

**THE QUEST FOR DELIVERANCE :
SUFİ ELEMENTS IN THE MAJOR NOVELS OF
DORIS LESSING**

*Thesis Submitted to the University of Calicut
For the Award of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in
English Literature*

BY

GEETHA KRISHNAN S.

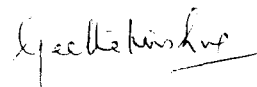
**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
2002**

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis entitled "**The Quest for Deliverance: Sufi Elements in the Major Novels of Doris Lessing**" is a record of original work carried out by me under the supervision of Dr. Joseph Kolangaden, Nilankavil House, Kolazhy P.O., Trichur -10, and no part of this thesis has been presented for any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other similar titles of recognition from any other university or institution.

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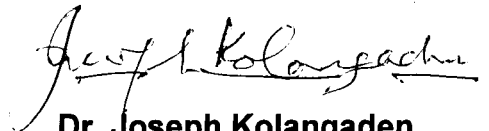


GEETHA KRISHNAN. S.

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this thesis entitled "**The Quest for Deliverance: Sufi Elements in the Major Novels of Doris Lessing**" is a record of original work carried out by Smt. Geetha Krishnan. S. under my supervision at the Department of English, University of Calicut. No part of this thesis has been presented for any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other similar titles of recognition from any other university or institution.

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**Abbreviations of Doris Lessing's works used in this thesis for
parenthetical documentation**

<i>GIS</i>	<i>The Grass Is Singing</i>
<i>MQ</i>	<i>Martha Quest</i>
<i>PM</i>	<i>A Proper Marriage</i>
<i>RS</i>	<i>A Ripple from the Storm</i>
<i>GN</i>	<i>The Golden Notebook</i>
<i>L</i>	<i>Landlocked</i>
<i>FGC</i>	<i>The Four-Gated City</i>
<i>BDH</i>	<i>Briefing for a Descent into Hell</i>
<i>SBD</i>	<i>The Summer Before the Dark</i>
<i>MS</i>	<i>The Memoirs of a Survivor</i>

“The treasury of Sufism contains pearls of great value for both the West and the Islam world and in fact for all human beings from whichever clime they happen to hail.”

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays*

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Preface

Doris Lessing has been acknowledged from the very beginning of her career as a conscientiously realistic writer dealing with many of the political and social issues which have engaged the international intelligentsia since the end of the First World War. Hence her turn towards Sufi mysticism and its attendant philosophical underpinnings came as a surprise to her critics. Ever since her initiation into Sufism, Lessing has persistently and passionately reiterated her Sufi proclivity in innumerable interviews and articles. Such a frank admission by one of the leading female writers deserves serious attention. While many astute critics have written about Lessing's diverse interests like feminism, Marxism, Jungianism and anti-psychiatry, surprisingly few have earnestly examined her interest in Sufi ideology. Moreover those critics who had approved of her allegiance in her early novels to the realism of left-wing writing were unable to appreciate the spiritual dimension in her later writing and overlooked its presence in her early novels. Similarly, critics who applaud Lessing for her prophetic mystical power overlook the political issues and the interaction between the individual and the collective which are of central importance in her early as well as the later novels. Situating Lessing's fiction in the context of Sufi tradition, this study initiates a new dialogue, a thing not attempted quite specifically and explicitly in the available studies on Lessing.

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of significant aspects of Sufism on her creative imagination after her initiation into Sufism in the

1960s. Lessing's romantic faith in human nature is expressed throughout her career in essentially religious terms, and her involvement with Sufism is a continuation of this religious impulse. Though originally a rationalist, Lessing has always written on themes of irrationality, including dreams and non-ordinary states of mind such as heightened awareness, extra-sensory perception, some forms of "madness" and mystical or spiritual experience. Crises, breakdown and dreams occur in many of Lessing's novels in ways that are thematically central. Following chronological order, this study begins with the experience of each individual central character, set in the context of his or her fictional universe. This dissertation deals with the way Lessing amalgamates Sufi ideas in each case, explains how that experience works within the whole fictional work and illuminates the evolution of Lessing's brand of Sufism.

While the focus of a particular novel may appear to be political, social, psychological or mythic, the common denominator in Lessing's fictional universe is the persistent question of "finding the right path for moral equilibrium" or the quest for deliverance of the individual. This search for Truth/deliverance is quite characteristic of the Sufi seeker's quest for the "obliteration of [one's] self" and in Lessing's fiction this quest finds expression through a complex system of symbols and motifs which cut across her entire canon. These symbols can be further traced in the varied ideological and philosophical influences which will serve as a theoretical framework to explore the quest for deliverance in the title.

In the following chapters, five novels of Lessing are examined to illustrate the influence of different aspects of Sufism on her work. These novels, however, do not complete the list of Lessing's Sufi-influenced novels. Nor do they reflect a limit to Sufistic traces in her fiction. Nevertheless, taken together, they reflect the range of ways in which Lessing manipulates and incorporates Sufi ideas. This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter I entitled "*Tasawwuf*: The Path of Love" aims at examining the history of *Tasawwuf*, the Classical Sufi Way, in order to establish a conceptual framework for the study. Chapter II called "Sufism in the West: Turning to the Core of Spirituality" focuses on the origin and development of Sufi thought and practices in the West along with the pluralism of attitudes toward Sufism in the West and reasons for these attitudes.

Lessing's debt to Sufism is complex, but there are two main aspects. One is the teaching story, where a story, a joke is used as a lever to open perceptions. They are simple stories with potentially many layers of significance. The teaching stories point to her other interest in Sufism: that of the hidden human potential. An important change in Lessing's fictive technique in her post-Sufi novels is her use of teaching stories. She structures many of her novels in the form of tales and these offer enigmatic lessons to her readers. The first two chapters provide the essential background information for understanding the thematic spirit of the works of Lessing.

Chapters III and IV have been divided into sections for detailed textual analysis of Lessing's five novels which represent important stages in her development as a realistic writer before she embarked upon science fiction series. Chapter III called "Sufi Bearings" consists of two sections. The first section called "*Landlocked: Into the Life of Things*" concentrates on the study of *Landlocked*, which has elicited a comparatively limited amount of criticism but which becomes crucial to account for Lessing's Sufi affiliation. A systematic analysis of *Landlocked*, the fourth volume of the *Children of Violence* quintet is undertaken to trace Martha Quest's acquisition of Sufi elements like prophetic dreams, "wakeful insights," and "new knowledge" under Thomas's tutelage. A thorough going analysis of this novel shows how far the preoccupations of Lessing's later novels find expression in this early work to establish a point of reference for her later development. The second section entitled: "*The Four-Gated City: In the Tavern of Ruin*" discusses a fiction of heroic exploration and self discovery wherein the Sufi "work" indulged in by Martha and Lynda is examined. Martha recognises that her own "insanity" can become a source of strength and understanding.

Chapter IV entitled "Sufi Moorings" comprises three sections: The section called "*The Summer Before the Dark: The Blue Print for 'A Proper Marriage'*" evaluates how an ordinary housewife like Kate Brown can be a Sufi paying heed to her dreams and drawing lessons from them. The second section entitled "*Briefing for a Descent into Hell: A Travelogue of Inner space and Cosmic Time*" examines how Lessing's conviction that madness is not breakdown but breakthrough is brought out. The third section called "*The Memoirs of a Survivor: Transcendence through*

Disorder" stresses the need for a "multi-levelled" perception. This novel epitomises Lessing's quest for deliverance and raises the issue of reconciling two apparently incompatible universes--the realistic and the fantastic. Sufi theories of literature will serve as points of reference in my analysis of that novel so as to ward off the widespread misunderstanding of that work. This chapter attempts to establish the truth that Sufi elements can become a source of creative energy, or awareness and even of salvation. While chapter III emphasises the content of the novels, chapter IV focuses mainly on their style and technique.

Chapter V: "Conclusion: In the Rose Garden" charts and discusses Lessing's development in the context of Eastern as well as Western modes that have influenced her work, since the interaction between the two is illuminating in understanding her oeuvre and helps to explain many areas of misunderstanding in her canon.

Tasawwuf: The Path of Love

Geetha Krishnan S “The quest for deliverance : Sufi elements in the major novels of Doris Lessing ” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 2002

Tasawwuf: The Path of Love

“The solution to the problem of the day is the awakening of the consciousness of humanity to the divinity of mankind.”

Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan

Introduction

It appears that man's greatest need today is to explore the human personality, in order to find there the latent inspiration and power upon which to build the whole structure of his life. Human life is meant not only for living, but to ennoble oneself and reach that perfection which is the innate yearning of the soul. The human soul is continually seeking to realise its true being and fulfil its purpose in life. This can be seen in each individual's yearning to realise to the fullest the potentialities inherent in his or her being towards the highest expression of human existence. Mystics and philosophers assert that the consciousness of humanity is awakening to the interrelatedness of all life; and this is reflected in the new holistic understanding of the universe emerging in all spheres of human experience today. We can see this trend in the growing concern for the ecological balance of our planet, interest in holistic faith, a deeper social conscience concerned with the plight of suffering people all over the earth, and a

growing awareness of the one underlying truth brought forth through all the religious traditions. At the same time, recent scientific discoveries are disrupting established concepts and models of the universe. In Physics, Biology, Medicine and Psychology the very foundation of our notions about life is being superseded by the realisation that we are both a fraction of the universe linked with all other fractions by resonance, and also the totality, as every cell of ours contains the code of the whole universe. This view corroborates the vision of the mystics throughout history who have looked beyond the frontiers of their separate and limited personal perspective to encompass the vaster reality of the whole. This is the way of the Sufi, which views life in the light of the one essence behind the surface of life, that essence which is revealed by all religions.

A Brief Overview of Sufism

Sufism is a way of life in relation to man's inward transformation. It is a particular discipline of the soul which cannot be revealed properly through rational principles. The Sufis comprehend Truth (*al-Haqq*) as they experience it and live with it. The Sufis have their own philosophy, which is realised after a direct vision of Reality. It is difficult to evaluate such wisdom since most of the genuine mystical teachings of the enlightened dervishes and the celebrated Sufis are their spiritual experiences gained in mystical ecstasy and they remain incommunicable. Mystical experience, like taste or smell, is something that is intimately inside us and can only be felt, not defined or explained. It is "as incommunicable to those insensitive

to it as is musical experience to those deaf from birth" (Hodgson 1:395). Sufis claim that Sufism is forever like a chameleon, possessing no fixed immutable attributes but instead takes the colour and texture of the individuals who practise it and travel its path to freedom in each age and culture. This gives it a flexibility which ensures its survival and transmission as a living path to higher states of consciousness from one age to the next and from one set of conditions to another.

