

## DORIS LESSING’S NOVEL ‘THE GOLDEN NOTE BOOK’-A STUDY OF INNER FICTION

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper, I begin with an introduction and Life of Doris Lessing. Later the theme of the novel of Doris Lessing’s prestigious book, ‘The Golden Note Book’, is developed. The central theme of the book was the theme of Anna’s cracking up or mental break down, which is a way of ‘Self-healing’. She did the support the women’s liberation movement. It is the story of Anna Wulf, who keeps four coloured note books- recording her experiences in Africa and of the 1960s London zeitgeist, her relationships with men, experiments with new fiction. It reaches closure with a fifth, gold note book, trying all together that has gone before.

**Keywords:** Authentic, exploration, feminist, flier, fragmented life, liberation, mental break down, movement, quest, setting and zeitgeist.

### Introduction:

British Author Doris Lessing, whose powerful feminist and anti-colonial writing won her the Nobel Prize in Literature (2007), died on Sunday at the age of 94 in London. Best known for the 1962 novel ‘*The Golden Note Book*’, today considered a landmark feminist work; Lessing became the oldest winner of the Nobel Prize in 2007. She penned more than fifty other works ranging from political critiques to science fiction-many of them inspired by her own experiences of a lonely childhood in Africa and involvement in radical leftist politics. In other words, she explored topics ranging from colonial Africa to dystopian Britain, from the mystery of being female to the unknown worlds of Science fiction.

### Birth and Parentage:

Doris Lessing was born on October 22, 1919 to British parents in Kermanshah in what was then known as Persia (now Iran) as Doris May Taylor. Her father, Alfred Cook Taylor, formerly a captain in the British Army during World War I (1914-18) was a bank official. Her mother, Emily Mande Taylor, had been a nurse at the old Royal Free Hospital in London. After the war, the Taylors moved out of England. They moved to farm in Southern Rhodesia. At the

age of seven, Lessing was sent to a convent boarding school in Salisbury. She opted out of a formal education. She read many books of England. Later she became a young nanny, telephonist, office worker, stenographer and journalist.

At 19, she married Frank Wisdom, a civil servant in Salisbury. They had a son, John and a daughter, Jean. The marriage ended in 1943. For some years, Lessing was an active member of the communist party. In 1945, Doris married Gottfried Lessing, a German-Jewish immigrant she had met in a Marxist group mainly concerned with race issue. She and Gottfried had a son, Peter. When the couple divorced in 1949, she took Peter and moved to London, quickly establishing herself as a writer. Between 1952 and 1956 she was a member of the British communist party. She became disillusioned with the communist movement and so she left the party in the mid-1950s.

Her first novel was “The Grass in Singing” appeared in 1950. It used the story of a woman trapped in a loveless marriage to portray poverty and racism in Southern Rhodesia. It got great success in Europe and the United States. The book is both Tragedy-based in love-hatred and a study of unbridgeable racial conflicts.

Ms. Lessing then embarked on the first of five deeply autobiographical novels from ‘*Martha Quest*’ to ‘*The Four-Gated City*’ - works that became her ‘*Children of Violence Series*’.

In the 1950s, Ms. Lessing became an honorary member of writers group known as the Angry Young Men who were seen as injecting a radical new energy into British culture. Her home in London became a centre not only for novelists, play wright and critics but also for drifters.

Ms. Lessing’s early novels decried the dispossession of black Africans by white colonials and criticised South Africa’s apartheid system, promoting the government of Southern Rhodesia and South Africa to bar her in 1956. Later governments overturned that order. Her novel ‘*The Golden Note Book*’ (1962), often trumpeted as the Bible of the Woman’s movement of the late 1960s, is not merely a prophetic insight into the lives of ‘free women’. It experiments with the form and content of the conventional novels and allows us to read into the anxieties of authorial production.

### **Introduction to ‘The Golden Note Book’:**

*The Golden Note Book* is a 1962 novel by Doris Lessing. This book, as well as the couple that followed it, enters the realm of what Margaret Drabble in ‘*The Oxford Companion to English Literature*’ has called Lessing’s ‘inner space fiction’, her work that explores mental and societal break down. The book also contains a powerful anti-war and anti-Stalinist message, an extended analysis of communism and the communist party in England from the 1930s to the 1950s, and framed examination of the budding sexual and women’s liberation movements. This novel has been translated into a number of other languages.

### **Plot of the Novel:**

A woman writer struggling toward living an authentic life in the modern world is the focus of action for this complex novel. As the novel opens, a divorced single mother, Anna Freeman Wulf has written a commercial successful novel based on her experiences as a young woman during World War II in South Central Africa, in a country called Southern Rhodesia. Now living in London on the royalties from this novel, Anna cares for her thirteen year olddaughter, Janet. In her role as a mother, Anna finds emotional stability and meaning; some of

the best scenes in the book involve Anna and her daughter. Meanwhile, Anna writes continually in her notebooks to explore the larger meaning of her life and of her writing.

