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IDENTITY CRISIS IN DORIS LESSING'S THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK

Godavari Shivaji Ugale

District Institute of Education and Continuous Professional Development, Jalna India

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ABSTRACT

In *The Golden Notebook* Doris Lessing explores the main character's identity crisis. Women place in a male-dominated society, their relation to men and children. Women frequent attempts to escape from the social and political oppression. It is Doris Lessing's life experience that leads her to gather all these issues in her autobiographical fictional works. However, the main focus is on Anna Wulf who has a personal, artistic and social breakdown. Out of fear of anarchy and chaos, Anna keeps four notebooks that record every phase in her life. The black notebook is dedicated to her life in central Africa. The red notebook is dedicated to her experience in the British Communist Party and her thoughts concerning the current political situations in England. The yellow notebook records Anna's life as a writer and also about Ella (her alter-ego) the protagonist of the novel entitled *The Shadow of the Third*. The blue notebook records Anna's dreams as a personal diary which kept factual account of her life and her quest for identity as a women writer. Before the final Free Women section is the Golden Notebook considered a successful self-healing from the fragmentation and the blocked creativity to which Anna has been exposed. The Golden Notebook is a story of a female writer who experiences alienation as well as fragmentation in a disintegrated world with consciousness. Anna is represented as being subjected to physical as well as psychological exile.

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INTRODUCTION

The novel *The Golden Notebook* begins with a section named *Free Women* with lines "The two women were alone in the London flat" (3). Anna Wulf and Molly Jacobs are divorced women each with a child and disillusioned by communist party. Both Molly and Anna are introducing themselves as 'free women'. This is illustrated in Molly's quotation:

"Free. Do you know, when I was away, I was thinking about us and I have decided that we're a completely new type of woman." (5)

In an article entitled "Doris Lessing's *Mara and Dann*" (1999), Doris Lessing's writing describes as follows:

Lessing's deeply autobiographical fiction emerges from her early experiences in Africa, her years of engagement with social and political issues, her concern for moral and psychological attitudes and the role of women in modern society.... Her complex writing is not easily categorized, but always evident is her concern about the madness and self-destructive tendencies of modern society. Although not intended as such, *The Golden Notebook* (1962) has been regarded as a feminist landmark. (246)

Elaine Showalter, *In a Literature of Their Own* (1999) comments:

The novel of the 1960s, particularly Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, began to point out in a variety of notes of disillusionment and betrayal, that the 'free women' were not so free after all. Lessing's free women are Marxists who think they understand how the oppression of women is connected to the class struggle, who have professions and children and who lead independent lives: but they are fragmented and helpless creatures, still locked into dependency upon men. (301)

The title *Free Women* is ironic because they are not free at all. Being 'not free' is highlighted through the conversation between Molly and Anna:

[Anna] If we lead what is known as free lives, that is, lives like men, why shouldn't we use the same language?

[Molly] Because we are not the same. That is the point. (43)
Thus, when they became aware of their identities they feel that they are not free from men. On the contrary, they are badly influenced by them:

Both of us are dedicated to the proposition that we are tough-no listen, I'm serious. I mean-a marriage breaks up, well, we say, it's not important. We bring up kids without men-nothing to it,

*Corresponding author: Godavari Shivaji Ugale

District Institute of Education and Continuous Professional Development, Jalna India

we say we can cope. We spend years in the communist party and then we say, well, well, we made a mistake, too bad. Now we had to admit that the great dream has faded and the truth is something else-that we'll never be any use. (51)

As Ella and her friend Julia - the heroines of the novel inside the novel- are Anna's and Molly's alter egos, they, like Anna and Molly, have the same attitude towards being 'free women': [Ella]: My dear Julia, we've chosen to be free women, and this is the price we pay, that's all.

[Julia]: Free! What's the use of us being free if they aren't? I swear to God, that every one of them, even the best of them, has the old idea of good women and bad women. (438-9)

Thus, the attempt to achieve freedom and identity is the main reason behind Anna's sense of fragmentation. They are trying all the time to get rid of this feeling in pursuit of wholeness.

In *Doris Lessing: The Poetics of Change* (1994), Gayle Greene comments:

Lessing demonstrates that both male and female behaviors represent crippling adjustments to a destructive society, but that men are more crippled because they are locked into postures that prohibit change. (10)

Some men try to survive in a society through trapping women or gaining money like Michael, Anna's lover. While some men, unable to live in a complicated society, try to kill themselves like Molly's son, Tommy. However, in such disintegrated societies women suffer self-disintegration and try all the time to achieve integration and wholeness. Anna being a member of the communist party attempts to achieve integration: "...a need for wholeness, for an end to the split, divided, unsatisfactory way we all live." (154) Anna joins the communist party to achieve wholeness discovers that there is a yawning gap between the communist theories and realities and they are hypocrites, capable of doing nothing.

Doris Lessing presents her novel in a disintegrated and disconnected structure-state which resembles her society as well as her consciousness. In *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing reveals the dangers and difficulties women encounter when attempting to live a free and independent life in a world ruled mainly by men.

This disintegration leads Doris Lessing and all the female characters in her novel try to free themselves from the authority of men. Lessing feels psychologically alienated due to male oppression. The writer divides her novel into four notebooks: black, red, yellow and blue. Each of these notebooks is set in a different setting wavering between London and Africa which intensifies the sense of exile, psychologically and physically. Each notebook of different colors reflects chaos and disorder.

Lessing could be categorized under the subtitle 'political feminism' as she believes that political forces after the Hiroshima bomb led to her sense of oppression and alienation.

Anna's split is symbolized in four notebooks and her split is actually conflated in *The Golden Notebook* section. She has a red notebook concerned with her communist politics, a black notebook to record her life in Africa, a blue one as diary and a yellow notebook creating her fictional alter-ego. The present novel *The Golden Notebook* is about five sections, there is a section entitled Free Women. The *Golden Notebook* is a synthesis of her blue diary and a final Free Women section. The Free Women of *The Golden Notebook* enjoys free professional life, but they don't get deserved happiness although they walked out bravely.

Lessing, through the character of Anna, questions the appropriateness of realist forms to represent the fragmented nature of modern reality and the crisis of belief. Anna is left by her lover, Michael at the stage that struggles with her identity crisis. As a mother, she is no longer needed by her daughter as decided to go to the boarding school. Anna's identity crisis results collapse of the familiar landscape of her world.

Dieter Hoffman-Axthelm writes, 'the establishment of personal identity is never an end in itself but a passing historical prerequisite for making forms of activity clear' (207). Identity serves as a sort of organizing point against which the individual makes sense of his activity. When the validity of this reference point is called into question, identity arises.

The Golden Notebook proved that women were not liberated completely. Lessing imbedded her protagonist in the bigger social picture of the society, managed to depict the way men and women related to each other. Anna Wulf succeeded in achieving wholeness eventually, but, did not succeed in finding a way of living, where she can have a satisfying love life. At the same time deal with society or men's, prejudice about Free Women. Anna has not been able to free herself from determining patterns and stereotypes. Still the question of identity remains throughout women's life from birth to death no matter we are fighting to overthrow the role patterns that society has imbibed on us. Thus study aimed about Anna's identity crisis to clarify and unveil a number of questions related to gender, feminism, oppression and exile.

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