

ABSTRACT

Doris Lessing's works cover a span of nearly six decades that have seen a number of political, social and cultural upheavals. These huge shifts made the world a threat for the self, which had already been under scrutiny for centuries with the consequence of fragmentation at the hands of the single mode analysis of the scientific minds. The postmodern times, even though embracing variety, did little to reconcile the parts to make them whole. In Lessing's fiction lies a plethora of human feelings that she expounds, while keeping in perspective the pressures of the outside world. The fragmented self unable to withstand these pressures, falls victim to the dominant and controlling emotion of fear of the other; that includes all which is not a part of self. The result is a self in fear of development, which might expose it to uncontrollable and unforeseen conditions.

Lessing's concept of self in her fiction has emerged from her African experience, that had people with different skin colour placed together to observe and identify the differences, eventually leading them to a consciousness of their individual existence in the world. The works set in the African landscape deal with an attempt to understand the self: a dilemma faced by the colonizers with flimsy links to their past and home, and also by the colonized made slaves on their native land. This attempt is surrounded with fear of the other, which threatens the existence of the self. The growing fear is expressed through different elements and appears in a variety of forms; resulting in utter denial and rebellion or passive acceptance of the circumstances.

In this dissertation, the role of fear in exploration and understanding of self with reference to its psychological aspects are emphasized in connection with Jungian psychological theory and the theory propounded by R. D. Laing, which has a close resemblance to Lessing's ideas. The dual self created by the alienation of/from the native land appears to be the cause of the misery of the characters. They try to alleviate this misery by adapting themselves to the surrounding which itself is a threat. The colonial view is discussed in relation to the theory presented by Frantz Fanon, who was a member of the colonized nation and was conscious of the miseries of the natives. He had an insight that could see the colonizers as humans capable of feeling guilt and not just as inhuman masters. The same pattern of violence, in Lessing's later writings, is perceived in the rest of the world where the persecutors change but fear makes the self maintain the same distance from evolution. Lessing sought a balance for the self which she elaborated with the help of Sufism as explained by Idries Shah, who reintroduced it in the West.

These issues are discussed with a focus on two short stories from Doris Lessing's first volume of collected African stories "This Was the Old Chief's Country" and three novels "The Grass Is Singing", "The Golden Notebook" and "The Memoirs of a Survivor".