One must not overlook the fact that Sufism grew and developed in a religious environment of Islamic traditions and dogmas. Sufis do not constitute a separate sect of Islam (as do, for example, the Shi'ites), but can be found within both the Sunni and Shi'a sects (although Sunnis tend to be more tolerant of them). Historically, Sufism has encompassed a wide gradation, ranging from devoutly orthodox Muslims to mystics who viewed their connection with Islam as little more than incidental. All Sufis stress the supreme importance of religious experience, and distinguish themselves among Muslims by their insistence that experience of God (who is often viewed in Islam as remote and unapproachable) can be achieved in this life.

Mysticism: Definitions

All historians, both Eastern and Western unanimously concede the fact that Sufism is the generally accepted name for Islamic mysticism. That "mysticism" contains something mysterious, not to be reached by ordinary means or by intellectual effort, is understood from the root common to the

words "mystic" and "mystery," the Greek *myein*, "to close the eyes." Annemarie Schimmel in her *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (1975) observes: "In its widest sense it [mysticism] may be defined as the consciousness of the One Reality--be it called Wisdom, Light, Love or Nothing"(4). The reality that is the goal of the mystic, and is ineffable, cannot be understood or explained by any normal mode of perception; neither philosophy nor reason can reveal it. Only the wisdom of the heart, *gnosis* may give insight into some of its aspects. Once the seeker has set forth upon the way to this Last Reality, he will be led by an inner light. This light becomes stronger as he frees himself from the attachments of this world or as the Sufis would say--polishes the mirror of his heart. Only after a long period of purification--which is called *via purgativa* in Christian mysticism--will he be able to reach the *via illuminativa* where he becomes endowed with love and gnosis. From there the quester may reach the last goal of all mystical quest, the *unio mystica*. This may be experienced and expressed as loving union, or as *the visio beatifica*, in which the spirit sees what is beyond all vision, surrounded by the primordial light of God; it may also be described as the "lifting of the veil of ignorance," the veil that covers the essential identity of God and His creatures.

Arberry in his *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (1950) defines mysticism as "a constant and unvarying phenomenon of the universal yearning of the human spirit for personal communion with God" (11). Mysticism can also be defined as "the love of the Absolute--for the

power that separates true mysticism from mere asceticism is love” (Schimmel 4). Divine love makes the seeker capable of bearing, even enjoying, all the pains and afflictions that God showers upon him in order to test him and to purify his soul. Evelyn Underhill observes:

Mysticism, [...] is not an opinion: it is not a philosophy. It has nothing in common with the pursuit of occult knowledge. [...] It is the name of that organic process which involves the perfect consummation of the Love of God: the achievement here and now of the immortal heritage of man [...] it is the art of establishing his [man's] conscious relation with the Absolute.
(81)

Having defined mysticism, it is advisable to examine the two main types of mysticism, namely, the Mysticism of Infinity and the Mysticism of Personality. The former type has found its highest and purest expression in the system of Plotinus and in the Upanishads, particularly as elaborated in Shankara's *Advaita* Philosophy. Sufism developed by Ibn Arabi school resembles this philosophy. Schimmel notes:

Here, the Numen is conceived as the Being beyond all being, or even as the Not-being because it cannot be described by any of the categories of finite thought; it is infinite, timeless, spaceless, the Absolute Existence, and the Only Reality. By contrast the world possesses only a “limited reality,” which

derives its conditioned existence from the Absolute Existence of the Divine. (5)

This type of mysticism appears to deny the value of human personality and results in pantheism or monism, thus constituting the greatest threat to personal responsibility. In the so called Mysticism of Personality, the relation between man and God is perceived as that of creature and Creator, of a slave in the presence of his Lord, or of a lover yearning for his Beloved. This type is commonly found in earlier Sufism. However, these two types of mysticism rarely manifest themselves in their purest forms, especially in mystical poetry, very often we find the poet describing God in terminology taken from a pure love relation and a few lines later using a language that lends itself to "pantheistic" interpretation.

The difference between the "voluntaristic" and the "gnostic" approaches to mystical experience needs to be mentioned. The mystic of the voluntaristic type wants to "qualify himself with the qualities of God, [...] and to unite his own will completely with God's will, thus eventually overcoming the theoretical difficulties posed by the dilemma of predestination and free will" (Schimmel 6). This mysticism can be seen as a practical life process. The mystic of the gnostic type strives for a deeper knowledge of God: "he attempts to know the structure of His universe or to interpret the degree of His revelations--although no mystic could ever dare to 'know' His essence" (Schimmel 6). In Islamic mysticism both these types of mysticism are evident and in later periods they intermingle.

Definitions of Sufism

Sufism has been defined in different ways by scholars writing in English, throughout this century, but they all agree on its essential character as being the inner, esoteric or purely spiritual dimension of the religion of Islam. "Sufism is that mode of religious life in Islam in which the emphasis is placed, not so much on the performances of external ritual as on the activities of the inner self--in other words it signifies Islamic mysticism" observes John A Subhan (6). Martin Lings, himself a practising Sufi, asserting the originality of Sufism remarks:

Sufism is nothing other than Islamic mysticism, which means that it is the central and most powerful current of that tidal wave which constitutes the Revelation of Islam; [...] this is in no sense a depreciation, as some appear to think. It is on the contrary an affirmation that Sufism is both authentic and effectual. (*What Is Sufism?* 15-16)

A.J. Arberry in his brief introduction to the subject similarly states that Sufism is "the name given to the mysticism of Islam" and "the mystical movement of an uncompromising Monotheism" (12). It was Arberry who first maintained that although Sufism was the recipient of many influences from Neoplatonic and other sources, it was in essence derived from the Koran and Prophetic (Muhammadan) tradition, and attempted to view "the movement from within as an aspect of Islam, as though these other factors

which certainly determined its growth did not exist" (11). This approach became generally accepted and was echoed by later scholars.

The term "Sufism" has been popularised by Western writers; but the one in common use among Muslims is *Tasawwuf* or the Classical Sufi Way, which refers to the thoughts and practices of some Muslims who call themselves "Sufis." The term "Sufism" does not adequately convey the disparate forms of Sufi practice but implies a degree of coherence and systematisation that has never been present in the various Sufi traditions. For the scholars of Islam, the term "Sufism" is but an "ism" created in the West to refer more conveniently to a teaching that originated in the East. Idries Shah, one of the foremost authorities on Sufism explains: "What most people call 'Sufism' is traditionally known in the East as 'being a Sufi' or 'The Sufiyya' and the 'ism' part is very typically a western concept. If we speak of 'Sufism' it is only for ease of communication" (*Perfumed* 177).

The Derivation of the Term "Sufi"

A number of theories can be traced as regards the origin of the word "Sufi." One school of Sufis believes that the word "Sufi" is derived from *Saff* or rank and that a Sufi belongs to the *saff-i awwal* or "the first rank in relation to nearness to God." Certain other Sufis connect the word "Sufi" with *Sufah* which is the name of an ancient tribe of Arabia. It is believed that the Muslims of this tribe lived a moral and pious life in Mecca on account of which they were called Sufis. According to yet another theory, the name

“Sufi” is derived from *Suffa* or “bench”; the true followers of the Prophet of Islam occupied covered benches outside the mosque of Medina and they were known as Sufis (*ashab-i suffa*). Some Muslim scholars observe that the word “Sufi” comes from the Greek word *sophia* which means “wisdom” and that a Sufi is one who is a seeker after “wisdom” or “Truth” (*al-Haqq*). Some of the Sufis themselves associate the word “Sufi” with the Arabic word *safa* or “purity.” According to this view, a Sufi is one who lives a life of absolute purity for the realisation of his identity with God. Etymologically, the word “Sufi” is derived from the Arabic word *suf* which means “wool.” The early Muslim ascetics used to wear a woollen garment (*jama-e suf*) as a symbol of unworldliness and devotion to God and thus they were called Sufis. They were known as the “friends of God” (*awliya*), who lived a retired life and were sincerely devoted to God.

The Origin of Sufism

Historically Sufism grew as a reaction against the rigid legalism of the orthodox religious leadership and as a counterweight to the growing worldliness of the expanding Muslim empire. One source of Sufism is to be found in the twofold presentation of God in the Koran. On the one hand, He is described as the Almighty Creator, Lord and Judge, and on the other, He is seen as abiding in the believer’s heart and nearer to man than his own jugular vein. Sufis search for a direct mystical knowledge of God and of His Love. Its goal is to progress beyond mere intellectual knowledge to a mystical experience that submerges the finite man in the infinity of God. In

the Koran is to be found justification for the mystical tendencies so strongly manifested by some of Muhammad's companions; therefore, one can safely assume that companions of Muhammad and their successors were, in a sense, forerunners of the Sufis. Muhammad was the first link in the spiritual chain of Sufism, and his ascension through the heavens into the divine presence became the prototype of the mystic's spiritual ascension into the intimate presence of God.

***Tasawwuf* in the Larger Historical and Social Context**

Attitudes towards the Sufi world-view, Sufis and their orders within Muslim societies have always been varied, both across space and time; however, some significant historical trends can be delineated in very broad strokes. The faith of Islam, or surrender of one's will to the will of God, was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula from A.D. 610 until Muhammad's death in Medina in A.D. 632. Because of the direct manner in which the Koran (lit., "revelations") was revealed to Muhammad, Sufi mystics, who were known for their aspirations for direct communion with Allah, upheld the Koran as the supreme authority to guide them. Allah's speaking to man *directly* was proof enough for them that direct access to Him was possible. As long as the Prophet was alive, the first Muslims who composed the Muslim community (*Ummah*) were able to rely upon his connection with God through the Koran. Upon Muhammad's death, the Muslim community encountered questions that had not been an issue before:

What is a good Muslim? What is a good caliph or *khalifah* (deputy or successor)? What constitutes a true community? What is purity? What is sin? In trying to find answers, several factions developed within Islam, and these questions were fought out for a century and a half. Sufis offered one of the many answers to these questions. (Galin 191)

Four caliphs, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali ruled after Muhammad: between A.D. 632 and 661. However, the latter two were assassinated as a direct result of disagreements over answers to the above questions. Their successors, the Umayyads (who ruled from 661 to 692) and the Marwanids (who ruled from 692 to 750), were accused of being too worldly and of practising *bidah* or "innovation" instead of striving to follow the Koran. The Marwanids were overthrown in 750 by the Abbasids who claimed direct descent from the Prophet's uncle Abbas and called themselves the *Ahl al-Bayt*, or "people of the house of the Prophet" (Galin 191). Unrest persisted and there were many attempts by Muslims to bring the unjust Abbasid caliphate to an end. There is no doubt that there also existed people of great wisdom and virtue and seekers after truth, as well as well-meaning scholars and men of knowledge and light, in the Muslim community. Shaikh Fadhlalla Haeri in his *The Elements of Sufism* (1990) observes:

It was these circumstances of blatant political and social contradictions that gave rise to the emergence of the Sufis, pious and thoughtful Muslims under the general umbrella of Islam, wanting to distinguish themselves from the ruling party and their worldly supporters. So we find the Sufi movement beginning as a natural consequence of Muslim society accepting and following corrupt dynastic rulership rather than following the King of Kings, Allah the Almighty, through following his true representatives on this earth. (29)

Muslims who were aware of the real prophetic teachings but unable to change the existing situation, started devoting their life to prayers and the discipline of inner purification. These Muslims could not turn their energies outward against the evil regimes, so they were compelled to turn it inward against the evil within the human self. These people later came to be called the Sufis.

