability to write, the black notebook becomes a cuttings file for new items about violence in Africa. The red notebook is about Anna's experiences with the British Communist Party from 1950 to 1957, her growing unease with it, and her final extrication from it. Anna's title for the red notebook is "The British Communist Party" with the date Jan. 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1950. The yellow notebook begins with a novel Anna is writing, called "The Shadow of the Third," and her comments on the process of writing it. The blue notebook functions as Anna's diary, a deliberate attempt not to turn everything into fiction, but to try to keep a factual account of what happens in her life. Anna's title for the blue notebook is "Tommy appeared to be accusing his mother." Finally, the most important notebook is the fifth one, the golden coloured notebook, in which Anna synthesizes various experiences kept separate in other notebooks so that they approximate to a kind of wholeness of vision.

As Anna comes through the process of breakdown and disintegration, she abandons her four separate notebooks and uses the golden coloured notebook to record the experience of breakthrough. The golden notebook acts as a symbol of Anna's psychic integration, just as the previous symbolized her feelings of disunity. Saul and Anna give each other sentences for a new novel, and Anna's sentence is

“The two women were alone in the London flat” (25) which is of course the first sentence of the Free Women section.

At the center of the novel is a series of remarkable conversations between Anna and Molly. Meeting in one another’s London homes, they talk again and again about personal relations but always with a muted irony, an impatience with the very topics they know to concern them most. They are alternately open and guarded, sometimes wounding but usually honest.

The novel begins and ends with the “Free Women” sections. It gives the impression that the four notebooks are the writings of a free woman, Anna, who keeps the books hidden in her room. Almost at the end of the novel, Anna looks back at her life in the form of the film sequences run off by a projectionist directed by her. She names each section of her life as “the Mashopi film” which is a film about Paul and Ella. It is here that Anna finally is able to confront herself with the chaos her life has become. In this regard, Brewster observes, “Time had gone and my memory did not exist, and I was unable to distinguish between what I had invented was all false. It was whirl, an orderless dance, like butterflies in a shimmer of heat, over the damp sandy vlei” (151). The novel ends with Anna’s complete individuation. She learns the lessons of her unconscious and finds strength in the depths of her personality, and most importantly learns to utilize her demons creatively.

To sum up, the novel can be considered an attempt to expose the emotion of women who choose to be ‘free’. Despite some structural flaws and its relentlessly negative view of relationships, it is a well written, deeply felt, deeply moving account of a time, place and women’s lives.

### **Women Characters**

Lessing has drawn the attention to trials and tribulations of women in a patriarchal society. Her novel is a powerful critique on women’s issues. Through the

portrayal of women like Anna, Molly, Julia and Marion, she suggests that what it means to be a free woman in the complex and fragmented socio-political atmosphere of mid-twentieth century.

Lessing attaches great importance to her feminine characters as “country of feeling” (636) which cannot be perfectly expressed by the existing words. Throughout the novel, Anna complains of the inability of language to convey the truth of feeling, the truth of her reality and history. Nothing is more reliable than women’s feelings and thoughts leading to their hair-splitting analysis and the necessity to acknowledge the results of their social and sexual experiences, the results of their work and maternal care for their children.

The protagonists are ‘free women’ who embody the maternity of the late fifties; they are divorced, take lovers and have a career: they want to lead an independent life and obtain the same liberties men enjoy. This personal story is encompassed by their political engagement as communists and, as communism in the end altogether failed to engender social change, the upcoming women’s rights movement did succeed in altering society profoundly, by conflating the personal and the political (Lauret 98). It means that the novel portrays the political climate among the British members of the Communist Party in the fifties. The protagonists who are referred to as ‘free women’ are independent and want equal rights like that of men. In brief, the personal is connected to the political.

