

## I. Introduction

The situation presented in *the Fifth Child* by Doris Lessing is much marvelous and extraordinary that very rarely takes place in the common cases. In fact Lessing dramatizes the miserable plight of the marginalized that often get ignored in the decent and so-called civilized society. At the same time she shows the bitter irony on the parts of the males who mostly hold the decisive power in the family and outside. Harriet the mother of Ben is challenging and having the strength and brevity to fight against all sorts of oppression done by the males. As a matter of fact, women and disabled are the ignored and boycotted groups in the society but Harriet being in love with her son Ben, who is somewhat deformed and abnormal challenges the society itself. Her efforts to bring back her son Ben, is a sort of protest against her husband David who does not like to see the deformed baby, Ben. But ultimately his plan is shattered in very severe manner and the step made by Harriet gets successfully. After all this is the irony of politics. Politically it is incorrect to boycott any groups of human beings whatever their condition, gender, class, ethnicity is. The conservative often favors the very mentality that the society is only of pure and capable people but here this traditional concept is subverted.

Her novel *The Fifth Child*, addresses the results of a couple's exploration for delight in creating a family, specifically with the birth of a troubled fifth child, Ben. The fifth child is not a monster or a giant, but a product of his parents' treatment. The longing parents have had for long time that their family should be large and widespread turns to be concretized but along with this something supplementary trouble does appear in their family life that is the byproduct of their desire--abnormal and

idiosyncratic that people around do not have normal responses to the child. The expectation of Ben's parents have had, gets shattered at the deviation of Ben's physical condition and idiosyncratic manner and behavior. No doubt how the family's peace and harmony gets looted, it seems prominent to assert that high expectation and desire for much is no more commendable since it brings troubles, pains and risks at the same ratio and finally people have to carry out.

Doris Lessing was born as Doris May Taylor in Persia on October 22, 1919. Both of her parents were British: her father, who had been crippled in World War 1, was a clerk in the Imperial Bank of Persia and her mother was a nurse. In 1925, lured by the promise of being rich through maize farming, the family moved to the British colony in Southern Rhodesia. Her mother installed Doris in a Covenant school, and then later in an all-girls high school in the capital of Salisbury, from which she soon was dropped out. She was 13, and it was the end of her formal education.

Lessing's life has been a challenge to her belief that people cannot resist the currents of their time, as she fought against the cultural and biological imperatives that fated her to sink without murmur into marriage and motherhood. Lessing believes that she is freer than most people because she became a writer. For her, writing is a process of setting a distance taking the raw, the individual, the uncriticized, and the unexamined, into the realm of the general.

Lessing's fiction is deeply autobiographical, much of it emerging out of her experiences in Africa. Drawing upon her childhood memories and her serious engagement with politics and social concerns, Lessing has written about the clash of

cultures, the grossing injustices of racial and gender inequality, the struggle among opposing elements within an individual's own personality, and the conflict between the individual conscience and the collective good.

Lessing is one of the few contemporary writers, who have consistently been able to surprise both readers and critics with her work. Her novels almost illustrate a new and different side of her character, making it difficult to understand how one person could produce this wide array of work. She seems to be unsolvable paradox; even her own autobiographies are riddled with contradictions and often leave the reader out of the emotional motivation that drives this unique, individual artist.

Lessing's central achievement, *Children of Violence*, describes the career of *Martha Quest* from rural central African beginnings to her later years in England on its way to moral and technological disintegration. Through the volumes personal and public concerns are skillfully interconnected, as the problem of a heroine seeking to become a free woman mirrors the problem of those who are radically or politically oppressed. The five volumes in the series are *Martha Quest* (1952), *A Proper Marriage* (1954), *A Ripple from the Storm* (1958), *Landlocked* (1965), and *The Four-Gated City* (1969).

Lessing's best-known novel, *The Golden Notebook* (1962), makes connections similar to those of *Children of Violence* while also questioning the value and authority of fiction itself. In this technically innovative novel, the narrative of the main plot an account of the friendship of two women is interrupted by excerpts from the notebooks of the main character. These excerpts record her experiences in Africa, her affiliations with the communist movement, her attempt at an autobiographical novel, and her daily activities. *The Golden Notebook* becomes a classic of feminist literature because of its

experimental style and its exploration of self, creativity, and female identity. Lessing continues her social criticism and stylistic experimentation in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971). In describing the schizophrenic but often beautiful fantasies of an insane professor of classics, the novel questions society's definition of normality. *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1975) also explores inner reality in the face of the breakdown of society, and it offers a glimpse of Lessing's terrifying view of the future.

*The Fifth Child* is the story of two hopeful lovebirds, Harriet and David Lovatt, who meet in the 60s, fall in love, and get married, with intentions of raising a very large family. But their fifth child Ben throws their world into turmoil. He is somewhat deformed with his Neanderthal-like appearance and he exhibits strength beyond his years. He has emotional and developmental problems. He is hyperactive and full of rage while he is in womb and once he is born he continues to vent his rage at the world. As can be expected, Ben puts a serious burden on the family that must now cope with him. Everyone is incapable of dealing with Ben and his behavior. All in the family give upon him except Harriet. She tries to treat him like her four other children, but his bad behavior runs rampant which causes the majority of the family members to pull away from his alien being because they are afraid of him. Not only are they afraid of him, they are not certain if he might harm them physically. He has already destroyed them emotionally. His almost super body strength causes concern especially given the fact he is only four months old.

Harriet as a mother is obviously passionate and easy-going in the matter of children and she is dedicated to the betterment and happiness of her children as well. This is why she cannot live with herself after Ben has been taken to the institution. As his

mother, she recognizes no matter how terrible Ben's existence has made their family life, she still loves him, even in spite of the havoc he wreaks. For better or worse, Harriet knows that this situation must be dealt within the family. Her love and compassion give her no peace until she goes to see Ben. Even though the outcome is sure to cause her family problems, she cannot stand not knowing Ben's condition which is no-win situation. After all, Harriet's concern is about maintaining sense of dignity for her family life, once Ben has been brought home from the institution that represents a horrible struggle for Harriet because she wants to love Ben and have him reciprocate that love, while keeping her family intact.

As it plays out, *The Fifth Child* becomes a subtle social commentary on the treatment of the handicapped by society. Almost nobody who comes in contact with Ben such his doctors, teachers, family members, admit that there is anything wrong. Only Harriet's mother Dorothy, who the Lovatts enlist to help raise Ben, is ready to admit there is a problem. And eventually Ben's behavior escalates to the point where the parents are forced to act. In fact Harriet and David themselves are partly a problem, too. It is as if their shared dream of having a large family is interrupted by Ben. They consume completely beyond their means and their reaction to Ben is one of distance.

Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* has generated strong reactions from the readers. Some insist that the novel is a political commentary on twentieth-century England. Others locate the child Ben's behavior in the facts that his mother took drugs and was tense during an unwanted pregnancy and his father, along with the rest of the family, rejected him from the time he was born, exacerbating his drug-induced genetic problems. Lessing has clearly stated her very different version of the origins of the novel:

I have always been fascinated by the legends of the little people, gnomes and goblins. And then I read an essay by [...] Loren Eiseley where he talked of walking up from the seashore somewhere in Maine at dusk. He had been thinking about the Ice Age, and he looked up and saw a girl. He said to himself, "there is an Ice age girl." He speculated that the gene could have come down through the centuries. (23)

Lessing coupled this with a letter she saw in a magazine from a woman with a deviant child, a letter in which she remembers the mother writing, "I have had three normal children. And then I had a baby, a girl, who from the moment she was born, was evil. My family was loving and close and now is ruined. She is vicious and spiteful and wants only to hurt other people." It poses the question, What if fifth child of Harriet and David Lovatt, a couple who, in wanting to retreat to an earlier time of simple and natural living within an extended family structure, end by propagating a throwback gene, the origins of which predate the civilizing qualities that began to develop with the kind of family structure they have tried so hard to maintain.

One way in which Lessing defines Ben as embodying a divisive, throwback gene is by insisting on his position in the family as the fifth child. In her study of Lessing's obsession with patterns of doubling and repetition, written before publication of *The Fifth Child*, Claire Sprague has speculated that Lessing uses the number five as a sign of breaking boundaries or exploding limits, something that Ben clearly does in his refusal to abide by any societal rules. If Sprague is accurate in also connecting Lessing's fascination with patterns-including numerological patterns-to mysticism, it seems likely that Lessing may be drawing on the mystical qualities of the number five as discussed in

both *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Sir Thomas Browne's *The Garden of Cyrus*.

Although these works may seem obscure sources for a woman who completed her formal schooling at age fourteen, their emphasis on the number five is striking enough that someone interested in numerology would be likely to remember them after a single reading. Whether or not Lessing is specifically alluding to these works, their discussions of the number five can help us to understand the relevance of that number to her novel.