Consequent to the Muslims' search for a precise knowledge of right and wrong in the eyes of God, it became necessary to develop an independent body of sacred law (*Shariah*) and several schools of thought (*madhhabs*) came into being. The basic intention of all *madhhabs* was to understand God's will and from that arrive at correct behaviour; if Muslims were to surrender (*islam*) they needed an exact law to which they should surrender. To arrive at such a law, a variety of *fiqhs*, or "proper legal

understanding," were devised to understand God's commandments for correct behaviour. The Koran exhorts one to "fear God and look to Muhammad" and therefore, what Muhammad had said or done during his life time (*hadith*) were collected and recorded, together with a careful reading of *isnads* or "the chain of names of all the transmitters of each *hadith* report." For Sufis as well as for Muslims, the recorded *hadith* served as their second source of guidance after the Koran.

Muslims also turned to *ijma*, or "consensus," of how the Muslim community in Pristine Medina during the first century of Islam behaved, since in the *hadith*, Muhammad was quoted as having said that "Muslims will never agree on a mistake." Finally, *ijtihad* or "personal reasoning," was added onto three sources, in order to allow the *faqih*, or "legal scholars," room to make analogies (*qiyas*) between a circumstance and one of the three sources for guidance. Within a short time the *Shariah* and religious scholars (*ulama*) became very authoritative, having a say on every aspect of life.

In the ninth century *Falsafah* or "philosophy" was devised by an elite group of philosophers (*Faylasuf*) who asserted that God was pure reason, that humans could achieve that same pure reason through using their rational capacity, and that the philosophic search was the truest way of honouring and worshipping God. Out of the challenge of the *Faylasufs* and

in reaction to the zealous followers of the Shariah, there developed a countermovement, the Mutazili disputation called *kalam* or "systematic theological discourse." According to the rational Mutazilites the Koran was not co-eternal with God, and therefore the *Shariah* was not divine; the Koran created in time--that is, created in *this* world--was open to interpretation. Naturally, this position gave the Abbasid caliphs free rein to interpret "God's commands" as best suited their personal interests. However, although the Mutazili movement became the official position endorsed by a series of Abbasid caliphs, beginning with al-Mamun, (who ruled from 813-33), it lost its popularity after some time.

As a last resort, to reconcile the nature of God, the nature of the Koran, and their relationship to each other the Muslims exercised *bila kayfah* which means "without regard to the how." This term coined by al-Ashari (d. 935) meant that certain things cannot be explained by human reason, and divine intention is one of them. God's will was to be *accepted*, not disputed--which, after all, was the meaning of the act of *islam*: surrender to a higher will. And it was agreed that while it was true that God has superior intelligence, it was equally true that human beings do not have access to that intelligence. Therefore, as in all monotheistic religions, a gap remained between God and humans. It is this gap that Sufis claimed to fill. They sought intimacy with Allah directly.

Early History

There are three distinct but overlapping periods in Sufi history generally recognised by historians: Classical, Medieval and Modern. Professor E. G. Browne in "The Sufi Mysticism: Iran, Arabia and Central Asia" notes that the early Sufism was characterised by:

[...] asceticism, quietism, intimate and personal love of God, and disparagement of mere lip service or formal worship. This ascetic Sufism [...] if influenced at all from without was influenced rather by Christian monasticism than by Persian, Greek or Indian ideas. (175)

Rabia al-Adawiyyah

Rabia al-Adawiyyah (d. 801), the woman saint of Basra, is generally regarded as the person who introduced the element of selfless love into the austere teachings of the early ascetics and gave Sufism the colour of true mysticism. Rabia's love for God was absolute and this love for love's sake has become the central topic of Sufism and almost every mystical poet in Islam has expressed this idea that the lover must be consumed by the love for the Beloved that he does not remember Hell or Paradise. Her idea of ecstatic and disinterested love soon developed into a major Way of the Sufis, the Drunken Way, which welcomed those who were intoxicated in their love of God, and who had forsaken their earthly senses for this love. The ascetic mystical attitude traceable in the early period of Sufism started

from the age of Muhammad and continued upto the first half of the ninth century. The other chief representatives of this period are Hasan al-Basri, (praised as the first Sufi in Islam) and Ibrahim bin Adham. These Muslim saints firmly believed in the sayings of Muhammad and developed their mystical knowledge on the basis of the teachings of the Koran and the Traditions. They did not distinguish between *Shariah* (The Religious Law) and *Tariqah* (The Divine Path). The love of God was regarded as the surrender of the individual to the will of God rather than the means for the realisation of the knowledge of God.

Over the two centuries after the time of Muhammad gnostic influences began to appear in some expressions of Islamic spirituality. Abul-Qasim al-Junayd (d. 910) of Baghdad, a transplanted Persian, was especially instrumental in the shaping of Sufism into a Pantheistic system. He wrote "Whatever attains to True Being is absorbed into God and becomes God" (qtd. in Browne 175). Another Persian, Al Hallaj (d. 922) executed for blasphemy, became celebrated as a martyr among medieval Sufis, particularly Persian poets. Hallaj, who travelled extensively and developed quite a following scandalised the orthodox with statements like "I am the Truth." Quietism, with its emphasis that God is all that matters and man is merely an instrument in His hands, provided fertile ground for the pantheistic beliefs that God is all there is, and man and the phenomenal world are merely shadows or emanations of His being.

The Sufis who extensively wandered used to meet in retreats and by the eleventh and twelfth centuries, these gatherings at rest houses focused around a particular master (*shaikh*) and in these retreats, devotional exercises took place under the supervision of the *shaikhs*. These retreats have been called either *Zawiyah* in Arabic and *tekke* in Turkish. Galin notes: "Their evolution into spiritual schools from the eighth century on has been a major step in the institutionalisation of *tasawwuf* in Islam" (195). By now, not only hermits, who isolated themselves from the world, but even ordinary people occupying positions in politics used to congregate at retreats and thus a drastic change occurred in the followers of *tasawwuf*.

The tenth and eleventh centuries saw a growth in the number of Sufi theorists. The earliest manuals on Sufi theory were treatises and guides on manners and practices for the *shaikh* and his pupils. They showed how the Sufi ritual was "now a traced-out Way, a rule of life, by following which the novice [could] attain union with God, founded upon a series of observances additional to the common ritual and duties of Islam" (Trimmingham 29).

Transition to Medieval Sufism: Some Leading Names

al-Ghazzali

Likely the most important figure in the history of Sufism is al-Ghazzali (d. 1111). Prior to his appearance, Sufis' success had been partial. To be

sure, it had become a powerful force among the common people, as it offered a more personal and emotionally satisfying approach to religion than that exhibited and prescribed by the orthodox interpreters of the Koran. However, it had not won acceptance from the religious establishment.

The theologians and legalists had taken great pains to develop an orthodox interpretation of the faith that would protect it from heretical innovations. They feared that the Sufis' emphasis on experience as a superior source of truth and their tendency to neglect legal prescriptions, could lead to the corruption of Muhammad's religion. They also feared that their own positions as religious leaders of the people might be supplanted by the popular Sufis. Consequently, the *Ulama* (religious authorities) sought, unsuccessfully, to silence the mystics. Idries Shah notes, "The accepted position of Sufism whereby it is acknowledged by many Muslim divines as the inner meaning of Islam, is a direct result of Ghazzali's work" (*Sufis* 167). In the public teachings and writings, Ghazzali set forth a synthesis of orthodox theology and mysticism. His greatest work *The Revivification of the Religious Sciences*, argues that only the Sufi emphasis on inner devotion can fulfil the strict demands of the Koran. Ghazzali's arguments did much to relieve the hostility and suspicion that had developed between the *Ulama* and the Sufis. The acceptance of Sufism into the orthodox fold had monumental consequences. Islam "acquired a more popular character, a new power of attraction" notes Gibb (110).

Ibn al-Arabi

Another important Sufi from the same era is Ibn al-Arabi (d. 1240). Raised by a Sufi family in Spain that had been under Islamic control for more than four hundred years, Arabi studied law and Islamic theology before establishing himself as one of Sufism's greatest poets and esoteric philosophers. While Ghazzali stayed within an outwardly orthodox framework, Arabi offered a clearly monistic, gnostic system. "His commentary on the Koran is a *tour de force* of esoteric interpretation" (Gibb 115). With Arabi the emphasis on the Sufi path "was shifted from moral self-control to metaphysical knowledge with its sequence of psychological ascent to the 'Perfect Man,' the microcosm in whom the One is manifested to Himself" (Gibb 115). In his *Bezels of Wisdom* Arabi explains: "When you know yourself, your "I" ness vanishes and you know you and God are one and the same" (Williams 141). Arabi's poetic usage of erotic language to signify the relationship of the soul with God set the tone for much of medieval Sufism. Poetry became a favourite medium of expression, the imagery sometimes becoming so sensuous that it is difficult to distinguish whether the "Beloved" being referred to is heavenly or earthly. For the Sufis this made little difference, since they believed that "Whether it is to be this world or that/ Thy love will lead thee yonder at the last" (Fatemi 51).

Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi

No mystic of Islam is as well known in the West as Jalaluddin Rumi, (AD 1273), the Persian Sufi poet, called by his followers, Maulana "Our

Master.” The order inspired by him, the Mevlevis, popularly known in the West as the Whirling Dervishes early attracted the interest of European visitors to the Ottoman Empire and consequently his poems were translated. Even though he did not produce any systematic Sufi thought and his poems do not contain systematic doctrines in a metaphysical sense, his emotional and sentimental expressions of various mystical ideas, particularly, the soul's yearning for an early union with God are highly original and exhilaratingly poetic. His masterpiece the *Mathnawi-i-Manawi* (Spiritual Couplets) consists of six books of delightful poetry and contains apologues, dialogues, interpretations of Koranic texts, metaphysical subtleties and moral exhortations. The *Mathnawi* will vary in its effect upon the listener or in accordance with the conditions under which it is studied. Shah notes: “It contains jokes, fables, conversations, references to former teachers [...] a phenomenal example of the method of scatter, whereby a picture is built up by multiple impact to infuse into the mind the Sufi message” (*Sufis* 133).