The heroines of the novel are not paradigms of liberated women, which is an often stated fact in the criticisms of the novel. The women characters encounter more or less suffer from the feeling of being fragmentary. They share the attitudes to split themselves up, one personality for the committee room, another for the café afterwards (88). When the propensity for masquerading is carried to the extreme, they

even develop a chameleonic personality, shifting the roles they can adopt without reflexive consciousness.

Female characters in the novel are ‘typical’ of the general idea of females. The women characters in the novel are shy and reserved except for Anna and Molly who are both more independent than most women at this time. The reason might be that they both are divorced and have learnt to live by themselves and support themselves. But when it comes to dating and being with a man, they both change and become reserved. The women in the novel work because they are independent and slightly eccentric. They also need money because they are spectacularly unsuccessful at being wives, mothers and mistresses. They attach no emblematic or suffragist importance to the fact that they work and maintain themselves, and, to state their position fairly, they hardly work at all by standards.

One of the most completely realized characters in Lessing’s literature is Anna as she represents a new woman. Although she believes that she is emotionally fulfilled in a relationship with a man, she does not rely on a man for her position in the larger society. Anna is sufficiently representative of a certain kind of modern woman to persuade the readers that her troubles have a relevance beyond their immediate setting. She is also keen enough to support the public combativeness and personal introspectiveness that Lessing has given her. Anna is a writer and her friend Molly is a small-time actress. These two women have a strong and rueful friendship and are never more united than when pointing out the shortcomings of a particular man.

Ella, a character in Anna’s yellow notebook, is her alter ego. Anna uses Ella to reflect on and interpret her own life experiences. Ella judges that the future without a man is unimaginable. But she hates the parties that she has to go to in order to meet men because the parties make her aware of the fact that she is “on market again”.

Both Ella and Julia dismiss their feelings, convinced that they have no legitimate grounds for complaining would only be self-pity. The two women share a minority-group psychological orientation, which compels them to depreciate their femaleness and their friendship and seek approval from and identification with men. The other women characters in the novel are Mrs. Boothby who runs the Mashopi Hotel in Africa, Mary rose Fowler who is mostly described in terms relating to her feminine charms, Patricia Brent who is a fictional character from Anna's yellow notebook and is an editor at the magazine where Ella works, Julia, another fictional character in Anna's yellow notebook, Marie who is Jackson's wife and has a long affair with George Hounslow and Mrs. Marks who is occasionally referred to by Anna as Mother Sugar and is a psychologist who treats Anna.

### **Women as Other**

In *The Golden Notebook*, it is seen that how society incensed in the behavior of a woman. The society tells a woman how she had to act or what she had to do, so this means for her a terrible struggle against herself. So the women characters show their dissatisfaction with the gender roles of their time where they were considered as the inferior sex and men were regarded as the superior one.

According to the novel, married women fare no better, as their husbands have affairs and leave them at home to take care of the household and the children. Furthermore, several men in the story state that they have a great fear of being emotionally intimate. On the other hand, the unmarried women are not as valued as married women in the novel. "Yes- and you call yourself Miss Jacobs. Miss in the interest of your right to independence and your own identity- whatever that might mean" (39) is an extract where Richard and Molly are arguing about the right for women to be independent and to be her own person and not something that belongs to a man. Moreover, young women in the novel are only regarded as marriageable



daughters (120) and nothing else; families with daughters have only one aim to marry them off, preferably to rich and prosperous men who can support the daughter and give her a good reputation. For centuries, a woman's duty in life was to get married and it seems to be in the novel as well. In other words, the unmarried women were not valued as much as that of the married women.

Ever more, when a woman finally gets married in the novel, her life changes drastically, especially if she grows up with the new and 'free' upbringing. Her new life with her husband becomes more or less isolating and trapping. She is now supposed to stay at home and take care of the household and her husband's job is that of the bread earner. For instance, the given lines show this: "She said she had three small children, was bored, wanted to go back to work, her husband wouldn't let her" (160). It is clear that according to men, women are supposed to take care of the household and the children, and they are absolutely not supposed to work outside the home.