Even more relevant to *The Fifth Child* is Browne's discussion of the quincunx or natural groupings of five, in *The Garden of Cyrus* though as with her inversions of Gawain's positive traits in Ben, Lessing is again being ironic. Readers of *The Fifth Child* may, of course, see the X as a devil-symbol. But Browne's point is that the five-figure divides the nine-figure into equal, balanced parts and that the five is thus the number of justice, the opposite of Ben's divisive quality. Browne then goes on to discuss the Greek association of the number five with the conjugal and the Hebrew association of it with the procreative, noting the biblical creation of the animals on the fifth day. Browne names many natural and religious associations with the number five: the fingers and toes, the petals of many flowers, the Pentateuch, the five loaves. Again Lessing's irony is readily apparent: if Ben is a natural product of procreation, he is one that demands physical nourishment but is removed from the spiritual and civilizing laws of the Pentateuch. In his discussion of biblical references to the number five, Browne also mentions the five raiment that Joseph ordered for Benjamin. When naming her child Ben, Harriet is quite definite that that should be his name. Though Benjamin was the twelfth child of Jacob, he, like Ben, was the last child and was the one most loved by Jacob. From the fire, Harriet seems to know that if she loves Ben, that love will draw her away from the rest of

the family. Like the biblical Benjamin, he will receive five times the raiment, five times the flood, five times the attention. If she loves him, it will be at the expense of the other children and all will end like the sons of Jacob in Egypt, enslaved.

Ben is the mystical number five turned into an archetype of fairy-tale horror. Whereas a fairy-tale goblin or changeling fictionalizes, and therefore controls, our unconscious struggle with fear and with evil, Lessing blends the fairy-tale element of a throwback child with the realism of the contemporary world. It is this blending that accounts for the visceral response the novel has engendered. If the number five represents a procreative, unbroken, evolutionary chain, this fifth child arouses our deepest, archetypal fears rather than the spirituality of the pentangle or the quincunx.

Some critics have looked at the novel's psychological aspect concerning the psyche of the mother and the fifth child. At the same time others have commented on the role of parents who undergo challenges in course of dealing with the fifth child. David Blanton states:

*The Fifth Child* is a spooky tale of a warped child, who is abnormally large, cruel and unfeeling. A frank treatise on the perils of modern parenting. A wise and startling rumination on the "bad seed" concept that in past decades has been a tasty current in modern debate. Lessing expertly hones in on the mixed feelings of an otherwise successful mother who has recently born a child who quickly becomes a terror to his family and later a threat to the world. (32)

His criticism makes it clear that the novel is about an abnormal child who is large, cruel and unfeeling. His mother's stance is dubious since she is responsible for both the

recently born child, Ben and the rest of the family members who are not interested in the abnormal child. To them this child is a threat not only to their family but also to the whole world.

Krishna Agrawal asserts in the concern, “Harriet cannot live with herself after Ben has been taken to the institution. As his mother she recognizes no matter how terrible Ben’s existence has made their family life, she still loves him, even in spite of the havoc he wreaks”(13). Hence his critique justifies the fact that a mother is mother as she is full of compassion and love for her children whatever shapes the children have. She never feels troubled with her children. Harriet as a good mother is committed to protecting and rearing her child Ben at any cost. This is why she is very much unhappy and feels uncomfortable to live when Ben is taken to the institution. His focus seems to have been on the maternity and its power. In this vein Nasir Husen says, “Harriet’s dilemma does not end when she brings Ben home from the Institution. In fact, the real struggle begins when she returns him to their happy family life without worrying about Ben’s behavior and actions” (7). He emphasizes on the fact that Harriet suffers a lot in course of dealing with family affairs. As a compassionate mother she brings Ben back from the institution. At the same time the family members start getting troubled due to the presence of Ben in the family. Even Harriet finds Ben as a source of problems and grieves. She is in dilemma in the sense that her stance does not seem pretty clear. Further she does not try to understand that one cannot play the double role at once.

Debbie Mrkvicka avers:

Harriet’s perfect world has become shattered by Ben’s presence at their family home. With the other children living with relatives, she and David

are alone with Ben and his gang. Now, nothing matters to Harriet. The dream is gone. She recognizes that to pick up the pieces of her life and try to have some peace and happiness, she can no longer worry about Ben's life, because he is an adult. (12)

As a matter of fact Harriet is seeking freedom from Ben since she has had a dream of living a beautiful life with husband. Till Ben is there under her care she does not feel happy as his presence shatters her perfect world.

Hence it has become pretty clear that Harriet's love for Ben is under suspicion. She prioritizes her personal happiness and wants to restore peace and bliss in her family which could refresh her life as well. In this regard Katie Beckett states:

For the first time we see Harriet accepting the blame for the harm that has come over her family because of her decision to bring Ben home from the institution. This makes the situation all the more real, and as readers we tend to sympathize with Harriet more because she did what she had to do and accepts responsibility for it. Unfortunately, no one else in the family can accept their part in the family's deterioration. (21)

Eventually Beckett has highlighted the psychological reality that prevails at sensitivity of Harriet who does not attempt to escape from the mishaps she has made while dealing with Ben. Her realization discloses her human aspect which strengthens her position as a member of the family.

## II. The Politics of Irony

Irony is a subtly humorous perception of inconsistency, in which an apparently straightforward statement or event is undermined by its context so as to give it a very different significance. In various forms, irony appears in many kinds of literature, from the tragedy of Sophocles through the novels of Jane Austen and Henry James to the contemporary writers but is especially important in satirical purpose, as in Voltaire and Swift. At its simplest, in verbal irony, it involves a discrepancy between what is said and what is really meant, as in its crude form. The more sustained structural irony in literature involves the use of a naïve or deluded hero or unreliable narrator, whose view of the world differs widely from the true circumstances recognized by the author and readers; literary irony thus flatters its readers' intelligence at the expense of a character or fictional narrator. A similar sense of detached superiority is achieved by dramatic irony, in which the audience knows more about a character's situation than the character does, foreseeing an outcome contrary to the character's expectations, and thus ascribing a sharply different sense to some of the character's own statements; in tragedies, this is called tragic irony. The term cosmic irony is sometimes used to denote a view of people as the dupes of a cruelty mocking Fate, as in the novels of Thomas Hardy. A writer whose works are characterized by an ironic tone may be called an ironist. According to *Britannica Concise Encyclopedia*:

Irony is a figure of speech in which what is stated is not what is meant. The user of irony assumes that his reader or listener understands the concealed meaning of his statement. Perhaps the

simplest form of irony is rhetorical irony, when, for effect, a speaker says the direct opposite of what she means. Thus, in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, when Mark Antony refers in his funeral oration to Brutus and his fellow assassins as "honorable men" he is really saying that they are totally dishonorable and not to be trusted. (321)

Hence the very text says that the rhetorical irony is the most practicable type of irony. Irony, in literature, is a statement or action whose apparent meaning is underlain by a contrary meaning. In addition to verbal or rhetorical irony, there is also structural irony, sometimes called "irony of situation." Structural irony typically takes the form of a discrepancy between appearance and reality, or between what a character expects and what actually happens. Both verbal and structural ironies share the suggestion of a concealed truth conflicting with surface appearances.

Conscious ironies are recognized by the characters in a story or play. For example, in English dramatist William Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*, Mark Antony bitterly describes the men who have murdered Caesar as "honorable". In unconscious irony, words or actions are understood as ironic by the audience or reader, though not by the characters. In Shakespeare's tragic play *Othello*, the title character repeatedly describes treacherous Iago as "honest". Misled by Iago's lies, Othello becomes convinced that his innocent wife is dishonest. Othello recognizes Iago's deceptions only at the tragic conclusion of the play.

When irony is used in a novel or a play with the share of knowledge with the readers or audience, it is sometimes called 'tragic' or 'dramatic' irony. In *Oedipus Rex*,

by Greek dramatist Sophocles, Oedipus attempts to find the murderer of Laius, king of Thebes, unaware that he himself is the culprit. The audience, who knows the truth, perceives the dimension of his tragedy early in the play and anticipates consequences that Oedipus does not expect. His statements become unconsciously ironic-when, for example, he prays that the murderer's life 'be consumed in evil and wretchedness.' In the same way the term 'Socratic irony' is associated with Greek philosopher Socrates. In Plato's dialogues, Socrates feigns ignorance to expose the flaws in his opponents' views. Irony in ancient Greek means hypocrisy, deception, or feigned ignorance. It is a literary or rhetorical device, in which there is an incongruity or discordance between what one says or does and what one means or what is generally understood. Irony is a mode of expression that calls attention to discrepancy between two levels of knowledge. In fiction, it is a demonstration of the distance between the character's knowledge and that of the audience. There is some argument about what qualifies as ironic, but all senses of irony revolve around the perceived notion of an incongruity between what is said and what is meant; or between an understanding of reality, or an expectation of a reality, and what actually happens. The term *Socratic irony*, coined by Aristotle, refers to the Socratic Method, and is not irony in the modern sense of the word. The definition of irony, in the simplest form, is the difference between what someone reasonably expects to happen and what actually happens. In the other words, something happens that you would not even reasonably expect to happen can be considered as irony.