Sufi Orders

In the early centuries of Islam, the Sufis were not organised into particular circles or groups. But as time went by, the teaching and personal example of Sufis leading the spiritually decreed code of life began to attract many groups of people. Between the ninth and eleventh centuries, we find that various Sufi orders, which included adepts from all strata of society, began to emerge. As the Sufi orders or brotherhoods, came into existence,

the centre of Sufi activity was no longer the private house, school or workplace of the spiritual master. A more institutional structure was given to their gatherings, and the Sufi orders began to use centres which existed specifically for these gatherings. These orders intended to define a simple path for the practice of inner purification. The earliest formally recognised *tariqah* that is known to us is the Qadiriyyah Order founded by Abd-al-Qadiri (d. 1166) from Gilan in Persia, who finally settled in Baghdad in Iraq. "While the earliest groups were loose organisations held together, by enthusiasm and common devotion, the *Silsilah-tariqahs* were more formally organised and united by a structured *shaikh-murid* (elder-disciple) relationship" (Galini 198). In this relationship, all the members of the order clearly agreed to follow the Way or *tariqah*, of the founder and his spiritual ancestry as listed in the *Silsilah* (the pedigree, or chain of transmission of knowledge). It was quite common for a Sufi order to trace its origin back to the Prophet Muhammad. The Qadiriyyah are known for their moderation, while the Shadhili are given to extravagance and emotion. An important order in India is the Chishti, founded in the thirteenth century; as expected, it bears several marks of Hindu influence. Each Sufi order constituted a focal point of activity, from which Sufi teachings were carried to the populace by the representatives of the head of the order. They provided the masses with a spiritual and emotional dimension into religion which the hair-splitting legalists could not supply. Because of the strength of these organisations, Islamic civilisation was able to withstand the many political upheavals of that period.

In the twelfth century, an association between the Sufis and the *futuwwah* orders became apparent. The *futuwwah* were groups of chivalrous young men who modelled themselves after the figure of Ali, the embodiment of courage, generosity, endurance of suffering and love of truth. Ali was Prophet Muhammad's nephew, who later also became Muhammad's son-in-law and the fourth caliph. The young men who looked upon Ali as their ideal gathered in groups or *futuwwah*, that substituted for lack of official institutions of protection in Islamdom. They very much resembled men's voluntary organisations. Galin writes:

The Sufi orders were also associated with occupational guild organisations which were involved with craftsmanship or trade, somewhat similar to the Masons. They in fact styled themselves after the hierarchical structure of the guilds which had a grand-master, master-craftsmen, and apprentices. Similarly the religious orders established a hierarchy of masters, initiates and novices [...]. Hence with the formal arrangement of the orders, *tasawwuf* became not only a legitimate spiritual activity, but also a vocation. (199)

***Tasawwuf*, the Journey of the Heart**

According to the Sufis man in his ordinary state of consciousness is literally asleep and when he dies he "wakes." Imprisoned in the cage of the world, man is exiled and forgetful of his true home. To keep this part of the

Covenant, to be faithful to his promise, he must set out on the Path from sleep to awakening. *Tasawwuf* has been referred to as a path, a journey of the heart.

Dhikr and Sama

The first step on the Path is to contemplate the futility of the world of dust, the world in which one's lower self is doomed. The seeker must renounce it all, including his own self, and seek that which is Everlasting. He must travel from things to Nothing, from existence to Non existence. Our present state is one of forgetfulness toward the Divine--the true Self--and remembrance of worldly affairs and the lower self. The cure for this is a reversal: remembrance of the true Self, the Divine within, and forgetfulness of everything else. The basic technique for this is invocation or "remembrance" (*Dhikr*) of the Divine Name, which is mysteriously identical with the Divine Being. The celebration of the *Dhikr* involves the communal rhythmic repetition of a phrase, usually from the Koran in which one of the names of God appears. Breath control and body movements were also used as techniques to aid in achieving concentration and control over senses and imagination. *Sama* is yet another communal ritual practice, defined as a concert of music, poetry recital, singing and dance, which leads the participants to a mystical experience where they seem to hear the music of the heavenly spheres and the voice of God Himself. Through this discipline the fragments of our directionless minds are

regathered, our outward impulse turned inward and concentrated. This is the act of the lover who thinks of nothing but his beloved.

Therefore Sufism is often defined as a mystical path of love. In their deep passion and longing for God the Sufis realise Truth as "The Beloved" and therefore are also known as "The Lovers of God." The essence of the Sufi Path is the particular tradition passed from teacher to disciple in an uninterrupted chain of transmission. Each Sufi order and teacher has certain practices and principles to help the wayfarer on the journey, to keep the fire of longing burning within the heart and the attention focused on the goal.

The Quest and its Expression

The Sufi Path has its goal the state of union with God. For each traveller the journey to this goal is unique; it is the journey "of the alone to the Alone." Yet there are also stages which all seekers pass through, trials, processes of purification and transformation. It is these stages that the Sufi masters, or *shaikhs*, have attempted to describe. As guides they have mapped out the path of the heart and the mystical states that are experienced along the way. With the passion and depth of feeling that belong to lovers they outline the stages of this journey and guidance to other travellers. Drawing on their own experiences, the Sufi masters describe the inner workings of the path of love. They tell how longing for God burns away our impurities. They remind us that by remembering God

we come closer to our eternal essence and that in our moments of utmost despair the Beloved reveals Himself. They share the glimpses of the essential oneness of all life and, with simplicity, directness and humour, describe the paradoxical nature of this mystical journey. Sufi literature offers us the richest and the most detailed understanding of the relationship of lover and Beloved, a relationship that is at the core of every mystical path.

Like all orthodox Muslims Sufis reject the concept of "incarnation" (*hulul*) and do not believe that God can become man. They also resist pantheistic tendencies, carefully distinguishing between God and his servants, while teaching that man's aim must be to attain to such a high state of consciousness of God that his personality may no longer be distinguished from God's essence and character. Man does not have this knowledge by nature, however, and each prospective Sufi must prepare himself for a course which will take him through many stages and experiences before he completes his journey. The Sufi who sets out to seek God calls himself a "traveller" (*Salik*), he advances by slow "stages" (*maqamat*) along a path (*tariqah*) to the goal of union with Reality (*fana fi'l-Haqq*). Nicholson in *The Mystics of Islam* (1914) notes:

The whole of Sufism rests on the belief that when the individual self is lost, the Universal Self is found, or, in religious language, that ecstasy affords the only means by

which the soul can directly communicate and become united with God. (59)

He can then become the Perfect Man, one "who has fully realised his essential oneness with the Divine Being in whose likeness he is made" (Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* 78). On the path towards this goal, therefore he must not only go through the progressive stages of self-annihilation but must also have trance-like experiences in which his normal consciousness is to be lost in ecstatic contemplation of the Divine Being alone. These experiences are the *ahwal* (singular *hal*) and authenticate the developing discovery of the ultimate light and truth.

The Christian tripartite division of the *via purgativa*, the *via contemplativa*, and the *via illuminativa*, is to some extent, same as the Islamic definitions of *Shariah*, *tariqah*, and *haqiqah*. The Sufis believe that God can be known in three ways--the *Shariah* or the Law of the Religion, the *tariqah* or the mystical Path and the *haqiqah* or the Truth. A Sufi's experience of unification with God depends on the transformation of his self. The Sufis recommend a *tariqah* or a Divine Path which is nothing but the indication of spiritual perfection of the soul of the seeker of God. When the Sufis began to analyse the different stages and the stations that the wayfarer has to pass on his way they distinguished between *maqam*, "station" and *hal*, "state": "state" is something that descends from God into a man's heart, without his being able to repel it when it comes, or to attract it

when it goes, by his own effort. The *maqam*, is a lasting stage which man reaches, to a certain extent, by his own striving. It belongs to the category of acts, whereas the states are gifts of grace. Or in other words, "The states are gifts; the stations are earnings" (Arberry 75). Believing in the perfectability of man, the Sufi Way is very much concerned, with the perfecting of the individual disciple. This endeavour is known as "work." The "work" is prescribed by the *shaikh*, performed by the Sufi in the context of the community. It aims to break the hold of conditioned patterns of behaviour which inhibit the desired spiritual awakening.

The Sufi Practice

The Teacher-Disciple Relationship

The journey to God is undertaken under the guidance of a *shaikh* or a spiritual master. Knowledge of spiritual and religious truth is often best imparted by a teacher. The personal relationship between a worthy teacher and his disciple (*murid*) allows a level of guidance and intimate communication of truth beyond what may be attained by private study of scripture or through personal prayer and meditation. The teacher should have a mature faith, rich experience and accomplishment by which he can set an example for his students and convey to them the insights born of his experience and mastery. The student on his part, should be obedient to the teacher and willing to receive discipline.

The Dervish

A dervish is one who has made Truth his or her master desire and is willing to submit all other desires and aims before this aim. In the Sufi tradition dervishhood does not mean the abandonment of a productive and socially useful livelihood, nor the renunciation of marriage and family, but it does mean that everything the dervish is involved with will be understood and arranged from the perspective of his essential spiritual intention. It is the dervish who helps to create the *shaikh*, and both are in the process of learning from the relationship. The *shaikh* holds the key to a treasure the seeker cannot really understand. He is able to unlock the treasure within the dervish's heart, if only he allows his sincere love for the *shaikh* to grow and deepen. When there is real love between a *shaikh* and a dervish, the dervish comes into resonance with the wisdom and light of the *shaikh* and the *shaikh* carries some of the burden of the dervish. In order for the individual connection with the *shaikh* to work at its highest potential, the student needs to cultivate a spiritual connection with the *shaikh*, who is a "wireless transformer." In reality, the dervish's connection is beyond the tangible matrix of space and time, beyond even the conscious mind. In the realm of the conscious mind, the dervish may cultivate a positive bond and even converse inwardly with his teacher. At the subconscious level of the heart, however, the *shaikh's* benevolent energy will be working on his disciple continuously. The relationship between a *shaikh* and disciple is one of the most sacred bonds any human being can experience and this relationship will mature into a bond of strength and beauty as is exemplified

in Lessing's *Landlocked*, (1965) *The Four-Gated City* (1969) and *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974).

