

# Class Struggle And Discrimination In Doris Lessing's This Was The Old Chief's Country

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## ABSTRACT

The British writer, Doris Lessing is a Nobel Laureate (2007), who holds prominent place in the field of English literature. She was born in 1919 in Persia (Iran) to a British family. Her family further moved to southern Rhodesia to have their fortune in maize farming. Her father served in World War I and was crippled during the war. The family has the very harsh memories of the war. Her childhood was of more pain and less pleasure. Grown in a country where racial discrimination is in its heights made her write about the harsh realities of her own society. Pursued social and political activities so as to bring social change. She wrote more than fifty works including novels, short stories, plays, autobiographies and operas. Some of her novels have been made into films. She has seen the harsh realities of her times, and through writings, she revolted against these menaces in the society. She was actively involved in politics what we can say communist party and fought & fought for the racial discrimination in Africa. She was the follower of Marxist philosophy whose slogan was to make a free and classless society. They demanded for discrimination free society and this philosophy or Ideology is quite clear in the writings of her important works. This research paper critically analyses the short story from the African stories volume.

The writer's main motive behind writing these stories is to bring a social change in the society. No one is special and being others as inferior on the basis of race and colour is a heinous perception of humans.

## Introduction

African Stories were published in two volumes. Both collections come to be collectively known as African Stories. Doris Lessing has spent most of the time of her life in Africa and has been impressed by the beauty of the Dark continent. Its landscape, wildjacks, pigs and other creatures impressed her throughout her life. The experience is quite visible in her writings about Africa. These stories about Africa are full of agony that she feels for Africans, the bile she had for white settlers who oppressed the black natives. She further goes on praising Africa for its atmosphere, which she finds as a chief gift from such a landscape to its writers.

Doris Lessing is undoubtedly one among the powerful writers of her own century. She belongs to the circle of writer of the realistic tradition and has definitely explored the social,

moral and political aspects which in turn affect the psychology of a character. Her works fall in the category of racism and feminism, and her main concern is communism to work for the justice and equality of mankind irrespective of caste, colour or sex. In most of her African stories, her main concern is to rule out the theme of alienation, theme of racism, injustice and oppression.

Lessing's fiction is much more centered with her political involvement with the communist party. This involvement is evident in most of her works, when she thought for the equality of these people. The short story collection contains Lessing's joys, agonies and complexities of African life. Lessing has combined all her extraordinary work in this collection. Doris Lessing herself belonged to the British settlers of Rhodesia. Her father bought thousand acres of farmland from

marble tribe in Rhodesia who were expelled from their homeland by these white settlers. As the time passed Lessing became aware of the racism in Africa. She became conscious of the violence and threat of these white settlers brutally. She then took the stand to work for the justice of these oppressed natives. So her stories are full of this anguish and the guilt. These colonials have oppressed most of the part in the world along with Africa. They consolidated the political power in Africa in the form of establishing companies in dark continent and it automatically shifted this power under British rule. The natives so for they could not speak for their rights. If they did, they had to be dragged out of their native land.

### Review

This paper attempts to make a comprehensive critical and analytical study of her select fiction with a special emphasis on class struggle and discrimination. Literary theory in the realm of literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century provide incredible insights into a literary text. Different theories have drawn from factors understanding a piece of literature and then its interpretation, social, political or philosophical. Doris Lessing has been a model for writers to be followed, social reformer and communist writer. Most of her novels are best sellers throughout the world as she realistically projected a clear image of her society. Lessing has an ability to discuss the burning issues of human relationship and particularly of individual relation within himself, man-woman relationship, their relationship with society and master slave relationship. She believes in frank narration of the incidents related to people and their society. Doris Lessing as a realistic writer prefers shedding light upon the reality and cruelty of the world in which one lives instead of something that is imaginary and superficial. This fact can be seen in her oeuvre, analysing communist, psychoanalytical and autobiographical elements in life. Her novels are based on the themes of reality addressing the issues related to people all around the world. Lessing has witnessed the shameful treatment of individuals in their own country leading to their alienation and this alienation towards their psychological breakdown as alienation and breakdown became her prime concerns to project throughout her works. She has grown in a country where injustice was everywhere. She heard the voice of these deprived voiceless

people and taught them how to bring a change in the society by writing about it and the same time by joining the politics to bring a change. Doris Lessing is one of the important British writers of twentieth century, as acknowledged by people across the world. Doris ((Lessing is) may taylor now as a Dorris Lessing is a British novelist, poet, Playwright, biographer, short story writer and liberalist. She was born in the Persia now Iran on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1919 to parents Captain Alfred Tayler and Emily made Tayler, both British. Her father who was a clerk in the imperial bank of Persia was crippled during World War I. Her mother worked as a nurse in order to support her family. IN 1925, the family moved from Persia to southern Rhodesia for maize farming in order to prosper in life but failed. They lived a hard life of a little pleasure but much more with pain. Lessing's childhood was a mixture of a little pleasure and more pain. It was miserable for both herself and her brother Harry. Doris Lessing's parents were much rigid especially her mother who has made some strict rules to be followed at home. Lessing's childhood was miserable with her father's worst and better memories regarding the World War I, where he became crippled which they could not forget. This failure and frustration of her parents left a horrible mark on their life and made her childhood very miserable. In school she learnt about the metaphysical issues such as purification of body and soul and of the hell, affiliation, castigation and retribution. At the age of thirteen, she left her formal education. She was only fifteen when she left her formal education. She was only fifteen when she left her home doing a number of odd jobs like nursemaid, telephone operator office worker and journalist.