Verbal irony is a disparity of expression and intention: when a speaker says one thing but means another, or when a literal meaning is contrary to its intended effect. An example of this is sarcasm. Verbal irony is distinguished from situational irony and

dramatic irony in that it is produced intentionally by speakers. In fact sarcasm is made by literary writers in order to correct the social evils and political errors. When writers cannot make statements for advice to the power holders or authorities, then they implicitly convey message to them in very sarcastic manner so that they can remain safe and their intention gets fulfilled as well. Additionally sarcasm is much dominant in literary domain and the writers of the eighteenth century were used to applying in their writings a lot. It can be shown as such for instance, if a speaker exclaims, "I'm not upset!" but reveals an upset emotional state through his voice while truly trying to claim he's not upset, it would not be verbal irony by virtue of its verbal manifestation ( it would, however, be situational irony). But if the same speaker said the same words and intended to communicate that she was upset by claiming she was not, the utterance would be verbal irony. This distinction gets an important aspect of verbal irony: speakers communicate implied propositions that are intentionally contradictory to the propositions contained in the words themselves.

The expression 'irony of fate' or cosmic irony stems from the notion that the gods (or the Fates) are amusing themselves by toying with the minds of mortals with deliberate ironic intent. The best examples are Hardy's novels. Closely connected with situational irony, it arises from sharp contrasts between reality and human ideals, or between human intentions and actual results. For example in art in O. Henry's story a young couple is too poor to buy each other Christmas gifts that the wife cuts off her treasured hair to sell it to a wig-maker for money to buy her husband a chain for his heirloom pocket watch. She's shocked when she learns he had pawned his watch to buy her a set of combs for her long, beautiful, prized hair. In the ancient Indian story of Krishna, King Kansa is told in a

prophecy that the eighth child of his sister Devaki would kill him. In order to prevent it, he imprisons both Devaki and her husband Vasudeva, allowing them to live only if they hand over their children as soon as they are born. He murders nearly all of them one by one, but the eighth child, Krishna, is saved and raised by a cowherd couple, Nanda and Yasoda. After growing up and returning to his kingdom, Kansa is eventually killed by Krishna, as was originally predicted by the self-fulfilling prophecy. It was Kansa's attempt to prevent the prophecy that led to it becoming a reality.

In history in 1974 the Consumer Product Safety Commission had to recall 80,000 of its own lapel buttons promoting "toy safety", because the buttons had sharp edges, used lead paint, and had small clips that could be broken off and subsequently swallowed. Importing Cane Toads to Australia to protect the environment is only to create worse environmental problems for Australia. Jim Fixx, who did much to popularize jogging as a form of healthy exercise in his 1977 book *The Complete Book of Running*, died at the age of 52 of a heart attack (a death associated with sedentary, unhealthy lifestyles) while out jogging. Eartha Kitt, who is popularly known for her Christmas song Santa Baby, died on Christmas Day, 25th December 2008.

There are some misconceptions about the uses of irony. Irony is often misused by people in everyday situations, where it can be used to describe bad luck or an unrelated coincidence. For example, a misuse of irony would be to say: "It is ironic that the same day that he ate a chicken dinner a chicken landed on his head." Although being struck by a chicken is highly unlikely, and therefore not something one would reasonably expect to

happen, it is unrelated to the eating of chicken earlier that day, and is merely a coincidence.

Comic irony is also much significant here. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* begins with the proposition: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife (23)". In fact, it soon becomes clear that Austen means the opposite: women (or their mothers) are always in search of and desperately on the lookout for, a rich single man to make a husband. The irony deepens as the story promotes his romance and ends in a double wedding. Comic irony from television sketch-comedy has the distinction over literary comic irony in that it often incorporates elements of absurdity. A classic example is where a shark tries to impress his shark friends by learning to surf. He then surfs so well that his friends mistake him for an actual surfer and eat him.

Wayne Booth a great figure in the field of irony and its political significance stands different in the matter of application of irony. He says: "Irony has been located and explicated in literature, the visual arts, music, dance, theatre, museum displays, conversation, and philosophical argumentation" (Booth I). Hence he makes clear that the use of irony pervades all sorts of discourse. He further takes irony that appears to have become a problematic mode of expression at the end of the twentieth century. Wayne says that some commentators have written about irony in a deliberately and controversially unsystematic and ironized way. In his book he further explains the concept of irony concerning its political nature and its use in the socio-cultural domains. LaCapra says as quoted in Wayne's book: "there is nothing intrinsically subversive

about ironic skepticism or about any such self-questioning “internally dialogized” (LaCapra 1985: 119). “There is no necessary relationship between irony and radical politics or even radical formal innovation” (Nichols 1985: 65). Irony has often been used to reinforce rather than to question established attitudes” (Moser 1984: 414), as the history of satire illustrates so well.

Booth Wayne further tells us that the major players in the ironic game are indeed the interpreter and the ironist. The interpreter may-or may not-be the intended addressee of the ironist’s utterance, but s/he is the one who attributes irony and then interprets it. In other words, the one who decides whether the utterance is ironic or not, and then what particular ironic meaning it might have. This process occurs regardless of the intentions of the ironist. This is why irony is “risky business” (Fish 1983: 176): there is no guarantee that the interpreter will get the irony in the same way as it was intended. In fact, ‘get’ may be an inaccurate and even inappropriate verb: “make” would be much more precise. In the same way the person usually called the “ironist,” though, is the one who intends to set up an ironic relation between the said and the unsaid, but may not always succeed in communicating that intention. Wayne Booth says:

From the point of view of the interpreter, irony is an interpretive and intentional move; it is the making or inferring of meaning in addition to and different from what is stated, together with an attitude toward both the said and the unsaid. The move is usually triggered by conflictual textual or contextual evidence or by markers which are socially agreed upon. (11)

As Wayne makes the sense of irony clear; he says that irony is the intentional transmission of both information and evaluative attitude other than what is explicitly presented. Furthermore he highlights the position of the interpreter. The interpreter is an agent performs act-attributes both meanings and motives-and does so in a particular situation and context, for a particular purpose, and with particular means. Attributing irony involves then both semantic and evaluative inferences. Irony's appraising edge is never absent and, indeed, is what makes irony work differently from other forms which it might structurally seem to resemble to metaphor, allegory, and puns.

The use and interpretation of irony always takes place in a definite discursive community. The discursive community encompasses "those strangely enabling constraints of discursive context and foregrounds the particularities" not only of space and time "but of class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual choice-not to mention nationality, religion, age, profession, and all the other micro-political groupings" in which we place ourselves or are placed by our society (Hutcheon 92). The overlapping of discursive communities in general by the complex design of "shared knowledge. Belief, values, and communicative strategies" is the condition that makes the politics of irony possible to happen (91). This means that the politics of irony does not happen, as prate states, in "amiable communities" but itself comes into being in "contact zones" of the "social space where different ideologies and cultures meet, dash, grapple with each other often in context of highly asymmetrical relation of power" (qtd. in Hutcheon 93). In ironic discourse, the political meaning in the whole communicative processes is not only altered and distorted but also made possible by those different micro political power relation to which each of us differently belongs and from the basis of the expectations, assumptions,

and preconceptions that we bring to the complex processing of discourse: of language in use. Irony, therefore, rarely “involves a simple decoding of a single inverted message; it is more often a semantically complex process of relating, differentiating, and combining said and unsaid meaning- and doing so with evaluating edge” (89). Irony, as a culturally shaped process, involves forms of social practice, of interaction between participants in particular situation. The politics of irony cannot be:

understood apart from its embodiment in context and... [It] has trouble in escaping from the power relations evoked by its evaluative edge. The paradoxically enabling constraints that are operative in all discourses obviously function here as well, But it is not only a question of who may use irony (and where, when, how), but who may interpret it. Whether viewed as an isolated or as the articulation of the human situation, irony involves the particularities times of space, of immediate social situation and of general culture. (90-91)

Irony is a political issue that involves relations of power based in relations of communication with issues such as exclusion and inclusion, intervention and evasion, thereby making the functioning of irony inevitably political. Our nationality, male or female, working class or not, all these factors condition the interpretation of the specific function of ironic meaning.