Initiation

When total commitment has been made by the teacher and the taught, the seeker enters into a contract with the master which is called "initiation." Although different Sufi orders have their own distinctive ways of initiating and training a newcomer, they basically follow the same practice. The master first tests the adept to determine whether the pupil is willing and able to undergo the hardships that await him on the Path. Usually three years of service are required before the adept can be formally accepted in the master's group: "one year in the service of the people, one in the service of God and one year in watching over his own heart" (Schimmel 102). During these three years, the disciple is asked to do such tasks as begging, cleaning latrines, carrying water and so forth, so that he will develop humility and discipline. The adept now will be considered worthy of receiving the *khirqā*, the patched frock as a badge of admission into that particular Sufi order. The *khirqā* is usually a dark blue robe worn or touched by the blessed master. After receiving this robe, the novice is called an aspirant or initiate. By being in contact with an object belonging to his master, he is said to acquire some of the master's "blessed power" (*baraka*). Now the disciple is made to go into a forty day seclusion in a dark room which resembles a tomb, and his robe, a shroud; the experience aiming to help the initiate to change his consciousness deeply. Schimmel notes: "one should not forget

that certain Sufis claimed to be travelling the path without formal initiation. They were called *Uwaysi* recalling the Prophet's contemporary *Uways al-Qarani* in Yemen" (105). Such aspirants were believed to be "spiritually" initiated by the Prophet. Another possibility of initiation was through the immortal Prophet *khidr*, the servant of God and the mysterious companion of Moses. This patron saint is believed to have drunk from the waters of eternal life and will provide the mystics with the highest source of spiritual inspiration.

Stages in the Journey

Even though the Sufis claim that there are a myriad ways leading to God and that there are as many ways to God as there are believers, the main stages on the divine Path to the "Ultimate Reality" remain almost the same. The mystical path is long and hard for the *murid* and requires constant obedience and struggle. *Taubah* or "repentance" can be considered as the first stage; *Taubah* means to turn away from sins, to abjure every worldly concern. The Sufis consider repentance as an important landmark in the mystical life of a seeker of God because repentance for his sins is rewarded with "contrition" (*nadamat*) which is a source of moral strength on the way to God.

The second station on the journey to God is *Wara* or "abstinence." This is the beginning of the traveller's separation from everything except God. The stage of *Wara* leads to the stage of *Zuhd* or "austerity." It is

renunciation in the true form. The Sufis consider worldly possession as the real cause of evil and sin and hence they plead for a separation from worldly goods. Renunciation of everything is considered a boon for the spiritual progress of the soul. Renunciation differs from person to person depending upon degrees of ascetic perfection. There are those who neither possess worldly goods nor do they possess any desire for them. This is an ordinary form of asceticism. The second kind of renunciation is concerned with the renunciation of everything associated with the self. This asceticism is followed by saints. "The third kind of renunciation is the renunciation of the thought of renunciation. This is the highest form of asceticism and is practised by perfect spiritualists because they consider everything save God as concealment of God." (Bhatnagar 161).

The ascetic now enters the station of *faqir* or "poverty." The follower of this station is called *faqir* that is a poor man or a dervish, or a mendicant. A *faqir* is not attached to anything and nothing is attached to him. The real mission for a *faqir* is to attain purity of the soul. Purification of heart removes every distinction between "I," "you" and "we" and results in the mystical experience of the state of union with God.

The next stage on the mystic journey to God is the station of *sabr* or "patience." He heartily accepts whatever comes from the side of God and during the period of affliction and suffering in his separation from God, lives

with patience. Patience is an important milestone on the Path, but a person who has reached the station of gratitude (*Shukr*) is already blessed by divine grace.

Tawakkul or "trust" in God is the next stage on the way to God. Trust in God results in the realisation of *rida* or "satisfaction." According to some Sufi mystics this is the last station on the journey to God, for nothing remains to be attained through mystical efforts after having experienced spiritual satisfaction.

The station of *qurb* or "proximity" to God is the next step and results in the stages of *khawf* or "fear" of God and *raja* or "hope" in God. The next stage is the *maqam* or "love" of God. According to the Sufi manuals, the *dhikr* or "recollection" of God is the most significant means of reaching the state of perfect love, for the recitation of the various names of God leads to companionship with Him. The lover (*ashiq*) develops an attitude of keen desire for an early union with God.

The lover's longing for early union with God takes him to the stage of illumination of his heart by the *fadl* or "Grace" of God. When the heart is illuminated by Divine Light, the aspirant experiences the station of *Mushahadat* or "spiritual vision" of God which entirely depends on his love and faith in Him. The true vision of God is experienced only when the

seeker contemplates God for His sake and in such a state he becomes totally absorbed in Him.

Contemplation on God leads the seeker to the station of *Wajd* or “ecstasy.” During the period of their mystical ecstasy, some mystics fail to hold themselves straight in the vision of God. Thus a seeker has to attain spiritual perfection for reaching such a stage.

Contemplation results in the experience of *marifa* or “gnosis.” At this station of the Path, the seeker of God attains knowledge of the Attributes of God and His essence. Sufis regard gnosis as a reward of love because God reveals his knowledge only in the hearts of His lovers. Hujwiri defines gnosis thus: “Gnosis is the life of the heart through God, and the turning away of one’s inmost thoughts from all that is not God. The worth of everyone is in proportion to gnosis, and he who is without gnosis is worth nothing” (qtd. in Bhatnagar 170).

Fana “(annihilation)” is the ultimate goal--a dissolution of the Sufi’s consciousness of his own identity through a total absorption in the knowledge of God. The word “annihilation” signifies the annihilation of the attributes of human nature and their transformation into Divine Attributes. In the state of annihilation, the Sufi is completely immersed in the contemplation of the Attributes of God and oblivious to his own self. It is to

be noted that this does not lead to a pantheistic theosophy, for Sufis, true to the Muslim faith, are always careful to distinguish between God and His servants. The union comes in the realm of consciousness and spiritual perspective. The mystic does not become one with God, he becomes conscious of his oneness with Him.

The highest state of *fana* is reached when even the consciousness of having attained *fana* disappears. This is what the Sufis call 'the passing - away of passing away (*fana al-fana*). The mystic is now wrapped in contemplation of the divine essence. (Nicholson, *Mystics* 60)

The ascetic becomes the Perfect Man and as such though he lives in this world, he does not belong to it.

Sufi Saints and Folk Islam

By the thirteenth century the Sufi schools were forming not only around a master or a rest house, but around the *barakah*, or "blessedness" of a place, person or tomb, so that blessedness itself began to be institutionalised. A result of this transition was that when a great *shaikh* died, and sometimes even while he was alive, he was venerated as a saint or *wali*, and members began building shrines around saint's tombs, starting a new trend of pilgrimage. The *shaikhs* were seen as miracle workers, healers and intercessors for others before God. Special celebrations which

developed into folk festivals were held on the anniversary of their deaths (*Urs*).

During the fifteenth century, along with the growth of the Ottoman Empire, the Sufi *tariqahs* had become very influential in the arts. The Sufis were the inspiration for a vast and rich tradition of poetry and music written in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Urdu, both in the educated and sophisticated circles and among the simpler folks. Moreover, in the sixteenth century, the Sufis were the only reconciling factor between the men of sword and the men of learning in the Ottoman Empire. According to Trimmingham, during this time, it was they, and not the *ulama* who were the significant representatives of religion; and it was the shrine, not the mosque that was the symbol of Islam (67). By the eighteenth century, every Muslim male may have been a member of at least one brotherhood whose intention was to spread the Sufi message, recruit more members, and to engage in social service. Islamicists however bemoan the fact that these Muslims were more involved in the practical rather than the spiritual activities of a brotherhood. Trimmingham observes that members even seemed to blame the *tariqahs* for fettering their creative freedom, binding them to a series of mystical terminology, disciplines and exercises (103).

Sufism in the Modern Era

The nineteenth century saw many revivals of movements among the Sufi brotherhoods in an attempt to rekindle the extinguishing frenzy of

mysticism within Islam. But the secularisation of Muslim nations forced the immediate disappearance of Sufi orders from the popular scene. According to Trimmingham, in Istanbul, the declaration of the Turkish Republic in 1920 was accompanied by the disappearance from the public eye of seventeen *tariqahs* which were housed in two hundred and fifty eight *tekkes* ("hostels") and many more smaller groups which used to meet in private homes (253). By 1925, all Sufi orders in Istanbul had either dispersed or had gone underground. Likewise in Iran, the predominantly Westward-looking public ridiculed and rejected Sufis' practice. Similar changes in attitude took place in the rest of Islamdom as well, especially in orthodox Muslim countries. During the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the major Sufi movements in Africa and Asia were often connected to mainstream Islamic movements. The Sufis were the elite of their societies, and often led the reform movements or opposition to oppression and foreign or colonial domination. The Sufis were in action in many countries, during the colonial era, opposing the colonial dismantling of Islamic governance and trying to revive and sustain original Islam. They often formed or were at the heart of strong social grouping, and had great followings in many parts of the world. However during the twentieth century, the situation began to change radically and rapidly. The Western colonisation of most of the Muslim lands was almost complete by the end of the First World War. After that, religious and Sufi interests and influences became of secondary importance, due to the rapid erosion of past and traditional values and life styles, and it became increasingly difficult and dangerous to follow the original way of Islam in its

entirety in the Muslim lands. However, in Pakistan, according to the 1961 Lahore district Census Report, Sufi masters continue to practise and have healthy following.

Decay of Sufism

The decay of Sufism may be attributed to many reasons. Citing the increasing numbers of bizarre ecstasies within the Sufi orders, Elliot Miller notes, "With the passing of time and the social decline of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, almost every pervert entered a Sufi order, and almost every madman was accounted a saint" (par.42). Quoting the Eastern historian S.Ameer Ali, Miller cites another aspect of Sufism which contributed to the decline of Islamic civilisation:

To the bulk of humanity the call to abjure the world and to betake ourselves to complete absorption in the contemplation of Divinity is an inducement to mental lethargy. The responsibility for the present decadence of the Muslim nations must be shared by the formalism of the Ash'ri (orthodox theologian) and the quietism of the Sufi mystical teachings.

(12)

In Saudi Arabia the Wahhabi puritan revival was extremely anti-Sufi, seeing their practices and doctrines as later pagan additions to pure Islam. For reasons mentioned above, the Sufis were blamed, not only for the

pollution of the historic faith, but for the weakened political position of Islamic nations, as contrasted with expanding European imperialism. In the twentieth century, Sufism has lost political influence it once enjoyed, and, in Wahhabi-ruled Saudi Arabia, it is officially prohibited. While still tolerated in other Muslim countries, Sufism generally in the Muslim world is hard - pressed because of a resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism and according to some sources, because of the activity of bogus *shaikhs* and Sufi orders. Colonialism, nationalism and secularisation had a negative impact on Sufism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The modern revival of Islamic learning was accompanied by a violent reaction against the superstitions of Sufism. It was accused as being the cause of the Islamic world's backwardness compared to the West. In Turkey, Kamal Atatürk abolished the Sufi orders in 1925 and confiscated their lands and property. In other countries too post-colonial independent central governments were often suspicious of the orders. They were suspected of being cells of political unrest and revolution which held the loyalty of the masses by their superstitions, religious emotionalism and outmoded power structures. Despite religious and political attempts to eliminate them, the Sufi orders continued to exist, often underground. Sufism today is still a formidable force in the Islamic world, transforming the lives of people, giving them meaning and emotional support in a world that is increasingly unstable and full of economic woes, suffering and confusion.

