ABSTRACT

Women are the essential constituent or characteristic of human civilization. The progress of a country without an active participation of women cannot be fulfilled. Although their position and status has always been in fluctuation from age to age and culture to culture, but they have never been considered equal to men. A woman’s status has always been determined according to her biological feature that is the bearer and nurse of the children. Hence she is restricted to the family matters and commitments. The long lasting effects of such conventions are tangible and are still followed, for instance the contrast features between males and females since the moment of birth is apparent; the baby girls are dressed in pink color and the baby boys in blue. Such a so-called trifle and petty conventions in a long way fix the polarities of the sexes. In the same way, some of the writers and philosophers in different ages have tried to convince their readers through their works that the inferior and subordinate status of women is a heavenly willed and beneficial act in the world. Women were degraded and descended to three types of roles in the ancient time: housewife, courtesan and nun. Men in all across the world used to talk in a derogatory manner regarding the women. As Doris Lessing had spent her girlhood period as a working woman in Rhodesia, prior to reside in England, she could directly feel and observe the conventions, traditional institutions and dictated codes that an unmarried woman encounter with and how they are brought up strictly based on the traditional codes in a patriarchal society; in other words she had a first-hand knowledge for penning her works related to women’s experiences. Lessing insists and stresses on throwing off most of the framed and dictated conditions in the community, and tries to gain deserved self-confidence and assertiveness. It is a very controversial matter that, some traditional-minded girls get married merely in order to emancipate from their parental bondages, although this mistaken conception doesn’t fulfill their expectations fully and they experience a failed marriage. Consequently, their individual satisfaction and self-realization is aborted.

KEYWORDS: Doris Lessing, Women, Men, Patriarchal Society, Emancipation, Feminism

INTRODUCTION

Lessing in her novel The Grass Is Singing, pictures a society which is inclined to modernity, minute fashion and disengagement. The women in Lessing’s works are intelligent and enterprising and aren’t inclined any more to stick at home like a housewife. They are in seek of their identity and individuality in society. They feel encaged like a slave and “are suffering from ‘boredom, the tedium of living alone, the unsatisfactory nature of marriage, the burden of bringing up children.” (Lessing, 1980: 234.) Young mothers like Martha in A Proper Marriage conclude, “Once you’ve been married, there’s no point in it, I don’t enjoy anything anymore” (Lessing, 1977: 97) Likewise, marriage for Mary fulfills more loneliness, insecurity and sorrow instead of making her free from her restrictions and routine life. Mary discovers her incompatibility with Dick after marriage and moving to his farm; she doesn’t even feel identified with him and their distance widens gradually. Furthermore, Dick’s indifference and selfishness enhance her loneliness and she finds herself
doomed to remain a housewife and stuck in her false, pretentious, meaningless, empty and servile existence. Hence, Mary gives up seeking for her own identity and self, and stays in the fold of her marriage.

“The moment a girl reaches adolescence, she is reminded of her femininity. The double standards and dichotomous attitude which continues to operate throughout a woman’s life start right in her parent’s home. She is prevented from developing her individuality. She is constantly reminded by her mother that a girl is destined for man and the one who gets the most masculine attention is the luckiest one. A woman in a male-dominated society is thus conditioned into the emotional and cognitive traits of subordination and dependence.” (Arora, 1991:53)

In _The Grass Is Singing_ novel, marriage for Mary Turner turns to an encroachment on her precious individuality and private life, consequently when she moves to Dick Turner’s farm, she realizes that she has made a foolish mistake and immature decision in getting married to a person who is not her type and he comes from very different walks of life. Mary feels caged and trapped on the farm and far from her originality. Gradually the net of depression and schizophrenia tighten around her and contributes to a state of conflicting emotions which gets aggravated by the environment around, including her husband’s ignorance, black residents’ style of life which led to her culture shock and her old memories’ pressurizing influence. Even her scape to city to seek for her previous free spirit, that is considered a revolt against the tyrannies of farm, doesn’t heal anything, she feels uncomfortable and resentful since she finds herself caged and hemmed in Dick’s broken shack on the farm.