The function of ironic meaning gets its political edge out of the ironist's intentional and the interpreter's interpretative move with a certain attitude towards both the said and the unsaid meanings of irony in certain discursive situation. In other words,

irony is a complex intentional act on the part of both the interpreter and the ironist—one that has both semantic and evaluative dimensions between intentions and interpretations, which are directed by conflictual textual or contextual evidences. Irony turns to be political in “the intentional transmission of both information and evaluative attitude other than what is explicitly expressed” (11). The interpretation of irony, as Christine Kerbrat-Orecchioni says, “brings into play, besides their linguistic competence, the cultural and ideological competences of ironist and audience” (qtd. in Muecke 40-41). Reading or interpreting irony is at once reading or interpreting life itself where we read character and value, thereby referring to our deepest convictions. It is because of its very nature of foregrounding the politics of human agency in this that irony has become an important discursive strategy. Its discursiveness comes from the interpreter and the ironist as the agents who perform the act of attributing both meanings and motives, and do so in particular situation and context for a particular purpose, and with particular means. Such an attributing irony involves both semantic and evaluative inferences. Similarly, “the semantic dimension of irony happens because of such a discursive communicative process in which irony “itself comes into being in the relations between meanings, between intentions and interpretations” (13). Irony explicitly sets up a relationship between ironist and audience that is political in nature as irony invokes notions of hierarchy and subordination, judgment and perhaps even moral superiority. Its “semantic and syntactic dimensions cannot be considered separately from the social, historical and cultural aspects of its contexts of deployment and attribution” (16-17). In such a context, the interpreters’ interpretation is not simply a matter of the “subjective attitude of either interpreter or ironist, but [is] a function of the culture, language, and social context

[where] both participants interest with each other and with the text itself” (91). In this light, the political meaning of irony is not only substitution of the identity and position of both the ironist and the audience but is a matter of interpretation as much as of its use that, as Hutcheon argues:

In the space between the said and unsaid, it needs both to happen. ironic meaning is inclusive and relational: the said and the unsaid coexist in the interpreter, and each has meaning in relation to the other because they literally interact to create the real ironic meaning, and the unsaid is not always a simple inversion or opposite of the said. [It] is the complex inclusive, relational and differential nature of ironic meaning making. [So] it is [impossible] to treat the semantics of irony separately from its conditions of use and reception. (13)

Thus, the context for the construction of irony is always crucial to interpreting its meaning and politics. This point further clarifies that the politics of “irony is a relational strategy in the sense that it operates not only between” said and unsaid meanings, but also between people: ironist, interpreters, and targets” (58).

Irony, being relational discursive strategy, has its transideological functions. The transideological nature of its “politics means that irony can be used either to undercut or to reinforce both conservative and radical positions” (27). To put it more explicitly, irony can be provocative when its politics is conservative or authoritarian as easily as when its politics is oppositional or subversive. It depends on who is using and attributing it and at whose expense it is seen to be. The politics of irony, in this sense, at once forces a

distinction between irony that “might function constructively to articulate new oppositional position[s]”, and “irony that would work in a more negative and negativizing way” where the ironist would stand outside of system in a position of power (16-17).

The use of irony from the position of power, especially by the dominant authority, generates irony’s conservative political function. Such an elitist use makes the irony as a weapon for “negating,” thereby becoming “largely destructive” (27). In this context, the notion of irony as a negation appears to be held by almost everyone who has been on the receiving end of an ironic attack or by those for whom the serious or the solemn and the univocal are the ideal. Obviously, the last group includes not only the humorless but those elites whose political commitments lead them to desire for didactic purpose and an unambiguous discourse of engagement. The totalitarian regime uses or attributes irony in order to materialize dangers in the protective cover of repressive irony. The conservative function of irony, therefore, is controlled by the, Bakhtin says, “One-sidedly serious dogmatic and authoritarian cultures” (qtd. in Hutcheon 27). It is the repressive cultures’ affirmative and the destructive political functions of irony to force the marginal be complicit with the system. In the “affirming and negating” use, irony functions, in Culler’s words, as the “ultimate form of recuperation and naturalization”: “We reduce the strange or incongruous, or even attitudes with which we differ, by calling them ironic and making them confirms rather than abuse our expectations” (qtd. in Hutcheon 28).

Another radical transideological political function of irony is to use it in a positive and constructively progressive way wherein it is used as a powerful tool or even as a weapon in the fight against a dominant authority by demystifying or subverting the

repression. Oppositional theorists like feminists, post-colonialists, and other marginal use this function of irony where, as Culler reminds, “the forces of oppression are subverted by the boundless powers of irony that no prison can contain” (qtd. in Hutcheon 28). In such a use, irony is not taken, as Belsey reminds, as “authoritative because its meanings are inherent than unambiguous” (qtd. in Hutcheon 29). The recourse to irony’s multivocal instability is exploited by the oppositional theories at the expense of necessarily univocal social commitments in which irony not only works to point to the complexities of historical and social reality but also has the power to change that reality. So, the subversive function is the “mode of the unsaid, the unheard, the unseen relishing them power in its verbal and structural forms” (4). Irony, in this light, is a discursive strategy operating at the level of language, which has intrinsically subversive, self-questioning, and internally dialogized mode that can and does function tactically in the service of a wide range of political positions, legitimating or undercutting a wide variety of interests as Hutcheon reminds us:

[I]rony is often connected to the view that it is a self-critical, self-knowing, self-reflexive mode that has the power to challenge to the hierarchy of the every ‘sites’ of discourse, a hierarchy based in social relations of dominance and overturn, is said to have ‘politically transformative power.’ (30)

Such a subversive political function of irony has established ironic discourse as, in Terdiman’s words, a “counter discourse” (qtd. in Hutcheon, 184). In this view, irony’s intimacy with the dominant discourse it contests is its strength to relativize the authority and stability in part by appropriating its power. This intimacy is what makes irony

potentially an effective strategy of oppositionality since the ironized discourse can point to difference to avoid both imperial and simply oppositional single voicing. The ironized language can allow “alternities of being” through the “alternities of saying” (31). In such alternities, the marginalized can be heard by the center, and yet to keep their critical distance and thus derange and undercut the authority. This function of irony, therefore, is “radical and democratizing” as it gives a room for alternative reactions (38). Irony involves social interaction as an inquiring mode to avoid the single and dogmatic. It becomes as Bakhtin says, “a special kind of substitute for silence” wherein the irony’s working as self-protective suggests that irony can be interpreted as a kind of defense mechanism (qtd. in Hutcheon 35). Thus the irony’s politics is not only relational but also counter discursive:

This is a function of irony that ‘does not reject or refute or turn upside-down: no evasiveness or lack of courage on conviction, but an admission that there are times when we cannot be sure, not so much because we don’t know enough as because uncertainty is intrinsic of the essence. When such a provisional position is seen as valuable, it is often called demystifying. For some, this provisionality actually becomes the essence of true art, over which irony rules as a kind of divine protector. [Such a] function of irony has specifically been called “counter discursive’ in its ability to contest dominant habits of mind and expression. (51-52)

The counter discursive function of irony, which rests on irony’s denial over certainties by unmasking the world as an ambiguous and instable is frequently exploited in oppositional

theories. Such a function of irony lies in the realization of the power that lies in its potential to destabilize with critical ends and ideological contradictions so that not to let the marginal resolve into the coherent and potentially oppressive dogma. It is the irony's politics that gives, in Fisher's words, a "survival skill, a tool for knowledge acknowledging complexity, a means of exposing or subverting oppressive hegemonic ideologies, and an art for affirming life in the face of objective troubles" (qtd. in Hutcheon 26). Irony becomes a political method when it deconstructs and de-centers the dominant discourses on the premise that the single vision produces more illusions than the double vision. While irony has often been used as a weapon of dominant cultures to keep the subservient in their place, it has been reversed as something that springs from recognition of the socially constructed self as arbitrary, and that demands revision of values and conventions. This is the irony, for instance, that feminist theorists and other marginal see as working to deprive, in the words of J. Butler, "hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities" (qtd. in Hutcheon 32). They are said to be able to use irony as a particularly potent means of critique or resistance to patriarchal social restrictions or even essentialist claims to truth. Irony, therefore, is seen as both empowering and embleasuring. And it is often the transideological nature of irony itself that is exploited in order to recode into positive terms what the patriarchal discourse reads as a negative, in which silencing of women's voice is transformed into the willed silence of the ironic and traditional feminine manner. In this sense, irony becomes:

'one sing of a loosening of a bond that binds us to the single and the singular track, to a paranoid obsession with certitude and fixed and

single destinations.’ Irony can be this kind of general reflexive mode, one that has the potential to reflect and model the recognition that all conceptualizations are limited, that what is socially maintained as truth is often politically motivated. (Hutcheon 33)

The transideological identify of “protean polymorphism,” ( qtd. In Hutcheon33) in Tittler’s words, is exploited as the rhetorical figure of the dialogic whose function is to project an alternative through which any element of the here-and-now may be shown as contingent, thereby subjecting the whole configuration of power relationship to the erosive dialectical power of alterity.

In this way the dialectical power of alterity arises from the said and the unsaid. The unsaid is related to the repressed, marginalized; it is not just unsaid, but unsayable within the hegemonic homogenous discourse. But irony is a matter of unspoken understandings, which can obviously cut across professional lines. So, just as the uncanny is never ‘surmounted,’ the repressed is similarly related to the said in dialectic uncanny fashion; it can be seen as the once constitution and disruptive of any discursive structure of controlling intention. For instance Toni Morrison in *Beloved* describes the kind of history or art with an eye to the uncanny as possessing a constant presence of hunting. The unsaid does get said in a hidden way-as the negative residues of a repressed history. Discursive irony, therefore, can also be linked with the questions of writing alternative histories and unearthing repressed memory.

Doris Lessing’s *The Fifth Child* subverts the tradition by its core issue that is the birth of abnormal child which stands against the so-called civilized and dominant culture. The subversion of the trend is the political matter and in the sense of irony it is a

transformation from the poetics to politics. Till irony is confined to its literal and metaphorical use, it is poetics. But when it is shifted to socio-political issues such as gender, class, age, profession, margin, center, and so on, it becomes politics. This shift from poetics to politics has much significance. Lessing attacks the decent society where people are preoccupied with the fact that children should be born in normal and usual state but when things differ, their preoccupied concept and hollow culture is shaken and the marginalized group such as women, abnormal children and so on come to the focus and become the matter of significance. As in the text *The Fifth Child*, the father David lingers with the traditional approach to look at the child and seems to be behaving with Ben the abnormal child in very conflicting manner and so does the child, Ben. The attitudinal rift between them shows the conflict even extant between the subversive and conservative discourse.