Anna keeps four separate note books, the entries in these notebooks occupy more than three-quarters of the total novel, and they are responsible for the complex structure of the book. The blue note book is a diary of the daily events of her life, the red note book is concerned with politics, the black note book is concerned with her previous life in Africa and with her professional life as a writer; and the yellow note book is for initial drafts and ideas for stories. But the most important note book is the fifth one-The Golden Note Book-where all her experiences connect and she starts to understand her own life and her search for a personal and political identity ends.

The dramatic interest of the novel revolves around Anna's life and her relationship with her friend, Molly Jacobs. A few years earlier, Anna and her daughter Janet had shared a house with Molly and her son, Tommy; Anna now lives a half mile away, but the two women maintain their close friendship.

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

One central event in the 'Free Women' sections of the novel is the attempted suicide of Tommy, which leaves him blind. In part, Anna and Molly blame themselves for the incident, and Tommy plays upon this guilt, controlling their lives in a manner which they deeply resent but feel powerless to change. The notebook entries enable Anna to explore this suicide attempt from a number of perspectives. In her blue notebook, her diary, she re-creates her relationship with Tommy and analyses it directly. In her Yellow notebook, she is in the process of writing a novel called "The Shadow of the Third"! Although Anna is never able to finish this novel, progress on it is important to her own development as a person. In this novel, the protagonist, a writer named Ella, is writing a novel about a young man who commits suicide. Anna is able to explore her thoughts on the actual suicide attempt by Tommy through the fictional suicide in her character Ella's novel. This situation is only one of the many parallels between Anna's life and the fictional life of her protagonist Ella. Like Anna in her relationship with Molly, Ella lives with another woman, Julia. The mutual support which the women find in this friendship is a parallel development of the sisterhood theme explored in the relationship between Anna and Molly in the "Free Women Sections". Common to both Anna and her fictional character Ella in "The Shadow of the Third" is the theme of a young woman seeking her identity in the modern world. It is a theme Lessing also develops in the early volumes of the 'children of violence series', through her protagonist Martha Quest. Another parallel is also crucial to Anna's development toward living in an authentic life; like Anna, the fictional Ella falls deeply in love with an English man Paul Tanner who finally leaves her after their intense relationship. After her lover leaves her, Ella feels herself changing in ways which she cannot control. She becomes less self-confident, less mentally independent. In writing Ella's story, Anna discovers that she herself has been more profoundly affected by her lover's leaving her than she previously realized. Like Ella, after the loss of her lover, Anna becomes depressed and loses her feeling of self-confident independence. The character Michael, Anna's lover in London,

fulfils Anna's emotional needs it is only after he leaves her that she realizes how essential he was to her independence. Subsequently, it is after undergoing crisis. The action moves toward a climax when Anna rented a room in her flat to an American writer, Saul Green. The two writers engage in an intense love affair which emotionally transforms Anna. And it is only after her relationship with Saul that Anna is able to break through to a rich emotional and creative life. She, therefore, places herself under the care of a psychologist, Mrs. Marks, or mother Sugar, as Anna calls her. Mrs. Marks tells Anna that she is suffering from a writer's block, which keeps Anna from doing her best work. In that breakdown, Anna experiences powerful visions of the world, and of her place in the world, which are lyrically compelling. Symbolically, her transformation is completed when she moves from writing in four separate note books-an indication of her fragmented life-to writing in one note book, *The Golden Note Book* which contains the essence of her now-integrated self.

The African setting in the black note book presents a different cast of characters, both colonials and young English servicemen who are stationed there for the war. Willi Rodde is a German refugee, who leads the local communist party which Anna joins, and he is Anna's unsatisfying lover; Paul Blacken Hurst is a young flier from the British upper classes with whom Anna falls in love. Lessing's lyrical treatment of the African landscape contains some of the best writing in the novel. Anna's novel "The Shadow of the Third" presents yet another gallery of characters in the London setting. Although Anna and her protagonist Ella share many characteristics, Ella is a distinct character in her own right. Her lover Paul Tanner, is a doctor who is married and has a family, and, like the character Paul Blacken Hurst in the African setting, he is a witty, charming man.

### Critiques:

Critics not only have praised the ambitious scope of the novel, when it's various themes and setting, but also have hailed it as a remarkable accomplishment in aesthetic form. The technically complex structure with the various notebooks continued in the separate narrative of "Free Woman" sections-generates the novel's content. Thus the subject and structure of the novels are complemented with each other in a formalist manner and the work is fully integrated. The book also engages with the important indicators of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Not only does Lessing record the crises in different parts of the world, she also identifies Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud as the two formative influences of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Conclusion:

*The Golden Note Book* is a self-healing not only of the individual but also of society itself. Only a major novelist of Lessing's stature is capable of sustaining such an ambitious theme.

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