



SUFI EXPLORED SCIENTIFIC THEME: A SIGNIFICANT ROLE OF RELIGION IN DORIS LESSING'S WRITING

DR. PRIYANKA MISHRA

E-mail: priyankush20@gmail.com

Jaipur (RAJ) INDIA

ABSTRACT

Doris Lessing, the veteran author, the Noble laureate of 2007, the representative star of post war is considered as an inapprehensive and an eminent contemporary writer. She moves the world of writing with her versatile themes. The era of discrimination disastrousness and disparity do produce an extraordinary writer Doris May Lessing. This courageous writer envisioned the scientific utopia on the anxiety of devastated function of post war era. She deals with remembrance, narration, racism, communism, religion, philosophic and cultural perspectives myth fable fantasy and scientific vision of utopia. One comes across finer shades of various aspects of post war to scientific utopia in her narratives. Lessing belongs to herself and her autonomous world. She moved from one religion to other for solace. Wandering from Buddhism to Hinduism and Catholic to Jain. Finally her soul finds comfort in Sufi teaching stories of Idries Shah. Hence Sufism becomes the new world of perception for her. Therefore this paper presents a discussion upon the role of religion in the making of Lessing. Religion has played a very important role in her life, no matter whether she abandoned or accepts it. It was always one of her severe requirements for understanding and decision-making. I would also concern about her particular interest in Sufi teaching story.

Religious Transformation in her Narratives

Lessing focuses on the universal human predicament, respectively through her narratives. So that her ideologies and perceptions provides a clue to the fundamental sources of modern anxiety. Lessing's adaptation of communism is viewed as an ever-recurring concept. But very soon there was a decline in communism and Lessing abandoned it too. After that she read so many Muslim, Jain and Buddhists scriptures then finally she got inspired from the intellectual philosophy of Sufi and adopted it as a perceptive religion and universal phenomenon. She lives with the tradition, Sufi offered to her:

All religion, as theologians – and their opponents – understand the word, is something other than what it is assumed to be. Religion is a vehicle. Its

DR. PRIYANKA MISHRA

1P a g e

expressions, rituals, moral and other teachings are designed to cause certain elevating effects, at a certain time, upon certain communities. Because of the difficulty of maintaining the science of man, religion was instituted as a means of approaching truth. The means always become, for the shallow, the end and the vehicle becomes the idol. Only the man of wisdom, not a man of faith or intellect, can cause the vehicle to move again.

(The Ways of the Sufi 261)

However, Lessing favours the concept of wisdom rather than the faith or intellect. Her leading motif is to approach the light of the truth towards the children of violence. This is at the heart, of Lessing's journey of post-war to scientific utopia of the present age. Step by step and little by little, she moves forward in her life.

Therefore, her longest journey begins with a single step. Ever striving towards the goal, gradually day by day living less from the head and more from the heart. Spiritual journey of Lessing has the whole expedition of the Sufism. The namely interchangeable characters of the *Representative Planet-8*, asks for their existence in the future. This curiousness as said by her is found in almost every character of Lessing, they ask:

"If we are not the channels of the future, and if this future is not to be better than the present, than what are we"? (RP-8 39)

This question expresses the uncertainty of the modern conscience. Their aimless journey of life seeking for the path of purity. Their structure wants an existence in the world they lived in. Actually, Lessing welcomed these heroic lunatics for inner-journey of self. Journey of their spirit, which is an immortal. Thus, Sufi provides the way of exploration. Lessing adopts this whole-heartedly. She reflects in all the emissaries create by her, whether, Tohar, Doeg, Emily, Sirized and the agents of Voleyn Empire. She may be considered as a memory maker and keeper of records. Through these assets and writings, her main purpose is spiritual awakening.

Relinquish from Religion and Acceptance of Sufi-Perception

Hence, the world 'religion' signifies for Lessing a particular kind of attitude towards life which is opposed to the secular. She uses the word to denote an attitude of passionate concern for man's spiritual evolvment. Religion is another name of mystical-science for Lessing. According to her, a religious man need not to be Christian, Muslim, or tagged with any other class and category. He or she may be an atheist and stoic in their attitude. Only the earnest thoughts on religious matters can made the person religious in some aspects.



It is this concern, with matters, spiritual as contrasted with the worldly and the secular, and not the adherence to any dogma that makes a man truly religious. Secondly, religion for Lessing implies a faith in the primacy of the science and mysticism over the natural life. In this lies the essence of her religious attitude. It is this concern with science and mystical-spiritualism makes Lessing to reject both communism and religionism.