The father David represents conservativeness but the mother Harriet does stand for the subversion of the mainstream culture and trend that can be perceived when she handles with Ben in very meek and delicate manner and shows her love for him. Hence she accepts Ben as he is and does not bother about his fragile and abnormal state. In the family mechanism, the role of the father is dominant and he overpowers everyone there. David as a conservative figure does not develop intimacy with the abnormal child, Ben, for he has the preoccupied mind that the life is beyond the social trend and the tradition that has ever ruled them. He is still controlled in the grip of the long-run tradition that undermines the minorities and the marginalized. But when Harriet naturally bears all sorts of problems created by Ben, she in one sense subverts the trend of the mainstream trend and the way of life. First she has upset the entire castle of the superego that is to say

the rules and norms of the society just bearing more children and secondly the common practice of giving the birth of normal and proper child gets broken after the birth of Ben.

*The Fifth Child* does carry out the dramatic irony that the characters initially expect one thing that does not happen. Rather something else takes place that is beyond their expectation and imagination. After all, in the novel, *The Fifth Child*, Lessing also presents such characters Harriet and David as parents to Ben whose life dramatically changes when they get the fifth child abnormal and idiosyncratic with other odd characters. Consequently the peace and happiness go away from the family ironically. On the whole whatever they wanted and wished for, remain unfulfilled due to the larger size of their family.

### **III: Subversive Political Irony in Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child***

Life moves on around different shapes of ups and downs. The type of life one has as s/he creates and invites. The more one expects from it, the greater risk one has to bear since human life by its own virtue is of the very nature. Doris Lessing in her *The Fifth Child* raises the family issue that is of a wider significance with a broader message to spread among the communities where parents have ambitious expectations from the larger family with greater number of children. But most of the time human beings face ironic situation in the life that they take as a bed of roses in the beginning. After all, the ultimate consequences they encounter with sometimes go beyond their capacity of tolerance and handling. When something happens opposite as it has been expected and thought of before is in literature known as irony. And moreover because of this ironic situation, even the happier life of the human family turns into the more complicated and miserable one. Then the members of the very family regret that they should not have thought of so.

The irony of life is when something happens beyond the expectation and on contrary to that indeed life moves ahead and people hardly pay attention to that. *The Fifth Child* does portray the similar picture of a family where Harriet and David as parents expect that they will derive much more pleasure from the larger family size with a greater number of children. Whatever they imagine and plan in the beginning, are not commendable and acceptable in an advanced and civilized continent like Europe. But the preference for much bigger family can be made everywhere regardless to the type of

countries. Hence it is much significant to show how Harriet and David think and plan about the future. Here, they bring about their parental thought as a way to follow in the forthcoming days. Lessing says, “Her mother was a contented woman who had everything she could reasonably want; so it appeared to her and to her daughters. Harriet’s parents had taken it for granted that family life was the basis for a happy one” (12). The example that Lessing has brought about to show that her parents were happy and satisfied with their life and their belief is that happiness sprouts from the family life and this is why family is significant and it is needed. As they believe that family is the basis and source of pleasure, it is also evident that so many factors such as economic, social, and psychological do affect the very family which is randomly considered as the source of happiness. No doubt the family is the ultimate source of pleasure and even bliss but at the same time the type and size of family structure is equally significant. Parents, who after all take all the responsibilities, have to make money for the better survival and bringing up of the children born to them. In case their economic status does not meet the minimum requirement, it is redundant to have a larger family size. Moreover the family preplanned to be the source of pleasure, turns opposite. Rather it invites a number of ups and downs in the family life. Hence the case of Harriet and David is very much ironic in the sense that both of them seem to have violated the rule of requirement and sustainability in the text. Harriet and David are hopeful enough that they are going to be pleased enough with the family. Hence, they look indifferent to the probable consequences of a bigger family where there are a lot of children. It can be evidently justified through the text. The narrator avers in this regard:

But they meant to have a lot of children. Both somewhat defiantly,

because of the enormity of their demands on the future, announced they 'would not mind' a lot of children. 'Even four, or five or six' said David. Or six! Said Harriet, laughing to the point of tears from relief. They had laughed and rolled about the bed and kissed and were exuberant because this, the place where rebuff or a compromise, had turned out to be no danger at all. But while Harriet could say to David, David to Harriet, 'Six children at least' they could not say this to anyone else. (14)

The passion of having more children than common people bear in the society is itself the postmodern issue since she feels rejoiced in having many children. She thinks her satisfaction will be when the size of her family gets bigger. This is indeed the opposition to the traditional society and the common trend of the society she lives in. at the same the very big size of the family is likely to invite a number of problems into their life but they do not take notice of the consequence. At the arrival of the abnormal child, Harriet is found happy but David does not feel good. Rather he grows aggressive at the abnormal behavior of Ben. Hence the lingering concept of David still dominates him and compels him to follow the old path and way of life. This is why there is a sort of enmity between the father David and the son Ben. But the relation between Harriet and Ben is much better than David's. The above extract makes it clear that both Harriet and David expect a larger family through the birth of many children a lot. They agree with the fact that they will not mind in case they have many children. Their desire for six children exposes their innocence and immaturity and at the same time blind decision. They indeed pay no attention towards the future which tends to get loaded with uncountable number of

responsibilities. Hence the birth of Ben brings a radical change in society that the entire superstructure gets shattered and moreover the traditional concept of configuration of child is changed and at the same time the misery begins on the part of conservatives who have ever thought of going in the old direction and showed disgusting attitudes towards the abnormal people regardless gender and class as well as race. The birth of Ben and compassionate reception of him by Harriet shatters the boundary of children types and preoccupied figures. This is the subversion of the so-called civilized configuration for a child. Bearing such a deformed child, Ben by Harriet is a sort of challenge and protest against the mainstream people as well. Despite the fact that they are from the advanced nation, their citizenry role does not match to the level and height of the nation.

Furthermore both Harriet and David seem to get lost in the world of hope and desire. They do not take the question of their friend Molly so seriously. Rather they respond in a very easy way and disclose their inner feelings stating yes. The narrator says, “How many children are you intending to have?” asked Molly, with the short laugh that means there is no point in protesting. ‘A lot,’ said David softly. Yes,’ said Harriet. ‘Yes” (18). The response that comes from David and Harriet sounds pleasing. However, it does not carry the balanced position of an answer which should be by its own virtue. Their hope and ambitious desire for the future does seem vain in the sense that it is unscientific and random. Despite all these, they further contemplate about the very thing that is to say having more children in the European country is much more difficult and abnormal than other developing and undeveloped nations. The narrator states in the text as such:

Harriet said fiercely, ‘Perhaps we ought to have been born into another country. Do you realize that having six children, in

another part of the world, it would be normal, nothing shocking about it-they aren't made feel criminals.' It's we who are abnormal, here in Europe,' said David. [...] 'But if you were having six-or eight, or ten-no, I know what you are thinking, Harriet, I know you, don't I?-and if you were in another part of the world, like Egypt or India or somewhere, then half of them would die and they wouldn't be educated, either the aristocracy-yes, [...]And poor people can have children, and half of them die, and expect to. (22-3)

Harriet and David regret that they should have been born in Egypt or in India since in those countries to have more children is normal but in Europe having many children is considered abnormal and parents do suffer to fulfill demands and meet the expense of children in different sectors such as education, housing, food and clothing. It is much natural that rapid problems do come to any parents whether they are in India or in Europe which they do not ponder about. Rather to console them and to feel satisfied with their hope and plan, they compare and contrast by bringing countries of two different continents. Hence, it gets pretty clear that they move on the surface level of human life and do not attempt to go on any matter deeply and seriously. In fact, Harriet and David should take the suggestion of Dorothy seriously and assimilate that so since that seems worthy.

It is true having children like domestic animals is beyond the rationale of humanity and it turns intolerable since human beings are conscious and rational beings that they have to train their kids providing a lot of facilities. Simply giving birth of them

does not meet the requirement. Rather children need food, clothes, houses and training. And hygienic food, beautiful clothes, sustainable houses and good education are gained only when parents have money. In fact money comes when people work. But when they need much money, they have to work longer and while working longer time, parents cannot stay together with their children again. Then children lack affection and love that they usually seek from parents. 'So many children so many troubles and problems' is the matter of assimilation and acceptance. The frequent pregnancy of Harriet surprises everyone and invites a sort of social commotion in their life. Hence Lessing says:

No one knew, not even Dorothy- certainly not Dorothy- that Harriet was pregnant again. Luke was three months old. They had not meant for Harriet to be pregnant-not for another year. But so it was. There's something progenitive about this room, I swear said David, laughing. They felt agreeably guilty. (25)

Time and again Harriet and David feel guilty which is because of their immature decision that the big family will be basis of happiness. They do not brainstorm that there will be additional problems and troubles once the size of the family becomes large.