Sufi texts, Social Contexts and Scholarly Endeavour

In contrast to what was happening in the East, we find many spiritual organisations and societies springing up in the West, often started by the Western seekers of knowledge. According to Shaikh Fadhlalla Haeri,

The fact that many people from Western societies embraced pseudo-religious movements such as those of the Baha'i and Subud, as well as various branches of Buddhism, Hinduism and other minor new religions or revived versions of old ones shows the growing thirst and interest in spiritual knowledge in the West, where the various versions of Christianity, which were mind - or emotion based, rather than 'heart'-based, had failed to provide any spiritual nourishment for several centuries. (92)

By the early twentieth century we find that there was a great deal of interest in spiritualism in both Europe and North America. The work of the orientalist who attempted to explore the spiritual dimension of the Eastern religions--albeit from within their own conceptual framework--including Islam, contributed to the increasing interest in spiritualism and the search for mystical experience in the West, by means of their writings and translations of original works on Eastern traditions, art, culture, philosophies and religion. By the middle of the twentieth century, we find quite a number of

Sufi societies and movements springing up in Europe, North America, some of them founded by genuine Sufis and some by pseudo-Sufis. The oil crisis in the West and petrol boom in a number of Middle Eastern countries also helped in increasing contact with the Middle East and the Arabic language and information about Islam. Then came the revolution of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, which has, ever since then, generated a global awakening of interest in the Islamic tradition.

Indian Philosophy and Sufism

It will be noticed that in some of its doctrinal features and more practical teaching, Sufism bears a close resemblance to Indian thought.¹ Stoddart declares, "the Sufi doctrine of the *dhikr* coincides with that taught by the nineteenth century Hindu saint Rama-krishna, who succinctly summed it up in the phrase, "God and his Name are one" (67).

Like the *Shuhudi* doctrine of the Sufis, the *Vishistadvaita* of Ramanuja is a modified non-dualism. The goal of the individual soul according to the teaching of Ramanuja is to release itself from the bondage of *karma* and then to reach the "abode of *Brahman*," and to exist externally having permanent consciousness of the highest *Brahman*. This is not much different from the Sufi goal of *fana fi'l - lah wa baqa bi'l lah*, "the annihilation and the subsistence in God." The means to attain this end according to Hindu teachings are *Bhakti* and *Vidya*, both of these may be compared with the Sufi *dhikr* and *muraqaba*. Similarly, the Hindu concept of *Moksha*

literally means release and is used in the Upanishads to denote the release of the individual soul from bondage to the sensuous, selfish and finite existence. It almost runs parallel to the Sufi doctrine of *fana wa baqa*, "annihilation and subsistence."

Conclusion

Islamicists insist that the term Sufism can be used accurately only when referring to the mystical tradition that developed within Islam. On the other hand, Western practitioners of Sufism from East and West, North and South, from among Muslims and Christians, Jews and Hindus, Gnostics and Theists, and others who found something more in Sufism than in the organised religion into which they were born insist that *tasawwuf* is much older than Islam, that it is independent of space and time and that one can hardly assign the origins of Sufism to any one general geographical location in the world. This necessitates an enquiry into the evolution of Sufism in the West, which will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Notes

¹ In the evolution of Sufism, a number of religious, mystical and philosophical currents of thought, apart from the spiritual experiences of the Sufis have contributed. For a comprehensive understanding of the major foreign influences on Sufism, see Idries Shah, *The Sufis* 401-11; Subhan 133-59 and Bhatnagar 23-30.

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Sufism in the West: Turning to the Core of Spirituality

Geetha Krishnan S “The quest for deliverance : Sufi elements in the major novels of Doris Lessing ” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 2002

Chapter II

Sufism in the West: Turning to the Core of Spirituality

“There is some quality--a vitality, a yeast--in Sufi work that affects in ways not easily explained.”

Doris Lessing, Preface *Seekers After Truth*

Introduction

The story of Europe is familiar to all of us. With the rise of science, rationalism and industrialisation, the Church lost its undisputed authority in society. When in the sixteenth century a Polish student called Copernicus demonstrated a competing theory of the earth and the solar system, the Church had to give way to other systems of truth. This did not, as it is popularly believed, lead to the immediate elimination of religion. Rather, religion was redefined as a private and personal matter. With the progressive secularisation of society, moreover, some Europeans and Americans turned increasingly to the mystical and spiritual foundations of religions, particularly Eastern religions.

A popular expression of Prophet Muhammad's religion in the Western world today is Sufism, Islam's mystic way. The current interest in Sufism can be largely explained by pointing to the same factors which

account for the popularity of several diverse Eastern mystical traditions among Westerners. These factors include a hunger for life-transforming spiritual experience and an attraction to monistic belief systems. British orientalist Martin Lings comments, "A Vedantist, a Taoist, or a Buddhist can find in many aspects of Islamic mysticism, a 'home from home,' such as he could less easily find in Christianity or Judaism" (qtd. in Miller par.1). Not only is Sufism making an impact on Western shores in its own right, it has also profoundly influenced such notable founders of new religious movements like George I Gurdjieff and Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. Also several personalities who have made their mark outside the field of religion acknowledge the influence of Sufism on their lives including the British novelist Doris Lessing, actor James Coburn, poets Ted Hughes and Robert Graves, psychologists Eric Fromm and Robert Ornstein, and the late Secretary General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjold.

The new and the allied form in which we encounter Sufism in the West today, though decried by theoreticians like Elwell-Sutton, Nasr and Bob Summer is welcomed joyously by Doris Lessing. She notes: "it doesn't do to say that a man, or a book, or an institution is Sufism, which, while it is essentially something always the same, is always taking different forms" ("Ancient" 80). In fact, Western Sufism began with two quite distinct forms which were practically opposites. One of them, the *Sufi Order*, was brought to the West by an Indian Sufi of the Chishti Order Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan, who introduced two fundamental innovations: he separated Islam

from Sufism and he gave women--Western women, at that--important positions in the order. In effect, these innovations made the order a purely Western phenomenon (even though it was started by an Eastern teacher). The other consisted of Westerners in the Shadhili order and its sub-branches in Egypt, Algeria and Morocco, all of whom were either initiated in those countries or in the West by Westerners who had been authorised to give initiations. All of these Western Shadhiliyya were Muslims and all of them were men. Yet though they were orthodox Sufis in the sense that they followed the same practice as their brethren in North Africa, they were also different from the vast majority of Eastern Sufis in one vital respect: they were Traditionalists. That is, they regarded all religious traditions as valid; and they had chosen the Sufi Way not because it was more true than the other great traditions but because it was more effective. This notion of Tradition goes back to one of the Western Shadhili, Ren Gunon, a French metaphysician, (1886-1951). And these two forms have one element in common: they are both instances of "Universal Sufism"--that is, they both uphold that Sufism was just true for twentieth century Westerners as for anybody else.

It would be wrong to say that the West of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was totally unprepared for Sufism but the ground was not fertile. The major reason for this was: Sufism was not very accessible, even though Sufi orders existed in every Muslim country--that is the entire Middle East--(Jordan, Syria, Iraq and even Israel) and

Afghanistan, India and North Africa from Egypt to Morocco. There was a considerable body of Western Sufi scholarship in the form of translations. These Western translations were mainly concerned with Persian Sufism, and Persia, though it had diplomatic, military and trade connections with the West (mainly Britain), did not have a resident Western population (unlike India and Sri Lanka). Moreover, the Sufi orders in general, throughout the Muslim world, were not in a very vigorous state. Thus we understand that the two usual ways in which Westerners entered Eastern traditions were 1) by being taught by an Eastern teacher in the West, or 2) by entering the traditions in the East (the term 'East' includes all Muslim/Sufi countries).

There were no Western practitioners in Sufi countries (until Ren Guon went to live in Egypt in 1930); instead, a handful of Westerners made contact with the Shadhili order in North Africa and were initiated there, and it was they, rather than their *shaikh*, who spread this form of Sufism in the West. And perhaps the most important aspect of this form of orthodox Western Sufism was that it was secret; there were no public meetings and no books; one could only find about it if one was allowed to. All Eastern teachers who visited the West and had Western followers are in some way untypical of their tradition. Inayat Khan, the sole Eastern Sufi teacher in the West was someone who had presented teaching in a form that Westerners could understand. His was the only form of Sufism that Westerners had real access to.

Hinduism in the West had far more variety than Sufism. Also there were two or more theosophical translations of Hindu classics such as the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads. There were no Sufi equivalents. Theravada and Hinduism had Western followers living and practising in the East. But, there were no Western Sufis in Sufi countries. There are a number of reasons for this, including the weak state of Sufism generally throughout the Muslim world as a result of Western colonialism. But the real explanation is that Sufism is an integral part of Muslim society and one cannot be a Sufi without at the same time having a social role. Sufism does have specific religious communities (called *Khanqahs* or *Zawiyahs*) but they are not separate from ordinary society in the way that Buddhist monasteries or Hindu ashrams can be--that is, Buddhist and Hindu society makes space in itself, so to speak, so that monasteries and ashrams can be distinct from ordinary life. Rawlinson observes: "But in Islam, there is no fundamental divide between lay and spiritual life--rather, Sufi communities can be regarded as an intensification of the ordinary (with added-ingredients, perhaps, but not based on different principles)" (par.22). Moreover Sufi practice is communal rather than individual. Therefore it becomes clear that Eastern Sufism is practised by Muslims who already have a place in a Muslim society, and their Sufi practice is itself social--both because it is communal and because a gathering of Sufis--is part of Muslim culture. It is exceedingly difficult for Westerners to fit into this pattern.

It is true that Zen and Tibetan Buddhism also did not have Western practitioners in the East until around 1920s--and in this respect, they are somewhat similar to Sufism. But the variety of each of these traditions was to some extent provided by the Buddhist societies. And in addition, Tibetan Buddhism was also a significant part of Western esotericism. All these factors were missing in early Western Sufism: that is, there were no Sufi societies of the sort we find in Buddhism, there were no links with the Western esotericism, and there were no Western practitioners in Sufi countries.