So that, Lessing expresses image of humanism and liberalism in her fictions. As studies express that the liberalism implies a faith in human nature; it implies that human beings are good and rational. Humanism implies a stamp of practicality and technicality on human behaviour. It favours the logical phenomenon of life under which the modern utopian generation should be run. Lessing successfully expresses her humanitarian attitude through rejection of God. She centralises the man and his happiness as the prime concern of modern generation. Her personal concern is man himself only. She favours the view that man is important through his intellectual growth.

Adaptation of Sufi-philosophy regards the fact that feelings, intuitions and inspiration are the better guide for spiritual exploration. Lessing attempts to artifice her narrations as thus in *Shikasta* :

But there the young are, in their hordes, their gangs, their groups, their cults. Their political parties, their sects, shouting slogans, infinitely divided, antagonistic, to each-other, always in the right, jostling for command. There they are – the future and it is self-condemned. (174)

In this way, Lessing portrays the image of ignorant people. These are the neglected inhabitants of an inhuman planet earth of 20th century. Society fallen in mysterious disintegration. Ideology and religion only can open the path of spiritual integration. As regards the inherent evolution in the goodness of men, she favours the liberalism and humanism. Her questive conscience lives with the vision, and her vision expands with the internal threaten of war. Only, the salvation she seeks for desperately. For this purpose she read-out so many aesthetic scriptures and go through with so many religious ideologies. With communistic heart it was impossible for her to roam freely thereabouts. She rejects the labels, of communism and alike. Lessing, has an exhilarative quest for perception, and she highlights it in these words:

I read first of all the various traditions of Buddhism ... Buddhism is attractive to the violent and warlike west. Then, various aspects of Hinduism to me appealing because of its polytheism, its heteromorphism, just like Roman Catholicism, absorbing gods and saints into itself according to the culture it finds itself in ... I was reading all the great eastern classics – the Vedas, the



Bhagwad Gita the various Zen scriptures, I was reading for information, and with enjoyment and pleasure, and above all for guidance. (WIS 321)

However, this religious journey, progress her mind with the equal thought and concern. There is no way of salvation, which her soul is tantalizing for. But through all this she realises the necessity of teacher in her life. The absolute freedom and understanding of human behaviour cannot bring such religious salvation. Without a perception and a guide, human soul faces the trouble. It is quiet unable to live in such framework of culture, tradition and orthodoxy.

Lessing got enchanted with the 'Sufism', through the Sufi teaching stories. These stories have hidden meaning and moral, thus put a magical impact upon the readers. The Sufi preacher Idrish Shah encountered Lessing's conscience, and she concern his teaching stories. In her preface to Shah's *Seekers after Truth* Lessing writes;

It was they who developed Sufis claim, the teaching story, an aircraft created specifically for influencing the deepest and most hidden part of a human being - a part not accessible to any other approach.

Lessing has been closely, involved in the disperse of these stories in the west which are taken from the east by way of giving public readings of Sufi. She adopted these stories intellectually as these are helpful to open the mind's eyes. Lessing draw the attentions in the sufi-teaching stories. The very first story Lessing read from Idrish Shah's book, *The Sufi*, the story as thus:

A certain man is a prisoner on an island, but he does not know he is a prisoner and that there is more to life than prison life. A resues offers him as escape, on a ship, but he says, 'Oh thank you, thank you I'll come, but I must bring my ton of cabbage with me. (WIS 323)

It is evident that the story has the hidden meaning about the success of human beings in their life. The person having succeeded in one area, then his expectations stick with good marks in other areas. Lessing finally accept the fact that,

"It was the Sufi teacher Idrish Shah with whom I was to discover – as I saw it then – my search rewarded." (WIS 324)

Sufi teaching stories concise the meaning of destructed life in very simple way. According these stories, actions do not necessarily provoke the reactions. One is conditioned to expect, the future is not always shaped by one's plans and one's life and behaviour are not as independently governed by the self as one would like to believe. Everything is infinitely interconnected, even if through bizarre and unexpected ties.