They remain happy in the world of fancy and useless whim that they do everything well. Hence the narrator states, "They did. This pregnancy, like the other, was normal, but Harriet was uncomfortable and sick, and thought to herself that while she had not changed her mind at all about six (or eight or ten) children she would be jolly sure there was a good interval between this one and the next" (25-6). Harriet feels jolly when she gives birth to the child after a commendable gap. The desire for many children does

not go away from her mind despite the fact that she faces lots of troubles and difficulties. It shows her extremist position of a mother who goes beyond the normal life-style of human beings in the advanced country. Both Harriet and David are much concerned to have a happy family that they think is possible only from the larger family. To do so they plan to have a great many children in their life. This temptation for having many children does seem groundless and fruitless. They expect that they will feel happy when they have many children. The narrator forwards here their inclination as such:

Happiness. A happy family. the Lovatts were happy family. It was what they had chosen and what they deserved. Often, when David and Harriet lay face to face, it seemed that doors in their breasts flew open, and what poured out was an intensity of relief, of thankfulness, that still astonished them both: patience for what seemed now such a very long time had not been easy, after all.

(28-9)

Harriet and David bring about the example of Lovatts' family that was happy since they had a great many children. In fact their attempts are to console them in order to derive a sort of pleasure even from imagination of such family size. They seem unconcerned with the further results of their actions. The role of mother is emotional rather than purposeful. David has a purpose that he wants to see a large family that can bring about happiness. But Harriet is unmindful to the consequence that comes on her part. She approves the decision made by David and simply remains cooperative to him. Her ignorance about the

future tells us that she is made to think and go ahead as she has been trained to do so in the society she has been brought up. But her reception of Ben discloses that she subverts the politics of males and overpowers the society by her compassionate love for Ben.

In fact Harriet seems even energetic and young though she has already given birth to four children. She is not old physically but mentally she is somewhat disturbed and worried about how to take care of them nicely. The narrator says in this regard:

She had not been much changed by presenting the world with four human beings. She sat there at the head of the table, the collar of her blue-shirts pushed to one side to show part of a blue-veined white breast and Paul's energetically moving little head. Her lips were characteristically firmly set, and she was observing everything: a healthy, attractive young woman, full of life. But tired[...]the children came rushing from their play to demand her attention, and she was suddenly irritable, and snapped. (33)

Despite the fact that she is young and energetic, she gets tired of responsibilities of many children. No doubt she derives a sort of pleasure from the children. However, she is upset and fed up with her own children since many children need many stuffs and types of needs they produce and demand which the parents have to fulfill and avail at any cost for the sake of children's happiness and betterment.

In doing all these Harriet remains engaged and does not feel free and rather she feels irritated. This is also a sort of irony in the life of a woman who expects to have many children but feels irritated when her own children show different interests and demand

things of their choices. Harriet, indeed, becomes a kind of model figure that other women do follow her mode of life that is to say having many children and a big house where they can derive a lot of pleasure and feel happy then. To add something more to the glorification of Harriet's role of a magnificent mother, John Beret states here:

Harriet is not a simple mother. Rather her revolting spirit is much Lively which never gets suppressed but it remains firm even in sardonic condition. She fights against the conservative society in very subtle way. In fact she does not only prove her a challenging mother but also a rebellion in the sense that she breaks the tradition and brings about innovative change just by bearing an abnormal child that belongs to the minority and the margin. This is indeed a threat to the mainstream society which accepts the normal children and discard the disabled and crippled. (43)

The narrator brings about an example of a woman who does make a preference for having a big house with full of family members like Harriet:

When I (Bridget) get married, this is what I am going to do. I'm going to be like Harriet and David, and have a big house and children...and you'll all be welcome.' She was fifteen, a plain dark plump girl who they all knew would shortly blossom and become beautiful. They told her so. (37)

Bridget seems much interested in having many children and walk on the path paved unknowingly by Harriet since Harriet herself has made lots of attempts to get many

children and a bigger house. The desire for having children and a big house emerges when Bridget thinks of Harriet and David's lifestyle. In fact it is a sort of immature decision as well. She does not even try to see the dark side of greater number of children. Rather she simply concentrates on the size of the family and its significance. As a matter of fact Harriet does not seem happy when she again gets pregnant. She feels loaded and exhausted enough that she cannot look after any more children. When she observes the lifestyle of her friends she regrets not marrying soon and giving birth of many children.

Hence the narrator reflects on her miserable and ambivalent condition that does not have any smooth motion: "Harriet believed she looked after them more than they her. They came or didn't come as the mood took them, and would sit around drinking tea with their girl-friends while Harriet toiled. She was frantic, exhausted [...] she was peevish; she lost her temper; she burst into tears" (41). She finds her girlfriends just enjoying and having romance. In contrary to their life, hers is much more complicated and troublesome. She does not feel contented with her present plight that is of being mother of many children and looking after them. It is natural when parents have more than single child, they do not live their life. Rather their children's life becomes theirs and they get desperate enough and seek for opportunities to enjoy free moment in the pleasing and romantic manner. Here the situation of David and Harriet's family gets worse when they have many children. The life that was normal and harmonious turns into abnormality and really it gets broken into tedious shreds that are much brittle to get reconciled.

It is a great misery that comes into their life all of a sudden. When Harriet finally gets pregnant, she faces the most troublesome and tormenting situation into her life. Her miserable condition can be well-understood through the extract from the text:

This morning, lying in the dark before the children woke, she had felt a tapping in her belly, demanding attention. Disbelieving, she had half sat up, looking down at her still flat, if soft, stomach, and felt the imperative beat, like a small drum. She had been keeping herself on the move all day, so as not to feel these demands from the new being, unlike anything she had known before. (45)

This time Harriet's condition is much unbearable. There is a sort of pain and ache in her belly. This is because of abnormal body structure of the fetus growing in her womb.

There is a constant movement and beating that troubles her a lot. In fact this is the beginning of her challenging journey of a big house with many children. She has never felt so much trouble and pained before. But the growing of the fifth baby in her belly is a kind of ordeal for her. The new being is expected to be abnormal in its size and shape since Harriet feels much different from the earlier experience of carrying child in her womb.

The problem is so dire and complicated that they have had to call the doctor. The doctor diagnoses Harriet's stomach and finds the case absolutely uncontrollable that the growing child is really much powerful and strong. It is indeed a tiny creature but dangerous as the doctor opines. The doctor's expression does sound wonderful:

He (Dr.) had stopped putting his hand on her stomach, in the old

companionable way, for what he felt there was beyond what he could manage with. It was not possible that such a tiny creature could be showing such fearful strength; and yet it did. And nothing he said seemed to reach Harriet, who, he felt, was possessed, had gone right away from him, in this battle with the foetus which he could not share. (49-50)

As the doctor experiences after a keen diagnosis, he concludes that the fetus in the womb is fighting with the inner parts of the mother. He cannot say and share everything with any one since the knowledge derives after examination is much displeasing and thus the doctor reports in a very desperate manner about the growing baby in Harriet's belly.

From that onward Harriet's life gets hellish immediately after the presence of the fifth child in her belly. She does not live even single moment of her life during gestation happily and comfortably. It is a great irony of her life. The happy family turns into a more desperate and miserable one. Hence the narrator tells us her condition in very sympathetic manner:

If a dose of some sedative kept the enemy-so she now thought of this savage thing inside her-quiet for an hour, then she made the most of the time, and slept, grabbing sleep to her, holding it, drinking it, before she leaped out of bed as it woke with a heave and a stretch that made her feel sick. (51)

Harriet is unable to sleep well and rather feels that the fetus is fighting with her. There is a sort of battling between Harriet and her inborn baby. In fact she is surprised and curious

to know the reason why the inborn baby is much troubling her even before coming to the world. The stretch and constant movement of the inborn baby indeed has made her sick and thus she is boycotted from the world of pleasure and happiness.

Furthermore she is just engaged in the maternal life that is in the real sense pious and praiseworthy. But opposite that it has become a sort of burden on her head that she feels much heavy to carry it on. The narrator brings the similar situation again that can convey much more message about the Harriet's condition during the initial phase of pregnancy:

Soon, nearly a month early, the pains began. Once she started, labor had always gone quickly. Dorothy rang David in London, and at once took Harriet into hospital. For the first time, Harriet had insisted on a hospital, surprising everyone. By the time she was there, there were strong wrenching pains, worse, she knew, than ever in the past. The baby seemed to be fighting its way out. She was bruised-she knew it; inside she must be one enormous black bruise[...]and no one would ever know. (59)

It gets pretty clear that this time the baby is not normal and Harriet is not sure enough to bear the baby in easy and usual way. This is why, she lets Dorothy manage everything on her admission into the hospital by calling her husband, David. In fact Harriet faces many problems till the fifth baby is born.

