
THE IMPACT OF RACISM ON FEMALE PSYCHE IN DORIS LESSING'S THE GRASS IS SINGING

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Doris Lessing is a notable writer who has experienced the anguish of the natives and therefore she is able to register authentically all the aspects of the natives. Anyone who comes across her life could reiterate that she is a woman writer who is always located in the margins. Her writings would offer resistance to patriarchy. Though she is an outsider, she belongs to every home of Africa. She has a great vision that there is a day of dawn in the relationship between black and white people. She envisages the day of dawn and her writings are the instrument to actualize her vision. Frantz Fanon also speaks about the real mission in *The Wretched of the Earth* as follows,

To take part in the African revolution it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves, and of themselves.

In order to achieve real action, you must yourself be a living part of Africa and of her thought; you must be an element of that popular energy which is entirely called forth for the freeing, the progress, and the happiness of Africa. There is no place outside that fight for the artist or for the intellectual who is not himself concerned with and completely at one with the people in the great battle of Africa and of suffering humanity (198).

There is a vast gap between Niggers and Whites in view of their relationship, it is a poor understanding of the whites who consider that the niggers are animals and lack humanness. Their misconception is that the white people are all the perfect beings and brand the niggers belonging to the world of imperfection. Franz Fanon talks about the given attributes of the black people in his work *The Fact of Blackness*,

The white world, the only honorable one, barred me from all participation. A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man- or at least like a nigger. I shouted a greeting to the world and the world slashed away my joy. I was told to stay within bounds, to go back where I belonged (324).

Lessing in *The Grass is Singing* (1950) presents race with certain moral quality and she portrays characters in such way that they behave according to the given code of conduct. By this factor the different races are identified and treated accordingly. Mary being in a confused status struggles to understand the behaviour of her servant in their conversation.

He replied gently, to everything she said, 'Yes, missus; yes, missus,' not looking at her. It made her angry that he would never meet her eyes. She did not know it was part of the native code of politeness not to look a superior in the face; she thought it was merely further evidence of their shifty and dishonest nature (82).

Lessing is aware of drawbacks sided with the blacks but she wishes to record the facts around her. She dares to handle an existing problem without any compromise. Her novels have brought out the racial segregation and social restrictions which treat the blacks impartially. In *The Grass is Singing* (1950), Lessing presents that Mary has a prejudice on the natives and she is not given a chance to have her own experience with the natives. She treats them with all misconceptions and because of this there is no proper understanding between Mary and Samson. In *The Grass is Singing* (1950) Mary seems to be away from the natives because,

She had never come into contact with natives before, as an employer on her own account. Her mother's servants she had been forbidden to talk to ; in the club she had been kind to the waiters; but the native problem meant for her other women's complaints of their servants at tea parties. She is afraid of them, of course. Every woman in South Africa is brought up to be. In her childhood she had been forbidden to walk out alone, and when she had asked why, she had been told in the furtive, lowered, but matter-of-fact voice she is associated with her mother, that they were nasty and might do horrible things to her (70).

Mary having carried the misconception in her heart treats all the native servants without mercy. But the new native servant is very obedient to his white mistress at the cost of even the worst treatment that he has received from the White lady. She often blames them offensive and dishonest nature but they are not really like that at one time the servant in *The Grass is Singing* (1950) "dropped a plate through nervousness, and she dismissed him at once" (82). She treats her servant as machine but the servant never mind and served her in a polite way. She dismisses him too accusing dishonest and shifty nature. She never minds her servant as a human being rather treats them as animals. When the servant is given work, she would follow him consciously. She is not ready to believe him as a genuine worker. It is said in *The Grass is Singing* (1950) that "She remained there for two hours, her head aching, listening with every muscle of her tensed body. She was determined he should not scamp his work" (89). The thing is that Mary has preconceived thoughts on the natives and the result of those thoughts forces her to forget them as human beings. It is evident from the following event in *The Grass is Singing* (1950) that "the door opened and he entered. Without looking at her,

addressing her invisible double that one side of her, he said that he was going to his hut for some food, and would go on with the bath when he came back. She had forgotten about his food. She never thought of natives as people who had to eat or sleep" (89)

Mary is not ready to come down from her stand point even though Dick has explained the problems of getting new servants. She thinks that this is a kind of victory over the black servant. If she retains him in the house that is the mark of hurting her self-esteem and therefore she goes to kitchen and dismisses him with the money which he is owed. It is evident from her reaction after sending out of home in *The Grass is Singing* (1950) that "She returned cold and victorious. But Dick did not acknowledge her victory" (96).

As far as Mary's racial views are concerned, they are actually imposed on her by her parents. As soon as she starts to take care of the farm, racial conflicts arise between her and the natives. Undoubtedly, she would like to master them, however, the natives protest against her supremacy. She has preconceived ideas about natives that force her to think negatively in most of times. This is one such evident in *The Grass is Singing* (1950) that she has misunderstood the native when

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Mary even refers to them as evil-smelling creatures, filthy savages or animals and she is not ready to accept them as human beings. At one time Mary happens to whip one of the blacks for no good reason and she justifies her action against the provision that they do complain to the police and further she reacts in the following way in *The Grass is Singing* (1950) that "it made her furious to think that this black animal had the right to complain against her, against the behaviour of the white woman"(147).

Mary imposes her authority on them and she hates their half-naked, thick-muscled black bodies stooping in the mindless rhythm of their work. She hates their sullenness, their averted eyes when they speak to her, their veiled insolence; and she hates more than anything, with a violent physical repulsion, the heavy smell that comes from them, a hot, sour animal smell. She is not even ready to remain the place where the natives stay. It is evident from following description of the surrounding of the natives in *The Grass is Singing* (1950) that,

The man slouched and stopped in the sunshine, resenting her presence; the native women stared and laughed; the filthy, underfed children crowded around, whispering to each other; the starved dogs slunk in the background among the vines and mealies. She hated the place, which she had never entered before. 'Filthy savages!' she thought vindictively (135).

Mary has a prejudice that white man is superior in thought and actions and she demeans the values of the natives. She remains as a moral teacher to the natives and

she refers to white man's service as an example through her short homily on the dignity of work in *The Grass is Singing* (1950), "It was this attitude towards work that had made what he was: the white man worked because he was good to work, because working without reward was what proved man's worth" (140).

Lessing analyzes the different nuances of colour-bar in colonized Rhodesia and the happenings and reshaping of Mary's life. It also deals with the strange situation of the settler-whites or the poor-whites and their financial crisis that leads them to emigrate from their homeland, and though they are the master in Rhodesia, they find themselves utterly misfits in the alien country. They try to safeguard their wavering commands over the natives by sticking to their ingrained racial prejudice. Mary naturally suffers a disturbed childhood in such an atmosphere of mutual distrust, and her discomfiture finally gives away to blind hatred for the natives.

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