The breakdown of marriage and of general relationships between men and women is also discussed in the novel. Men, Lessing implies, need mothering and physical satisfaction whereas women need emotional fulfillment. When a woman becomes too dependent on a man to fulfill her emotional needs, the man loses interest. In such cases, the cracks in the relationships between men and women become more like chasms.

Despite the fact that Anna and Molly were raised as 'free women', they grew up believing that women could do just the same things men could do, especially when it comes to work and supporting themselves. But, unfortunately these free women did not experience life differently from other traditional women. Their lives were pretty much similar, as this line suggests "Being so young, twenty-three or four, I suffered, like so many emancipated girls, from a terror of being trapped and tamed by

domesticity” (130). This is a very good extract from the novel which explains the frightening thoughts, among a couple of girls who were born and raised free from traditional social restraints, but are still afraid of falling back to the old traditional way of living, where women were subordinate to men.

The women characters in the novel also display different attitudes, which support the fact that they were considered as the inferior sex or the other. Anna even realizes that she is often jealous of married women, who have more security than she does. At one point, she also confesses that she, in many ways, is no different than a married woman as she is just as emotionally dependent on her lovers as wives are on their husbands. Anna at one point says of herself and Molly, that no matter how close they are on the basis of shared understanding, experience and lifestyle, their “real loyalties are always to men, and not to women.” Anna- Ella feels strongly inclined to discuss Molly-Julia her problems with men, but she judges that all the “complaints and the reproaches and the betrayals” (86) ought not to be voiced. These judgments, which undermine the solidarity between two women are the result of their conviction that men are superior to women and that their own self-interest lies not in relationships with women but in those with men; damaging individual female-male relationships may be. Ella judges that the future without a man is unimaginable and Molly, who decides to marry at the end of the story, sounds as if she may have found a path to security, but not necessarily a means towards achieving love.

Reading further in the novel, one gets to know that Anna’s boyfriend Paul is unconsciously controlling her in all possible ways. First of all, he makes sure that he is the superior one in their relationship and that she does not complain about it and then he starts controlling other small things with her as well, especially her clothing. Anna feels that Paul is trying to control her. He often keeps talking about her clothes and tries to control her ways of dressing up. For instance, at one point, she says, “But

Paul, you brought me that red blouse. It's cut to show the top of my breasts. But when I put it on, you came into the room and came right over and buttoned it up-you did it instinctively" (203). From the given excerpt, it is clear how Paul controls Anna's ways of wearing dresses. He constantly tells her that she should wear better and nicer clothes. Despite the fact that Anna really does not care about his interest in her clothing, Paul himself experiences a greater power over Anna and that he has the ability to influence her in spite of everything.

In addition, it is not popular for women in the novel to be interested in politics either, which is as well only allowed for men. For instance, Marion, Richard's new wife, is secretly interested in politics and really wants to work with it, but due to her position as a woman and wife with children, she does not get any opportunity to work within the politics area at all. Furthermore, the women in the novel are often seen as reserved and withdrawn compared to men who are extrovert and noisy. This is especially true when it comes to love and relationships where women often play an inferior role as seen with Anna. Her love for Paul makes her change from an independent woman to once again inferior to man. The issue of power over the other sex is brought up in the novel over and over.

Women in the novel are not regarded as capable of supporting themselves since they do not have the same rights as men. Just as in real life, women are not represented within many occupations in society at all. A few women who actually are mentioned in the novel are mostly full-time mothers or teachers, secretaries, cleaners or as in this case novelist and actress, but more high positions are not available for women at all. Men are plainly the sex with the best privileges and they always seem 'better' than women in many aspects. But even though a woman could support herself, as Anna and Molly do, many people in the novel regard unmarried women as

sad and unhappy; their life is plainly not seen as perfect and unfulfilled until they have a man.

To sum up, the women in the novel are described as needy, clinging and yearning for decidedly pre-feminist style of relationship with always truly dreadful men in their lives. The novel reveals women's marginal social position and shows their condition in the patriarchal rule. These arguments support well to the fact that women characters in the novel were considered as the Other.