On the whole, Lessing use this rational attitude of Sufi-teaching stories in her, fictions, and characters. The major Sufi-effected narratives are *The Four Gated City*, *The Memoirs*, *The Marriage*, *The Representative* and *The Fifth Child*, each provide the Sufi-concept in teaching manner. This prolific writer, showed her deep interest in the sufism and its hidden meaning of stories. Several of the Sufi, books written by Idris Shah, were introduced to her through a philosophical revolution of the Islamic religion, called Sufism. Lessing too much attached with the feelings and thoughts of the particular religion. Thus, Sufism is the intellectual-treasurer for Lessing. Sufism gives the new and realistic talent to her writing. Sufi-teaching stories are not didactic not parables while these are for simple interpretation of the complex situation. It has a suitable meaning described by Shah likens the Sufi story to a peach:

The exterior may emotionally stir a person as if the peach were lent to you. You can eat the peach and taste a further delight. You can throw away the stone-or crack it and find a delicious Kernel within. This is the hidden depth. (**Sufi Teaching Story**)

It is in this manner, Sufi's teaching stories learn the meaning of life. That there are two options towards human conscience, one accepts the situation in the way it enjoys it and then let it be. Second, tries to find out the real meaning of self and existence of intellectual-self. Well, Shah pointed-out this 'sweet kernal' as the purity of intellectual-self. If one seeks to discover self, one must accomplish something in himself. Likewise, Lessing incorporates many ways of sufi-teaching stories in her narrative technique. Even, she herself encouraged purity of intellectual-enlightenment by adaptation of such religious – perception. Her views about its adaptation as thus :

Surrendering' independence was seen wrongly by me, because of ignorance and conceit, as I soon found out, but there was a real embarrassment and annoyance. When I began to look around for some 'Path or discipline, I kept quiet about it because the atmosphere of the time was so strongly against it, but the cult-crazy sixties was in fact easy to predict. Particularly if I had remembered how our rigid atheistical dogmatic communist group ended in ghost tales and seances. (WIS 324)

Therefore, Lessing easily grabbed the view of eternity of the guiding path. She now realises the self-reliance of acceptance a stable and constant path. Her over-soul commands her for the same awakened insight as the Sufi-stories have. That is the reason, that first, Lessing, herself adopt the religious-concept and then she highlighted its enlightenment in her narratives' theme and characters' potentials.

Spiritual Exploration in Lessing's Narratives



After 1960s, she turned to Sufism. No one can understand her attraction with the mysticism of science. Lessing's transformation attitude, finally accept the way of mysticism. Her continent of Sufism, flourished in her novels as *The Marriage*, *The Representative*, *Shikasta*, *The Memoirs and The Four-Gated-City*. These fictions are the superb blend of creativity, mysticism and mental illness. These fictions have the spiritual-exploration in her work, Lessing uses the symbol and metamorphoses of words in her narratives. Light and water are the symbol of 'comprehension' and description. She acquires to enhance and sharpen the particular balance. This oriented author portrays the characters and situation which depends upon daily practices. Sufi believes in experience and practice. Bookish knowledge is a worthless knowledge for them. She believes in the fact that, those who consciously choose to change their quality of life by welcoming the wonders of the inner life. Generally find it useful to make a commitment to daily practice. From their daily routine life these people gives the time to their daily improving qualities. Lessing's characters struggle for 'I', struggle for self.

Her protagonists have the quest for integration. Her characters seek for commitment. Shah favours, this commitment for evolution. Though, everyday living provides a struggle to everyone. 'Self' is the word through the appropriate use of it one can achieve the perfection. Lessing's characters also get uncomfortable in the seeking of this 'perfection'. Anna's fragmented conscience seeking for 'oneness': "Obviously; because it's been necessary to split myself up, but from now on shall be using one only." (TGN 598)

Anna's dream about Egyptian temple is the Sufi exploration of Lessing. It is in this sense Lessing highlights the struggling human consciousness. That; the spiritual and the sensuous, the beastie and the divine, are ever at war within the human soul. The 'trauma' and 'Schizophrenia' in Lessing's narratives arises from a representation of this clash of opposite in the human consciousness.

By the use of the technique of the 'spiritual exploration', the author present the 'inner situation' and the 'inner struggle'. Particular struggle, forwarded or evolve with a 'decision' a 'choice' or an external choice or conflict. The aspects of selection, rejection or assimilation, arises the struggle in human consciousness. Lessing achieves the complete spiritual-exploration, and applying it in the concept of her narrations. The technique of her writing experiences the transmission and orientalism. She portrays the very character, in the significant term of speculative-mysticism. Her characters and her situations have scientific exploration. Only a few significant narrations can successfully approach the potentials. Lessing's Sufism explored in the intellectual wilderness and splended in scientific theme.