Problems that are faced are biological since the inborn baby is inside the womb and is desperately waiting to be born. It gets clear as well that the baby does not look like a normal baby. The narrator describes the baby and mother's response in this way:

He was not a pretty baby. He did not look like a baby at all. He had a heavy-shouldered hunched look, as if he were crouching there as he lay. His forehead sloped from his eyes to his crown. His hair grew in an unusual pattern from the double crown where started a wedge or triangle that came low on the forehead, the hair lying forward in a thick and heavy, with pads of muscle in the palms [...] she had been waiting to exchange looks with the creature who, she had been sure, had been trying to hurt her, but there was no recognition there. And her heart contracted with pity for him: poor little beast, his mother disliking him so much. (60)

This detailed description of the inborn baby shows that it is not normal and it is not born in the usual way as other children are born. Hence the baby is not pretty and does not look like a baby at all. This detail surprises and upsets the parents. They feel amazed and worried. Despite having the compassion, and pity for the coming baby, Harriet does show her disliking attitude and expresses her hatred through terms such as poor little beast. She is sure that she will suffer much while delivery of the baby. So now she is too desperately waiting for the time when she can exchange the looks of the coming creature. The word creature tells us something more about her attitude towards the unusual inborn baby.

Hence the situation and her expectation seem to be beyond her wants and plans.

There is a dramatic change in the life of Harriet after the birth of the fifth child, Ben. Ben is not normal and easy to be taken care of. His strength is the matter of wonder and shock. The way he sucks the breast of the mother shows he is not a human child. Rather he is a wild creature that so hurriedly and energetically survives on the mother. His and Harriet's role of baby and mother respectively can be understood from the textual evidence:

Ben sucked so strongly that he emptied the first breast in less than a minute. Always, when a breast was nearly empty, he ground his gums together, and so she had to snatch him away before he could begin. It looked as if she were unkindly depriving him of the breast, and she heard David's breathing change. Ben roared with rage, fastened like a leech to the other nipple, and sucked so hard she felt that her whole breast was disappearing down his throat.

This time, she left him on the nipple until he ground his gums hard together and she cried out, pulling him away. (63)

Ben seems to be fighting a battle while sucking the breast of Harriet and uses his complete energy and power to kill his hunger. Within less than a minute he finishes the first breast, he discloses the fact that he is abnormal and physically wild. Even Harriet turns unkind to him because of his behavior and nature. She is troubled while feeding the breasts and really gets amazed and hurt as well since Ben's every sort of action is amazing and tormenting.

In fact Harriet is made a source of milk and Ben is just a vampire which survives on her body. Though Ben is the source of misery and problems, Harriet cannot completely be cruel and indifferent to his life. Rather she wants him to remain alive even at the cost of her pleasure and happiness. She is sure that there will only be troubles due to his presence in their life. However, she wants the baby: "All I need is a prescription for diarrhea," said Harriet. She added deliberately, staring at him, willing him to look at her. 'After all, I don't want to kill the nasty little brute" (67). Hence her attempt for Ben's life adds something more to the compassion of a mother for children. After all, Ben is her son whatever physical body-structure he does have and how ever he behaves with people in his surrounding. She compares Ben with a nasty little brute makes; it is clear that she unconsciously loves him but consciously tries to hide her love and pity for the baby. Her expectation for a happier family has received a radical change right from the birth of Ben. In fact this is the irony of parenthood. She has never hoped before that their life would be so as they are having now.

No doubt parents make a number of efforts to bring changes in Ben's behavior and manner. They want to get socialized through companionship of his siblings. But Ben is again found behaving with them unusually. The narrator brings about a detail:

Ben was already in a cot with high himself up to a sitting position, falling, rolling over, pulling himself up[...] This cot was put in the room where the older children were, in the hope that Ben would be made social, friendly, by his siblings. It was not a success. He

ignored them, would not respond to their advances, and his crying-  
or, rather, bellowing made Luke shout at him, 'Oh shut up!' -but  
then he burst into tears at his own unkindness. (68)

It is not Ben only that he behaves badly with other siblings. Rather they do not feel good and easy to play with him. Luke shouts at him which is indeed a bad activity. The parents fail to change the situation and make Ben friendly to them since the thoughts and attitudes of these children towards Ben are much biased. They do not take him normal and easy-going guy. They rather take Ben as their counterpart in behavior and action which really creates a gap between them. By bursting into tears Ben shows that he is also emotional and can feel what other children can. But he is abnormal physically and mentally. He is sorry to himself as well since he cannot change him and his behavior.

As a matter of fact there is an emotional detachment between David and Ben. David does not come in his touch because of Ben's abnormality. At the same time David thinks that Ben is just a burden on them and is no more fruitful for them. When he finds his own child as the source of trouble and misery, he makes a distance and hardly thinks of Ben. The narrator figures out his detachment:

This afflicted Harriet with remorse: poor Ben, whom no one could  
love. She certainly could not! And David, the good father, hardly  
touched him. She lifted Ben from his cot, so much like a cage, and  
put him on the big bed, and sat with him. 'Poor Ben, poor Ben,'  
she hands, pulled himself up, and stood on her shirt with both

hands, pulled himself up, and stood on her thigh. The hard little feet hurt her. She tried to cuddle him, persuade him to soften against her. (69)

It is a great wonder that parents turn opposite the normal ones. Harriet and David think that their life onwards is not pleasing and romantic due to the fact that Ben has badly entered into their harmonious and peaceful life. The world of peace, pleasure, happiness and romance appears to have changed radically. For them Harriet behaves with Ben as if he were a human child who needs delicacy and softness while getting handled. Rather she roughly handles him while transferring him to the next place from the cot.

After all, Harriet's position is much ambivalent in regard to her fifth child, Ben. Both David and Harriet are feared with the unusual behavior of Ben. They hypothesize that Ben will loot the peace and happiness of their family. Hence their prediction is based on his performance over six months. The narrator brings about the speculation of David and Harriet here:

David and Harriet conferred, in the low, almost guilty, incredulous voices that Ben seemed to impose. This baby was not six months old yet [...] he was going to destroy their family life. He was already destroying it. They would have to make the children were down-stairs with the adults. Family times, in short. (72)

They find Ben destructive and forecast that he will destroy the whole family later since he is imposing and much more energetic than a common child of six months. There is a

drastic gap between him and other children. They regret that they should not have planned to have a larger family. They should not have given birth to many children. They were wrong that they planned of having a larger family and wished to have many children. They find Ben much destructive and violent as well. In fact, morning shows the day. Ben is so violent and wild at the age of six months. On this ground his future is hopeless and beyond imagination. Ben is a hyperactive child. He surprises people with his abnormal behavior. He does everything in very fast manner. His reaction towards anything is powerful and aggressive. He cannot tolerate any sort of response of people in his surrounding.

Parents are economically troubled a lot as well since Ben tears his clothes and they have to manage clothes for him time and again. Every organ of his body is abnormal. His abnormality can be pretty clear through the detail below:

Ben came in from the garden and stood watching them, in his usual position, which was apart from everyone else. He wore brown dungarees and a brown shirt, both in strong material. Everything he wore had to be thick, because he tore his clothes, destroyed them. With his yellowish stubbly low-growing hair, his stony unblinking eyes, his stoop, his feet planted apart and his knees bent, his clenched held-forward fists, and he seemed more than ever like a gnome. (89)

Right now he puts abnormal clothes and behaves in violent ways with people as well. He does not seem sound in mind and action. His action shows that he is beyond the control of Harriet and David.

Lessing describes his physic in much amazing way that is to say even readers feel sympathetic enough with his predicament. He is more than so many things such as gnome. In fact he is compared with creatures, not human children. Hence, Harriet realizes that Ben has ever been a burden and has oppressed them too much in the sense that he has never obeyed their instructions and rather has done everything that he liked and does like at the moment. After all, the narrator gives the realization and understanding of Ben's mother, Harriet below:

In the days that followed, the family expanded like paper flowers in water. Harriet understood what a burden Ben had been, how he had oppressed them all, how much the children had suffered; knew that they had talked about it much more than the parents had wanted to know, had tried to come to terms with Ben. (93)

This realization and understanding is a sort of epiphany that she gains after entering into the world of a larger family size. Before that she thought life would be much easier and happier with many children but now she thinks that she along with her husband was wrong in perceiving life from that perspective.

It is their fifth child that really awakens them from slumbering state and reminds them of challenges and troubles that a bigger family faces while their economic situation

is not so sound. As a matter of fact, humans can improve their economic situation and fight against the financial challenges as well. But they fail to do anything against nature. Ben, a destructive and burdensome child is in his natural state and a symbol of trouble to parents who often wished to have many children. Furthermore, Harriet does not dare to touch Ben delicately and rather she keeps her away from him, for he does not respond well and favorably. The gap between Harriet and Ben appears in the extract below:

His eyes looked up at her in a glare of hate. He didn't recognize her, she thought. She did not dare unwind the jacket. She was afraid of injecting him anywhere near his neck. At last she managed to grab, and hold, an ankle, jabbed the needle into the lower part of his calf, and waited until he went limp: it took a few moments. What was this stuff? (104)

When Harriet goes in touch, she hesitates whether it is good to touch him meekly and delicately. Though she is his mother, she is physically away from him most of the time. She does not have the courage that she can handle him in easy manner. Even Ben does not recognize his mother. He is emotionally far away from her as well. She simply grabs him and wraps him with clothes.