Lessing is self-educated herself mentions in her novel speech that she did not have books to read and neither her family encouraged her writing nor she had any model to follow like other writers and around this particular time. She had started reading sociology and politics at the same time started writing. She started writing stories and sold these stories to make money. She read the Charles Dickens, Walter Scott and Rudyard Kipling and got inspired by their communist party. Lessing as a writer always spoke of her mind whatever its impact might be and that was the reason she was banned for years from

entering into Rhodesia and South Africa as she expressed her disapproval of white minority rule in both these countries. Doris Lessing's fiction is more or less autobiographical, emerging out of her experience in Persia and Africa especially of African influences closely based upon her childhood memories and her serious involvement in political and social issues like clash between cultures injustice related to racial inequality, struggle or opposing elements within an individual's own personality and the conflict between the individual consciousness and the collective consciousness as per the psycho-analytical theory (defined by Carl Jung). Lessing through her realistic novels and passion wants to make her readers understand the reality beyond perception. Her works have addressed the complex questions about gender and class and focus on her emotions of city, home and their related memories and mainly focus on gender and racial discrimination. One of the important influences on Lessing's writing is the horrible and miserable condition of people in Africa. It's the place where she was grown up. She saw how black natives are treated by white settlers and how they were discriminated and exploited. This discrimination on the basis of colour made her have a strong aversion towards racism and colonialism. It made her have sympathetic towards blacks and concerned about the amelioration for them. Her only motive was to bring social justice for all. She goes beyond the defined categories of class, race, ideology and gender to grasp the totality of human mental process and collective consciousness.

Lessing's works, which have often reflected her leftist political activism, are largely concerned with the lives of women-their psychology, sexuality, politics, relationship to men to their children and their change of vision as they age. One of the founder mothers of feminism Doris Lessing made her debut as a novelist with "the grass is singing". The novel examines the relationship between Mary Turner a white farmer's wife and her black servant. The novel does not unswervingly explore the feminist causes. Still, Lessing's portrayal of Mary Turner warrants a closer examination because of the unique perspective Lessing brings to unfold the female psyche in the midst of gender, race and class barrier. At the heart of grass is singing is the whirl wind of race, the struggle that the female psyche of Mary Turner

faces in accepting the blacks as human not as equals but merely as human. To this end various unwritten laws of colonial Africa that are frequently mentioned in the novel serve as a convenient support for an arranged kind of exclusivism. So rigid were the laws regarding black and white content that the house Moses cannot ride in the same car as the corpse of Mary Turner. One could not put a blackman close to a white woman, even though she were dead and murdered by him thus the black becomes the constant the marriable the epitome of crime and violence, with the whites having behind them the police, the courts, the jails, what all the natives can expectis patience. Even the black Police men are not permitted to touch a white man in the pursuit of their duties as a whole, The whites. 'loathe to the point of neurosis', which ultimately causes the murder of the white women. The plot of the grass is singing relatively simple and uncomplicated. The whites are so certain of the necessity and rightness of their treatment of the blacks that newcomers to the country are immediately made aware of the difference between England and Rhodesia.

Sometimes with a vague attempt to establish her feminine identity, she protects like a true feminist. Failing to endure Dick in grass is singing, she speaks in a new voice for her, a voice she had never used too before her life... It was not the voice of Mary, the individual but the voice of the suffering female, whowanted to show her husband she just could not be treated like that (lessing,1950a;960).

Throughout her life Mary has been isolated both infact and in feeling, and this isolation created in her feelings of noninvolvement in the lives and feelings of others that she call freedom. This freedom however is not at all a kind of sense in which this term is use by late fictions, for the 'freedom'. Mary Turner claims for herself is considerably less viable and carefully reasoned that it is for the feminists or Lessing's later central characters. Her real freedom, she believes, comes only after her parent's death. She is unhindered from her personal pursuit, although even than her innate fear of involvement can be seen; for although she is 'free', she is not free at this time to enter into others lives. Traditionally marriage is considered to be the final destiny for women.

The Grass is singing, is almost forced into marriage by society. The marriage however turns out to be a failure and thinks of resuming her life as single women, but in her work office she is not taken back because now she has lost the graces and attractiveness which are a professional requirement. The grass is singing concern "social, economic and political structures with female in a conventional man's world," and highlights even after the marriage, a woman attempts to emulate the vague feminism, as well as loneliness, sufferings and frustration in marriage sometimes cause disintegration and make some women even schizophrenic, the discrimination of gender and race. Lessing goes deep into the human psychodepits that this enormous gulf between individual understandings can never be compensated.

Doris Lessing's wrote her novels with strong themes such as disillusionment. Specifically political disillusionment is a reoccurring theme in the stories of Lessing and ever more so, in her novel. The gap between political idealism and actual practice create a psychic dislocation for many Lessing's characters that inexorably leads to disillusionment. The best intention of characters are hampered by what is typically an obstacle which is destined to overcome romance. To be specific, the narration focuses with almost complete, exclusivity on the thoughts, feelings and motivation of its white characters. The black characters are secondary in narrative for their thoughts and feelings.

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