In 1900, the first active contact with Sufism occurred when Isabella Eberhardt, an extraordinary Russian pioneering explorer was initiated into Qadiri order in Tunisia. Another contact with Sufism came about when Ivan Agueli, a Swedish painter living in Paris, on a visit to Egypt in 1907, was initiated into the Shadhili order, as a *moqaddem*--that is, one who has authority to initiate others into Sufism. He was the first Westerner to be given a spiritual function in Sufism, and he was a traditionalist. Agueli's form of Universal Sufism-cum-Traditionalism might have come into nothing if he had not met Ren Guonon in Paris. According to Gunon,

Traditionalism implies that all traditions are expressions of the laws of the universe which emanate from the divine source; and that every tradition necessarily has three levels: a statement of metaphysics; ordinances that govern how

(wo)men should live; and a way of initiation and practice that leads back to the divine source. (qtd. in Rawlinson par. 34)

Meanwhile, Hazrat Inayat Khan's Sufi Order came to be established. Inayat Khan was a *murshid* (teacher) of the Indian Chishti order but actually he came to San Francisco in 1920 as a musician; and he met his Western disciple, Rabia Martin, whom he appointed as a *murshida* or Sufi teacher in her own right. She developed the American wing of the Sufi Order. Her "announcement of the Sufi message" in San Francisco in May 1912, is considered to be the first open declaration of Sufism in the West. In 1915 Inayat Khan started a magazine "The Sufis." He also managed to gather a circle of disciples, many of whom were women; he also appointed a number of *shaikhs* and *shaikhas*, before he moved over to France.

The year 1925 became a watershed for Western Sufism because in that year, Hazrat Inayat Khan established a branch of the Sufi Order in Geneva; Samuel Lewis, his famous disciple received inner initiation from all the prophets culminating in Muhammad; Ren Gunon published his second study of Hindu Vedanta. According to Rawlinson,

[...] the first of these represents public and esoteric Sufism of the Universalist, non-Moslem form; the second the beginnings of an independent version of this form of Sufism (because Lewis was always an independent); and the third, the

traditionalist position stated by a Western Sufi, in terms of Vedanta. (par. 38)

Other forms of Western Sufism

But there are other forms of Western Sufism, quite unconnected with any version of either the Sufi Order or the Western Shadhiliyya--and again, all of them very untypical of Eastern Sufism. They do not make their appearance until the 1950s and for the most part they are all independent of each other, rather, they are each linked with an unusual Western teacher. One such Sufi is J.G. Bennett, a student of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. He set out on an extraordinary spiritual quest and met many Sufi teachers including Idries Shah. Two Western Sufi teachers need to be mentioned, both connected with the Naqshbandhiyya but otherwise quite different from each other. The first is Idries Shah, born in India, born of Afghan father but in every other respect completely Western because his mother was Scottish. He claims to represent the Naqshbandi order--but who his Sufi teacher is not exactly known. In 1963 he met J.G. Bennett and the liaison between Shah and Bennett became a significant part of the development of the Western Sufism. Bennett incorporated some of the stories of Mulla Nasruddin, which Shah had popularised through his own teaching. Another Westerner who claims to be connected with Naqshbandiyya is Irina Tweedi.

From 1955, a number of Westerners including Bennett, Shah, Tweedi and others all made a form of Naqshbandi Sufi teaching available in the

West, however, none of them could be said to be representative of Eastern Sufism. The search for Universal Wisdom is deeply rooted in the discovery of all the Eastern traditions but it is particularly evident in Western Sufism. Among innumerable Sufis, three Sufi teachers stand out. They are Reshad Feild, E.J. Gold and Lex Hixon. Feild was a singer and in 1962 met Pir Vilayat Khan, (the elder son of Hazrat Inayat Khan), head of the Sufi Order and received twelve initiations from him--the equivalent of being a *shaikh*, he claims. In 1969, he met another Sufi teacher, Bulent Rauf in unusual circumstances and this meeting and Feild's subsequent journeys to the Middle East are described in two books of spiritual autobiography, *The Last Barrier* (1976) and *The Invisible Way* (1979). Feild does not present himself as a Sufi *shaikh*, but rather as an esoteric healer and teacher of the science of breathing. E.J. Gold's *Autobiography of a Sufi* which appeared in 1976 is yet another book involving meetings with teachers in unusual circumstances. Lex Hixon/ Shaikh Nura'l-Jerrahi, was initiated into the Turkish Halveti-Jerrahi Order in New York in 1980. He has been accepted into other religious traditions like the Ramakrishna Order, Zen Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism and Eastern Orthodox Christianity. These men were the pioneers of comparative religions, embracing several religious traditions not out of curiosity but as a part of their continuing spiritual quest. Thus the history of Western Sufism is a complex tale made up of disparate threads--and these threads are themselves just one of the patterns in the whole tapestry of Eastern traditions in the West. It is in this modern context of the willing acceptance of these diverse religious traditions, that we have

to place Doris Lessing, the intimate friend and ardent disciple of Idries Shah. Now let us examine the reaction of critics to this growth of Western Sufism.

Critical Response

In his article "Sufism and Pseudo-Sufism," Elwell-Sutton accuses Idries Shah, G.I. Gurdjieff and P.D. Ouspensky of playing up to the psychological weakness of Westerners looking for something to replace their lost family, tradition, or religion in the twentieth century. He refers to the brand of Sufism we encounter in the West as "Pseudo-Sufism," without Islam and without religion, "centered not on God but on man" (*Encounter* 16) and which is nothing but a "despiritualized accumulation of ritual, superstition and folklore" (*Encounter* 12). According to Elwell-Sutton, the reason behind the Western omission of talk of God from Sufi teachings is "Western individualism and materialism that cannot easily surrender to powers out side the self" (*Islam* 54). Elwell-Sutton along with many other critics vehemently objected to the recontextualised, Western Sufism arguing that those who endorse it and praise it have little knowledge of Islam and therefore are unqualified appraisers of the authenticity of the teachings of Islam. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, though apprehensive that Sufism will degenerate in the hands of the ignorant is optimistic that

there can be discerned a more profound and genuine attraction by those who wish to profit from [Sufism's] insights for their spiritual benefit, [...] and those who are seeking a genuine spiritual path to follow and are willing to make the

necessary sacrifices to become qualified to follow such a path.

(11)

Bob Summer in his article in *Publisher's Weekly* expresses his curiosity as to where Sufism in America leads to, thus: "So what does the Sufism-in-America curve add up to? Is it indeed just another 'wave' or New Age ripple? Or is something deeper with a more enduring potential going on?" (35). He quotes Jay Kinney's (the publisher and editor-in-chief of *Gnosis*) immense faith in the future of Western Sufism thus:

If the various orders who now call North America home are able to develop in dialogue and clarify the essentials of Sufism and the shape they take, the potential exists for a creative explosion such as happened in medieval Turkey and Andalusia (Moorish Spain), where the mix of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish cultures helped incubate such great mystics as [Rumi, Ibn al Arabi,] and Moses de Leon. And that would be something marvelous to see. (35)

Andrew Rawlinson eulogising the role played by the Western Sufi teachers exclaims:

The phenomenon of Western teachers is unique--not just because of the individuals themselves, though they are certainly fascinating, but because of what they represent the flowering of the Western genius, which has discovered

Eastern Traditions, absorbed them and in the process changed them and been changed by them. (par.47)

Doris Lessing's intense commitment to Sufism places her in the company of Kinney, Summer, Rawlinson and others who have full faith in the contemporary Sufism in the West.

Nasr, identifies three types of writings on Sufism in the West 1) Scholarships or translations done by orientalist like L. Massignon, R.A. Nicholson and A.J. Arberry. 2) Works by practitioners which Nasr calls "pseudo-spirituality inundating the West"(9) and 3) "authentic expositions" and "genuine teachings"(8-9) like that of Lings, Stoddart and others (8-9). According to Nasr, the last group reflects a non-academic, profound, and seriously spiritual investigation of Sufism in the West, and an investigation that in turn influences the first group. Nasr further recognises the authors of this group as belonging to traditional Sufi orders established in the West, which, with only a few exceptions, are closely associated with Islam (9).

Islamicists insist that the term "Sufism" can be used accurately only when referring to the mystical tradition developed within Islam. According to some, all religions come out of *tasawwuf*. According to some Sufis like Hazrat Inayat Khan, Sufis do not necessarily have to be Muslims. They do not have to practise Islam, nor need they abandon the religion into which they were born--thus the Western Sufis "[...] are in pursuit of perfecting

themselves and becoming more evolved human beings, rather aiming to lose themselves in order to become one with God. The focus of the student is perceived to be primarily on him--or herself" (Galín 15). Commenting on the Universal nature of Western Sufism, Lessing in her preface to Shah's *Seekers After Truth* notes:

Sufism is not particular to Islam, or the property of Islam, though for historic reasons it developed--in the public form--within the Islamic context. The great Sufi teachers in Islam all had innumerable Christian and Jewish pupils. Sufism predated Islam by thousands of years, under many different names, in a hundred different guises. (632)

Lessing's Connection to Sufism

Since Lessing was initiated into Western Sufism by Idries Shah, her novels reflect the departures of Western Sufism from *tasawwuf*. Idries Shah is hailed as the grand *shaikh* of the Sufis whose inspirational books enlightened the West about Sufism, the moderate face of Islam. Most Western Sufis, who do not live in a Sufi community cannot practise *tasawwuf* as it was originally intended. They live their individual lives in their respective homes and gather to discuss Sufi concepts in theory, in workshops and seminars, usually at retreats that last for sometime. It appears that when Lessing absorbed Sufism originally through Shah's books and lectures in London, she encountered much more of Sufi thought than she did of Sufi practice of a Sufi community. When she began to study

Sufism under Shah's tutelage, Lessing did not have to abandon her Western socialisation and move into a community of Sufis to worship God. As a novelist firmly rooted in the Western tradition, she is able to read and think about classical Sufi practices without having to assume the passionate language of the Sufis or their lifestyle.

Placing Lessing among other Canonical Writers

Though mystics vary in the modes of apprehending reality and correspondingly in the images they use to signify the goals they pursue, all of them essentially go through an experience which is of a psychological and spiritual character. The phases of this experience--the slow shifts and transitions--are traceable in the very accent and tone of the mystics' language and evidence is further available from the images the mystics employ as appropriate to these phases. Mystical thought and the mystical attitude are curiously persistent in English literature, it is more evident in English poetry.

Spirituality in Literature

At the turn of the century, novelists wrote about the death of God, poets offered themselves as prophets of the secular age; many writers preached liberation and self exploration; and a few writers turned to Eastern traditions for their inspiration. E. M. Forster explored Hinduism and Islam as he found them in India; Herman Hesse explored the occult; C.S. Lewis

looked deeply into Christianity; while Lessing turned to Sufi truths as she encountered them in the West.