She further compares him with stuff and takes him a creature without and feelings. Similarly there is a distance between David and Ben as well. Ben does not have faith and trust in his father. On the whole Ben does not behave with him as if he were his father. The narrator says in this regard, "But Ben did not trust his father; he never trusted him again. David could not even come near him without Ben freezing, and backing away,

and, if he came too close, snarling” (109). Not only Ben but David as well feels uneasy and difficult to behave with Ben as if he is his father. He rather growls at him in case he goes near Ben. Thus this emotional detachment between both David and Ben has created the situation of mistrust and faithlessness. In fact their life is desolate and meaningless. It is absurd to both Ben and David to have had father and son respectively.

As a matter of fact, Harriet wants to see her son Ben in normal position. She wants him to change and behave normally. It is the motherly compassion for the child. Her position is much obscure though she loves Ben. She feels that she is his mother but she gets responded in very way by Ben. This is why, she does think sometimes that Ben should not have been born at all. But compassionate feeling sometimes dominates her as well. Then she changes her mind and thinks that reformation is yet possible in her son, Ben. The narrator says pointing out her compassion here, “Tell me,’ said Harriet,’ are you saying that Ben is a perfectly normal child in every way? There’s nothing strange about him?’ ‘He is within the range of normality. He is not very good at school; I am told, but often slow children catch up later” (125). She is still hopeful that Ben can improve him and change his abnormal behavior. She brings the reference of Ben’s school where he does not perform normally. But when she is reported that he is normal and not strange enough then she feels pleased and expects that her child could come in the normal track later. In fact this is just a way to console oneself and nothing more than that. After all, Ben is abnormal in almost all ways that does not need any further verification. Later on she questions whether Ben is not human. Hence she is much confused about the real plight and state of her son, Ben. Despite the fact that she knows Ben is beyond normalcy, she is reluctant with full approval that he is so and she should accept him as he is by

nature. The narrator shows her puzzling condition regarding Ben's state: "Harriet said, knowing it was no use, but because she wanted it said, heard: 'He's not human, is he?'" (126). When she comes to know that Ben is for no use, she alleges whether he is not a human being.

Apart from Ben, other children do create problems into their life. Their lifestyle is getting aggravated day by day since it is much difficult to afford money on all of the children in sound and proper way. David is troubled a lot. He lacks time to stay with his children and wife as he is bound to have joined a part-time job so that they could meet the line of requirements of their family. David and Harriet do seem worried about other children as well especially about Paul. The narrator says:

He's not learning anything, he's a real mess. He's worse than Ben!  
At least Ben is what he is, whatever that may be, and I don't think I want to know. But Paul... And how are we going to pay for it? I will. David now added a part-time job teaching at a polytechnic to his already heavy load of work, and was hardly ever at home. If he did come home during the week, it was late at night, and he fell into bed and slept, exhausted. (130-1)

There is no pleasure and charm into their marital and family life because of many children. Many children need many things and many things require much money that comes when people spend longer time on job. David is single in earning money. If he stopped working, the family could not move a step ahead right from then. It is also significant that he is overloaded with work and responsibilities that he does not have time

to share his feelings and emotions with other family members. Their life turns mechanical and absurd. There is no fruit since David is busy in earning money and Harriet is always engaged in taking care of the children. Thus, both of them are living for the children's sake not for them. In fact, they had never imagined that their family would get broken and they would have to be troubled as much as they get now. This dramatic turnover of their plan and concept traumatizes them and makes them feel sorry for their decision of having many children and a big house. The life they had planned to have becomes a source of misery and troubles. This ironic situation makes both mother and father get a lesson that the size of family must not be made beyond ones' capacity and strength. When their expectation for happiness and pride in bigger family dismantles, they really feel sorry and lament further the life they had before was happier and more harmonious than the present one. As a matter of fact, Lessing intends to show how life of women and disabled gets dependent on the male and especially on authorities or power holders in the society. Her irony is of subversive nature and she subverts the social status quo that has forwarded some policies and people are compelled to implement into their life. Hence Lessin through the child Ben has dismantled the conservative concept about the physical formation of children and through Harriet, the mother has gone beyond normal mothering and the passion and motherly love that she has for her child, Ben is much surprising to all the so-called decent people in the society. Thus there is a radical change in the face of politics ever done to dominate the disabled and marginalized ones. Furthermore she wants to awaken the slumbering people and lead them to accept all things as they are. And along with this Lessing warns them not to go beyond the natural process.`

#### IV. Conclusion

Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* subverts the traditional values that have ever been practised by its core issue that is the birth of abnormal child which stands against the so-called civilized and dominant culture. Along with this the prominence of the mother's role in the family mechanism shows a radical rupture in the traditional trend. The subversion of the trend is the political matter and in the sense of irony it is a paradigm shift from the poetics to politics. When irony is confined to its literal and metaphorical use, it is poetics. Whereas when it is shifted to socio-political issues such as gender, class, age, profession, margin, center, normalcy and so on, it becomes politics. This shift from poetics to politics has much significance. Lessing attacks the decent society where people are preoccupied with the fact that children should be born in normal and usual state but when things differ, their preoccupied concepts and hollow culture are shaken and the marginalized group such as women, abnormal children and so on come to the focus and become the matter of significance. The unsaid meaning of irony, i.e. implied meaning is provided to the marginalized people.

As in the text *The Fifth Child*, the father David lingers with the customary approach to look at the child and seems to be behaving with Ben the abnormal child in very inconsistent manner. The attitudinal rift between them shows the conflict even extant between the subversive and conformist discourse. At the same time she has vitalized the position and voice of women, like of Harriet's whose voice has ever been unheard and neglected by the society. In the society the role of males seems highly dominant and women remain on the margin. They simply assist males from the back. But

Lessing drastically overturns this conformist trend and brings about an innovation in the family mechanism in this text, *The Fifth Child* which additionally vitalizes the voice of the marginalized and promotes women in general that they are the most important part of the family, society, and nation. After all, the high significance of the abnormal child, Ben is a great challenge against the sophisticated society that always gets engaged in maintaining its values and norms by hook and crook.

As a matter of fact, Lessing intends to show how life of women and the disabled gets dependent on the male and especially on authorities or power holders in the society. Her irony is of subversive nature and she subverts the social status quo that has forwarded some policies and people are compelled to implement into their life. Hence Lessing through the child Ben has dismantled the conservative concept about the physical formation of children and through Harriet, the mother has gone beyond normal mothering and the passion and motherly love that she has for her child, Ben is much surprising to all the so-called decent people in the society. Thus there is a radical change in the face of politics ever done to dominate the disabled and marginalized ones.

Furthermore, she wants to awaken the slumbering people and lead them to accept all things as they are. And along with this Lessing warns them not to go beyond the natural process. After all, it gets pretty clear that Lessing is much sympathetic to the disabled and women since she seems to have focused on the significance of life everywhere. Besides, she promotes the role of mother in family mechanism a lot in order for subverting the hierarchical relationship among people on the basis of males and females, the able and the disabled and so on.

## Works Cited

- Agrawal, Krishana. *Lessing and Her Novels*. Delhi: Sharma a Publishing House, 1994, 13.
- Armstrong, Paul B. "The Politics of Irony in Reading Conrad". *Conradiana* 26.2.3 1994, 85-99.
- Beckett, Katie. *A Study on Doris Lessing*. London: HarperCollins, 1999.21.
- Beret, John. *A Glimpse in the Fifth Child*. London: Crown and Reck Publishers, 2001.4A.
- Blanton, David. *The Fifth Child and Abnormality*. London: West and East Publication; 1999.
- Bogel, Frederic V. *Irony. Inference and Critical Understanding*. Yale: Yale University Press, 1987.
- Booth, Wayne C. *A Rhetoric of Irony*. Chicago The University of Chicago Press, 1975.
- Brown, Fulman. *A Critical Commentary on Doris Lessing's the Fifth Child*. Great Britain: Gurdain, 2003
- Colebrook, Claire. *Irony*. London and New York: Routeledge, 2004.
- Culler, Jonathan *Satire and Irony*. London: Western Publication, 2004.
- Egao, Kieran. *The Educated Mind: How Cognitive Tools Shape our Understanding*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997: 137-144.

- Fixx, Jim. *The Complete Book of Running*. London: Santa Publication, 2001.
- Husen, Nasir. *Dilemma in Family*. Chicago: Corinth Publishing House 1990.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*. London:  
Routledge, 1994.
- Lessing, Doris *The Fifth Child Great Britain*: Flamingo, 2001.
- Mrkricka, Debbie. *Ben in the Fifth Child*. Glasgow: Westerners Publication, 2004.
- Muecke, D.C. *Irony and the Ironic: The Critical Idiom*. New York: Methuen and Co.  
1982.
- Pandey, Beendra, A. *Paradiagm Shift in the Representation of Violence*.
- Richard; I.A. Brooks, Cleanth, Burke, K. *Irony and Its Impact on Politic Chicago*: Brown  
Publishing House, 2003