

# **Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*: Reflection of Social and Political Realism in The Post-Colonial World**

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The present research paper aims to present the social and political realism in post-colonial world of Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*. Doris Lessing's debut novel, published in 1950, is regarded as a landmark in the twentieth century literature in English. A masterpiece of social and political realism in post colonial world, the action of the novel is set in Rhodesia [now in Zimbabwe] in South Africa in the late 1940s. The novel is set in colonized landscape and concerned with the issues of colour bar and its disastrous effect on the marginal whites and the native Africans. Doris Lessing holds a place of singular distinction in the history of post-war British literature. The sheer scope, number and variety of her work have given her a unique position among twentieth century women writers.

To understand the social and political realism in the post colonial world of Doris Lessing's novels, one should know the term 'post colonialism'. Doris Lessing's aim in the novel is to portray the contemporary issues of colonized people's psychology, and their inhuman treatment to their colored brothers and sisters. *The Grass is Singing* is now read as a strong anti-colonial text projecting contemporary post colonial themes and issues. For better comprehension of the subject of the research article, it would be better to analyze some of the basic tenets of post colonialism at the start. It would be appropriate to quote the views of the critic, author, Shiv Narayan Verma, "Taken literary, the term 'Postcolonial literature' would seem to label literature written by people living in countries formerly colonized by other nations."<sup>[1]</sup>

According to Shiv Narayan Verma, postcolonial literature is related to the problems and sufferings of the colonized people. Colonized people present their true picture of life. But this is not the sufficient interpretation of the term. Even Post colonialism, which “deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies.”<sup>[2]</sup> Post colonialism is, directly or indirectly, related with the culture and civilization of the colonized people. Here, literary texts function as efficient tools to represent the different cultures in a colonial context.

Post colonialism is the period in which native people of the state, country find themselves exploited, and trapped socially, politically, economically and moreover mentally. For example, the literatures of the nations such as Canada, Australia, New Zeland, Nigeria, Kenai, India, Pakistan, Jamaica and Ireland have been called postcolonial literature in terms of various overlapping topics as the following:

- 1] The native people’s initial encounter with the disruption of indigenous culture.
- 2] Postcolonial literature refers to writings before and after domination of colonized countries.
- 3] Exile i. e. the feeling of being an outsider comes naturally in one’s mind.
- 4] In post colonialism, struggle for

individual identity and collective cultural problems begin. People living in this situation feel isolated, alienated, and unhomeliness, etc.

The novel *The Grass is Singing* opens with a report relating to the murder of the protagonist Mary Turner, wife of Richard Turner, who has been for several months running a farm at the district of Ngesi in Rhodesia [now in Zimbabwe]. The introductory paragraph of the novel acts as a good indication of the context in which the story is written. It reads as follows:

“Marry Turner, wife of Richard Turner, a farmer at Ngesi, was found murdered on the front verandah of their homestead yesterday morning. The houseboy, who has been arrested, has confessed to the crime. No motive has been discovered. It is thought he was in search of valuables”<sup>[3]</sup>

The notion of supremacy and the discriminatory attitude displayed by white characters are the two main themes in *The grass is Singing*. Here the reader understands the idea of how prejudice and racism are present in the Rhodesian racist society. Furthermore, the news in the paper suggests the colonial attitude of the colonizer. Throughout the novel, Doris Lessing presents how the white people use their political power to steel all the

belonging of the black native people in Rhodesia. Here, the reader understands that the social and political conditions of the colonized people are worst and disastrous. They are treated as slaves, who work to fulfill the lust, and desire of the whites.

Doris Lessing puts critically social race theory in practice in her novel, through her characters. Marry Turner and Charlie Slatter, are the two such characters that are not afraid to turn to violence and abuse in disciplining the farm laborers. In turn, the workers obey all their instructions and adhere to the masters' needs without dispute. As a result, every intelligent reader thinks with few questions such as: Does native son of a land get social and political equality? Do they have political freedom to express their opinions against the exploitation? The answer of these questions is left unanswered by the author because the author believes that these questions are unsolvable. Although, the novelist desires that all men and women should get quality i. e. end to discrimination in society, work and education.

The first chapter of the novel ends with the raising the mystery in the murder of Mary Turner, the protagonist. Doris Lessing introduces the new character Tony Marston to the readers. Marston, a new white takes a

natural stand in unraveling the murder mystery. As a farm assistant to Dick Turners, he has closely observed Mary's demeanor and her treatment of Moses for a few days before the tragedy. But we come to know his racist and political stand point in the following lines:

“But, in the interval, there would be a few brief moments when he would see the things clearly, and understands that it was ‘white civilization’ fighting to defend itself that had been implicit in the attitude of Charlie Solatter and the sergent, ‘white civilization’ which will never, never admit that a white women can have a human relationship, whether for good or for evil, with a black person”<sup>[4]</sup>

The novel is a story of two main protagonists Richard Turner and Mary Turner. Mary Turner marries Richard for enjoying the marital luxury and a happy life. Richard Turner, throughout the novel, is shown obeying all the requirements of Marry. But Mary remains unhappy due to the poor farming abilities of Richard. After marriage, Mary realizes that Richard does not fulfill her desires of lust, passion and luxuries life style which she expects from Richard. On the contrary Richard is a practical person. He always wishes to have his own happy life. But circumstances wash

away his desire of happy life. Unfortunately, both Dick and Marry fail to understand that marriage is made up of compromises and trust. Mary Turner as a white lady always hates the black Africans who are working as a slave in Richard Turner's farm. Like this jealousy, hatred towards the native black results in her murder. The odyssey of the protagonist's life is further narrated in the novel by Doris Lessing.

Few other notions of social and political realism are presented by Lessing in context with the terms of Homi Bhabha. In the post colonial context, Homi Bhabha has used the term 'hybridity' which refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. This term is mostly associated with Bhabha's analysis of the relationship between 'the colonizer' and 'the colonized'. According to Bhabha's opinion, "all cultural statements and systems are constructed" in space which he calls "the Third space of of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process."<sup>[5]</sup>

The process of Hybridity is well narrated by Doris Lessing in the relation between Moses and Mary. She explains how the black and the white coming together generate hybrid generation. In the course of the time, Moses, who is given the most distinguishing

characteristics of all the blacks, starts to speak with a modified voice and this forces Mary to treat him fairly. Not knowing what to do with this personal relationship, Mary feels weaker and weaker while Moses becomes more and more powerful.

Second important post colonial theme which reflects social and political aspects of the society is 'ambivalence'. According to Bhabha, ambivalence refers to "the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizers and colonized."<sup>[6]</sup> Therefore, the ambivalent nature of the colonial relationship generates the seeds of its own destruction. Mary's relationship with Moses seems to be ambivalent. On the one hand, she despises the exposed flashiness and the fact that he is a native, but on the other hand she feels attracted to him, his strength and his sex appeal. But she knows she is not supposed to have such emotions. She tries to suppress her feelings.

As a reader, we can understand that like many artistic works, Lessing's work may be betraying a few flaws. But on the whole, the novel is redeemed by the author's powerful artistic strength which is realized in her deployment of effective techniques as well as having at her disposal a post colonial ideological perspective that allows adequate

perception of the realities of her characters. Doris Lessing suggests, through her novel, that the people of post colonial world of Rudhosia need social, political, financial and psychological independence in order to exercise their creative potentiality. They need the people who understand and recognize their social and political identity in a society. In the novel, Mary and Moses are the representative examples of contemporary British and African society. Besides, the people of Rudhosia need a tradition, a language, an economic and intellectual independence to assert their own individual human identity.

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