Conclusion :Sufi Explored Scientific Theme



Sufi is an ideology it can evolve the human conscience not the time and technique. Instead, science is the way of living and acceptance of the practicality, rather the emotionality of the ancestor's generation.

Though, Lessing has had least knowledge about the scientific terminology viz. satellite communication, rocketry, spacecraft and space-travel. But later, these become the significant part of her writings in Canopus series. Often, what happened in Lessing's novels is no more than a single observed impression. An emissary of Canopus, survey the deserted and desolated *Shikasta* and finally reached in the universe of ice-age of *Volyen Empire*.

Consequently, she did not create any super-human figure and mystical-magic. She just imagined the destructed land converted into a digital arcadia. In this way, she creates a utopian society as it is actually felt and lived. Many critics imposes the direct blame on the atom bomb, for the pessimistic destruction of the 20th century. Science becomes the 'new religion' for the 'new era'. She traces the desolation of contemporary western civilisation to spiritual-degeneration and anxiety, thus upholds the message of Sufism and science as a remedy for its ills. As the present generation accustomed with this 'new religion'.

Lessing is interested in the space, manifesto, and probe into spirituality. Lessing's theory of science fiction is not a creation on imagination, while it is an innovative through the exemplifications of Sufi truth. Lessing, used to explore her Sufi-learning, into scientific theme because, through this she can appropriately express the fantastic reality of future. To sum up, all the facts about Sufism in Lessing's narration it has been clear that Lessing is a questive conscience of historical land. Lessing is an uncomfortable, with the religious concept or without the perception. Lessing gives the new-concept even to the Sufi ideas, to combine them with spirituality and science. Sufi believes in the complete surrender so Lessing and so the science. According, to a Sufi-teaching story,

"Nasruddin, found a weary falcon sitting one day on hi window-sill. He had never seen a bird of this kind before. "You poor thing", he said, "however were you allowed to get into this state?" He clipped the falcon's talons and cut its beak straight, and trimmed its feathers. "Now you look more like a bird," said Nasruddin.

Similarly, Lessing fined the Sufi-concept with the wonderful eyes, like a 'new-falcon for Nasrudin. Then, she also 'clipped' the ideology and shaped it in more realistic, ritualistic and scientific way. In this way, she favours the transformation as because orientation in thoughts keeps the person more realistic and humanistic. Like Nasruddin's falcon, finally look like a bird. Therefore, that Lessing's Sufism looks more like a space-idealism of spirituality.



REFERENCES:

- Arberry, A.J. *Sufism: An account of the Mystic of Islam*. Dover Publications: Nov.9, 2001. Print.
- Bennett. "Electronic Publishing Revision." August 23, 2009. Web.
- Freud, Sigmund. *On Creativity and the Unconscious: The Psychology of Art, Literature Love and Religion*. Harper Collins: 2009. Print.
- Glain, Muge. *Between East and West: Sufism in the Novels of Doris Lessing*. Suny Press: 1997. Print
- Greene, G. *Doris Lessing: The Poetics of Change*. Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press: 1994.11. Print.
- Grey, Stephen. "Way of Scientific Possibilities", an interview with Doris Lessing, 1986.116-17, Rpt *Doris Lessing and Newsletter*. Gospel of St. Mathew-5:38-41.
- . *The Four Gated City London*. McGibbon and Kee and New York: Knopf, 1969. Print.
- . *The Golden Notebook*. London: Joseph and New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962. Print.
- . *The Sirian Experiments*. London. Cape and New York: Knopf, 1980. Print.
- . *Walking in the Shade*. London: Flamingo, 1998. Print.
- . *Spiritual Exploration in the Works of Doris Lessing*, Greenwood Publishing Group Incorporated. The University of Michigan: 1999.51. Print.
- Shah Idries. *The Ways of the Sufi*. The University of Michigan: Dutton, 1970.261. Print.
- Tales of the Dervishes: *Teaching Stories of the Sufi Masters Over the Past Thousand Years*. Octagon Press Ltd: 1967. Print.
- . *Tales of the Dervishes*. Ishk Book Service: 1967. Print.
- . *Seeker After Truth*. Octagon Press Limited: 1991. Print.
- The Religion of the Heart*, From Religious Gotheke 1 by Hazrat Inayat Khan, The Spiritual Message Of Hazrat Inayat Khan. Wahiduddin's Web. n.d.