## Chapter 4

### Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* as a Feminist Project

*The Golden Notebook* remains Lessing's crowning achievement and an iconic piece of writing for women of multiple generations. The novel is about feminism. Although she herself claimed in the preface to the book that her book was not about women's freedom, but was about the gender war. Lessing and her character Anna being divorced with a child symbolize new women because they want free lives like men do. Anna refuses to accept the roles traditionally imposed on women by society. By describing troubled relationships throughout the novel, the novelist shows women's dissatisfaction with men.

Lessing's novel is a real feminist novel despite the fact that the novelist herself denies it. All the feminist components that one can read about in *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir, one can also find in Lessing's work, or at least similar. Despite the fact that Lessing's novel differs from Beauvoir's book in the sense that it is more argumentative and analytical than Lessing's work; there are still many similarities between these works, indicating Lessing's novel as feminist as Beauvoir's book.

As a feminist text in 1962, Lessing's novel was an important statement about women's roles. Far from being a celebration of women's independence from men, the novel explores relations between men and women, and seemingly the inescapable female need for the opposite sex. Along with the women's dependence on men in this novel, it is shown the devastating effect of being rejected by them. Fear of breakdown is always very close to Anna or Ella. The novel is not a treatise advocating autonomy for women: it is a lament for its seeming impossibility.

The novel records several years in the life of a woman exploring her past, digging down deep into her soul to discover who she truly is, what her life has been, and how she will cope with the future. In the novel, it is shown how society incensed

in the behavior of a woman. Society told a woman how she had to act or what she had to do. So this means that for her it is a terrible struggle against herself. It is the typical topic in which women had the confrontation between what she feels and what society tells she has to do. The adjective “free” associated with “women” lays emphasis on the feminist ideal of breaking with the tradition, making free choices of existence and language, free sexual experiments for accomplishing their knowledge and for better understanding of the world.

The multiple references to the protagonist’s sexual affairs and experiences suggest the feminine nostalgia for its primordial wholeness including the feminine and the masculine principles in the perfect match. Anna Wulf, a keen psychologist, remarks that women’s search for an ideal world and feeling stems from their naivety, which is presented as a theme of the novel in the yellow notebook. The colours, which are nothing but well-chosen symbols attributed to the five notebooks, indicate the feminine bent for identifying states of mind and states of affairs. In the black notebook, the author strives to write and make light in the darkness of chaos by finding appropriate words to illuminate and reveal the truth. In the red notebook, the author strives to stick to the socialist, egalitarian principles associated with the communists red color. In the yellow notebook, the author strives to find the perfect match, analyzing her lovers’ attitude, views, language, overcoming her jealousy symbolized by yellow to show a balanced judgment and by doing her maternal duties responsively and affectionately. In the blue notebook, the author strives to convey her vision on writing on language and life, to present her symbolic dreams and her interpretation in a free way symbolized by the color of freedom. The final notebook is the golden coloured notebook. The author selects the royal color of victory over the inner darkness of chaos through one’s literary creation in a free language and judgment.

The relationships described are usually troubled but running throughout the novel as a kind of unmentioned subtext is the idea of a woman, living happily with her husband, sexually and emotionally fulfilled by him, cooking for him and bearing his children.

To conclude, in Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, the feminine gender reflects the feminine power to keep control of the world through a nostalgic search for the origins associated with a trustworthy 'logos' (the word) and with a trustworthy eros, or the perfect match, the perfect love. The novel proved that women were not liberated completely. As Lessing embedded her protagonist in the bigger social picture of the sixties, she managed to depict the way men and women related to each other at that time. The two main elements i.e. family and relationship, which are considered important feminist discourses that can be easily found in the novel. Moreover, women are the central issue when talked about feminism. These main themes fit perfectly in the novel. Hence, *The Golden Notebook* by Lessing can be considered a feminist project.

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