Lessing also has portrayed the sexual extortion of Mary’s relation with Dick. As both Mary and Dick are not satisfied with their sexual gratification, so this matter turns into a reason of the distance between them. “While Dick unintentionally makes her a ‘sexual object by idealizing her, Mary can only accept him when he approaches her submissively. Then, yielding to him in a martyr-like way expecting outrage and imposition, she was relieved to find she felt nothing.” (Rubenstein, 1979:19) Therefore, in Mary’s case, even attention to sex doesn’t bridge the huge gap between them, it rather makes them further.

Motherhood is another orientation of the novel, which is scrutinized meticulously by Lessing. Mary leaves no stone unturned to dispense with the depression and boredom which she is suffering from on the farm. She understands that being a mother or giving birth to a child can bring her happiness and fulfillment, but when she shares her idea with Dick, she confronts with his flat refusal due to their poverty which as a matter of fact was caused by Dick’s stubbornness and destruction. Hence, Mary’s only hope of changing her boring and miserable life shatters; she attempts to give meaning to her life by inclining to stitching, mending and sewing some fabrics, clothes and curtains, “as if fine embroidery would save her life.” (Lessing, 1980:65).The wide gulf between Mary and Dick starts widening and they feel “stunted unfulfilled figures” (Lessing, 1980:45) in their gloomy, lonely tiny home.

The other controversial perspective of the novel, which compares Mary’s state of life before and after her unsuccessful marriage focuses on women’s desire to look beautiful. Such impression in society demands women to preserve their beauty, if not they will be rejected socially. Men mostly are interested in doll-like beautiful females as their future wives or mistresses who is placed to give them enough pleasure and be as quiet as a doll, not to question any of their illegitimate actions and opinions. This is very apparent since Mary could find a job in a company when she was tailored
dressed, young with her desired complexion. While after marriage and suffering on the farm and consequently losing her beauty and lack of demanding social etiquettes, she could never get back to her previous job. Having a desire to look beautiful by women represents, their “submission to the patriarchal values to which women are ‘to be mere dolls for men.’” (G. Raymond, 1965:25)

Broadly speaking, marriage shuts all the other doors of her improvement and spoils her chance to get back to her previous job, since she had lost her beauty and social qualification and turned from an admirable and lovely girl in society to a sloppy and unpolished manner woman. Thus she ultimately gives herself to the traditional role of a woman and kept looking after her house and husband on the farm.

THE FEMINISTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE GRASS IS SINGING

The present study is concerned with depicting a patriarchal society and the victims of it who can be a male or female against all the common conventional impressions that always take a woman as the main victim in all situations. After skimming and scanning of the novel, this belief may be shaped that the victim can easily become the oppressor and enjoys repressing the other weak people if she gains the power and fall in the position and situation. Therefore, the story approves this notion that how feminism sometimes heads to the wrong and opposite way by shifting from backing and standing the women’s right to take revenge and suppressing the men. The aforesaid notion will be pictured through illustrating Mary’s relation with Dick her husband, her servant Moses and other hired servants. (Anita Myles, 2004:25) believes that:

“There the Grass is Singing is of embryonic significance embodying the seeds of her later novels while ensembling several varied topics all at once. The novel unfolds Lessing’s anxiety about social, economic and political structure, the problem of women existing in a male dominated world.”

To the fullest extent, we can determine that the novel hinges on the struggle between man and woman as “Mary believes that a woman would normally suffer from the male power in society, even though she admits that she herself does not face this oppression.” (Alia’a Yousef Bahlaq, 2011:82). She refers to her mother as a woman who suffered a lot out of her drunken father’s side. In contrast, she confesses that she hadn’t witnessed such a patriarchal and oppression feeling toward women in the traditional environment of Rhodesia and before her marriage to Dick, she used to live freely without any restriction:

It had never occurred to her that her father, too, might have suffered. “About what?” she have retorted, had anyone suggested it. “He’s a man, isn’t he? He can do as he likes.” She had inherited from her mother an arid feminism, which had no meaning in her own life at all, for she was leading the comfortable carefree existence of a single woman in South Africa, and she did not know how fortunate she was. How could she know? She understood nothing of conditions in other countries, had no measuring rod to assess herself with (Lessing, 1980:32).
Mary’s sense of loyalty and allegiance to her mother and her intense dislike toward her father is secreted out of her mother’s transmitting feminism feeling against men, especially her husband. Although in future, while Mary’s single life, this criteria fades as she is having a comfortable carefree single life in South Africa. Taking into account all the ups and downs of Mary and her mother’s life, we come to this conclusion that Feminism is used in this novel oddly in its negative perspective which is female hatred of males. This aspect of feminism has got a contradiction with the internal nature of Doris Lessing’s public authoritative declaration. Mary along with her mother is trapped in the prison of poverty and family, which is made by their husbands and accordingly they turned to conceive feminism thoughts in their minds to defend their rightfulness.

The other prominent perspective of feminism is sexual concerning and the equal right to deal with that. As the most claimed unfairness of marital intimate relation refers to this matter, therefore in the novel, the sexual immaturity, unawareness, arresting and frigidity has been scrutinized. As far as the story proceeds, it gets more and more apparent that Mary and Dick were not totally prepared to get married and involve with the matrimonial matters. They both are cold and distant with each other; they are not even sexually mature. For Mary, if her friends and people around “hadn’t made her get married, Mary would have pursued her comfortable, independent stereotypical female secretarial role.” (Batra, 2008:119). She could survive, even though through a life associated with rumors and backbiting. She might have missed some of the so called supreme qualifications of life like, a permanent partner, children and feeling of being mother.

As the story proceeds, the fluctuation of Mary and Dick’s life presents a progressive and gradual but constant loss of spirit and emotion in both couples. Specially Marry as a woman who had made a false castle in the air for her future married life, was the main victim. She sacrificed her successful life and interchanged with a defective and demolished life. She leaves no stone unturned to reshape her life and make it productive and at least bearable, but none of her strategies, including redecorating the house, assisting Dick, physically and mentally, bee and poultry farming, running Kaffir, or even running away to get her previous job works. After all, when she gets disappointed to change her life, she stops challenging with life and there is a temporary calmness in her life feels a little peace after her return home. Neither of Mary or Dick reminds her mischance and adventure in town, not to light up a new fuse of family matters explosion.

The climax of Mary’s feminine tie gets back to her illegitimate relation with her black servant Moses out of desperate. As Mary was always alone with Moses at home and basically didn’t feel having an understanding husband who is concerned about her and looking after her emotion, consequently a human bond was created between her and Moses. The convenient, familiar and full venerable attitude of Moses had fascinated her. She was puzzled and did stuck in two minds, as if she was struggling between two incomparable and competitive forces in her life. On one side, there was, Dick her husband who was hardly present at home and worked doggedly without concerning about her, on the other side, there was Moses who was always available and treated her intimately with an attitude of admiration and esteem. Furthermore, Moses’ constant calm and obedient to her, in contrast to Dick, who constantly complained about her bad management and nagging Moses. Therefore, it was very probable for Mary to have a crush on Moses and make a bond with him.

CONCLUSIONS

All things considered, in conclusion, it is quite noticeable that Doris Lessing juxtaposes successfully the assumptions and principles of feminism and defends and criticizes them in the same time. Although nowadays, some extremist feminist movements have exceeded the limitations and passes the red lines of supporting the women’s
right; their deed resembles the situation of “how some repressed people or classes, once they are given authority, may persecute people under their power because of the oppression they have faced throughout their lives.” (Alia’a Yousef Bahlaq, 2011:82). Through portraying the situation of a couple (Mary and Dick) in The Grass Is Singing, the aforementioned description is clarified by Doris Lessing. By and large, this impression may arise among the readers that Mary’s death is justifiable and she deserves that due to her humiliating and ignorant attitude toward Moses. Even the people’s reaction to Mary’s murdering news on the newspaper can prove this controversial assumption that we reap what we sow, and Mary is doomed to a pathetic death because of her style of life and attitude.

REFERENCES