Robert Graves, the famous poet had acknowledged his firm faith in the development of extra-sensory perception and he wrote the Introduction to Idries Shah's *The Sufis* (1971). The spiritual sterility and the profound sense of gloom felt in the twentieth century are depicted in innumerable novels; but most of these writers have offered only broken or mundane solutions to the collective cries of humanity. In *The Waves* (1931) Virginia Woolf prescribes one of turning to one's friends for spiritual affirmation. Bernard feels "so imperfect, so weak, so unspeakably lonely" (267) without his friends that he is lost but for the comforting memories of his dead friends. He says, "some people go to priests; others to poetry; I to my friends [. . .] the touch of one person with another is all" (266). Atwood's solution to the absence of a satisfactory religion is this-worldly. Her protagonist in *Surfacing* (1976) turns to an ancient Indian religion more as an aid in this life rather than offering salvation in any other life after death. Flannery O'Connor's self-willed protagonist Hazel Motes in *Wise Blood* (1962) is frightened by the Jesus who haunts him. When his mother says "Jesus died to redeem you" (39), he retorts, "I never ast him" (39). This exchange is followed by his first incidence of self-mortification. He fills the bottoms of his shoes with stones and small rocks and walks in them for a mile thinking that "that ought to satisfy Him" (39). It is through sin, through transgression that Hazel realises that he cannot escape divinity.

Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) is one of a few works in modern fiction that directly addresses the failure, as well as the ongoing practice of, religion. The novel has three sections, entitled "Mosque," "Caves," and "Temple," representing Islam, Christianity and Hinduism. In the "Mosque" section we meet Dr. Aziz, who is a devout Indian Muslim and who considers all non-Muslims "infidels." In the "Caves" section we meet a true Christian, Mrs. Moore contrasted with the Brahmin professor Godbole. In the "Temple" section we witness the Hindu festival celebrating birth of child God Shri Krishna. The most striking aspect of these three characters is their sincere religiosity. In fact Forster's depiction of Hinduism in the novel far surpasses all testaments of faith expressed in Lessing's novels under the influence of Sufism. While Mrs. Moore is disappointed that in spite of "century after century of carnal embracement, [...] we are still no nearer understanding one another" (135). Her Eastern counterparts professor Godbole and Dr. Aziz have full faith in their respective religions. It becomes essential to note that Forster's models of religiosity are not Westerners, nor do they look to the Western people for emotional security.

Both Lessing and Forster have imported the spiritual content of their novels from Eastern traditions. In *A Passage to India*, Forster privileges the Indian characters like Dr. Aziz and Godbole over the British characters like Ronny, Adela, Mr. Feilding and even Mrs. Moore. By portraying the inspiring qualities of Dr. Aziz's Muslim tradition and Godbole's Hindu

religiosity, he puts across the message that there is something valuable to be learned from the East. Muge Galin observes:

For [Forster] as for Lessing, spirituality is transformative, not this-worldly in its scope. Forster's and Lessing's depictions of spirituality in literature are serious, and not only a symbolic substitute for what's missing, nor a playful exercise in artistic freedom. (171)

Forster's protagonists observe mystically oriented Hindu festivities from a foreigner's distance--unlike Lessing's characters who are deeply involved in the Sufi tradition. Even Mrs. Moore keeps herself at a safe distance from Godbole's Hinduism while Lessing's Martha, or Emily, are not mere observers but participants in the mystical events. Another point of difference between the two novelists is: Forster is less overtly didactic; he is satisfied simply to present the differences between the British and the Indians and their religious traditions as he sees them. Eventhough Forster strongly resents British colonialism in India, he never assumes the role of a prophet delivering sermons from the pulpit. On the other hand, we find Lessing foregrounding the didactic and concerning herself very little with the sugarcoating that can help her readers to swallow the bitter pill of her sermons. This accounts for the disparity in the critical reception of the two novelists.

Lessing's Background and Main Influences

Doris Lessing was born in 1919 in Kermanshah, Persia, as the first child of Emily Maude McVeagh and her husband Alfred Cook Taylor. Her father was a bank clerk who had left England after the First World War, in search of a less constrictive life in the East. In 1927, the family moved to Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), where her father obtained a grant for land from the government. The young Lessing referred to her childhood as "hellishly lonely." She often wandered on the veld alone to shoot a game; this early freedom from the confinements of the female role gave her lifelong independence of mind. The visionary elements in her writing, which shine through even the most realistic of her surfaces, owe much to her father's influence and to her own solitary childhood experiences on the veld.

Lessing's Childhood Experiences

Lessing recently commented that unhappy childhoods seem to produce fiction writers. In order to escape from being unhappy, she started reading books avidly, and these books ordered from London fed her imagination, laying out other worlds to escape into. Lessing's early reading included Dickens, Scott, Stevenson, Kipling; later she discovered D.H. Lawrence, Stendhal, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Bed time stories also nurtured her youth: her mother told them to the children and Doris herself kept her younger brother awake, spinning out tales. Doris's early years were also spent absorbing her father's bitter memories of World War I, taking them in as a kind of "poison." At the age of nineteen, she married

Frank Wisdom and had two children. A few years later, feeling trapped in a persona that she feared would destroy her, she left her family. Soon she was drawn to the like-minded members of the Left Book Club, a group of communists, "who read everything and who did not think it remarkable to read." Gottfried Lessing was a central member of the group; they got married and had a son. During the post-war years, Lessing became increasingly disillusioned with the Communist movement which she left altogether in 1954. These experiences form the basis for *Children of Violence*, which she published at intervals over the next seventeen years (1952-69). By 1949, Lessing had moved to London with her young son. In 1950, she published her first novel, *The Grass Is Singing* and began her career as a professional writer. Doris Lessing's background has been a powerful influence on her fiction. She has written "we use our parents like recurring dreams to be entered into when needed. They are always there for love or hate" ("My Father" 85). She has described her father as "not living in the real world" but her mother as "brave and resourceful" (91) but her sympathies clearly lie with her father. Martha Quest's parents in *Landlocked* (1965), Alfred Quest and May Quest, are modified versions of Lessing's own parents. Her parents have left their mark on her work, not only in her characterisation of them in her novels, but also in that the clash of their personalities seem to have been a motivating force compelling her to be a writer. In fact Lessing appears to have combined the "practicality and cleverness" of her mother and the "dreams, ideas and imaginings" of her

father in her fiction and ultimately to her it is the non-rational which is seen as a source of hope and salvation.

Lessing's Literary Career

Lessing's fiction is deeply autobiographical, much of it emerging out of her experiences in Africa. Drawing upon her childhood memories and her serious engagement with politics and social concerns, Lessing has written about the clash of cultures, the gross injustices of racial inequality, the struggle among opposing elements within an individual's own personality, and the conflict between the individual conscience and the collective good. Lessing's literary career spans more than fifty years, and during that long span, her focus has shifted. Critical attempts to pin her down and label her as "Marxist" or "feminist" or more recently a "mystic" have been superseded by the evolution of her ideas. It is almost as if by the time she comes to write a novel she had already moved on from the ideological force which motivated it. Ruth Whittaker comments on her keen sensitivity like this: "Like a highly sensitive cosmic seismograph, she has a striking ability to detect cultural shifts in the universal consciousness before they actually manifest. This makes her work [...] prophetic, [...]" (3). She wrote about the problems of apartheid and the evils of colonialism and racism before it was in everybody's minds; in fact her first novel *G/S* is widely acclaimed as a highly successful colonial novel. In her major and most controversial novel, *The Golden Notebook* (1962), she brilliantly explores the acute struggle of the "free woman" to survive and create for herself a meaningful life in a man's

world; her holistic approach to madness and dreams depicted in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971) and *The Summer Before the Dark* (1973) was in advance of what is widely accepted; her warnings about the likelihood of a nuclear holocaust portrayed in *The Four-Gated City* (1969) are still not taken seriously by the majority of the population. She herself is always impatient to move on, and aware that her views will soon seem to her not inaccurate but outdated. It appears that Lessing's principal interest lies not in any specific ideology, or empirical truths about any section of society, but in the nature of change itself. In her Stony Brook interview with Jonah Raskin she observes: "What interests me more than anything is how our minds are changing, how our ways of perceiving reality are changing" (*Voice* 63).

Lessing's Communist Phase

During the Second World War she joined a communist group in Rhodesia, which she saw as a way of fighting apartheid; but she was quick to perceive the gap between theory and practice of Marxism, a situation she subtly exploits with some irony in *A Ripple from the Storm* (1958). But she very much appreciated the unifying vision underlying Marxism. In the 1971 preface to *GN* she says:

Marxism looks at things as a whole and in relation to each other--or tries to [...]. A person who has been influenced by Marxism takes it for granted that an event in Siberia will affect one in Botswana. I think it is possible that Marxism was the

first attempt, for our time, outside the formal religions, at a world-mind, a world ethic. (14-15)

The idea of unity is a powerful dynamic in Mrs. Lessing's work. Each novel is part of her research into how it can be achieved, and potential solutions such as Marxism, feminism, mysticism are examined within her fiction.

Her *Retreat to Innocence* (1956) is only one of her socialist realist novels which can be described as overtly propagandist. *FGC* captures very vividly the atmosphere of communist and left-wing circles in Britain in the 1960s, the feelings of disillusionment and betrayal. Political rhetoric is attacked in *The Canopus in Argos: Archives* series (1979-83) and by the time she comes to write *The Good Terrorist* (1985) she is openly satirical about the ways in which jargon is used indiscriminately as a substitute for thought-out opinions.

The most lasting legacy of Lessing's political commitment is not the content of her novels, but her dialectical method of working. Instead of accepting her raw material, as it were, and trying to make sense of it, she puts up its antithesis; the resulting creative clash makes a new synthesis. Thus apartheid, ideologically opposed, is shown in all its tragic potential; motherhood and domesticity, instead of being ratified, are countered and challenged, and the woman grows. Thus systems based on opposites have always attracted Lessing--the dialectics of Marxism, the juxtaposed

conscious/unconscious of Freudian psychology, the Jungian analysis of the psyche as a system of paired opposites, the mysticism and rationalism of the Sufis. Lessing's formative years in a Rhodesian farm, the temperamental incompatibilities of her parents made Lessing keenly aware of opposites. Thus oppositions between nature and civilisation, between the privileged and the exploited, between the pragmatic and the visionary, have engrained their dialogic pattern on Lessing's world-view.

Since the mid 1960s, Lessing has been regarded as one of the early voices of the feminist movement and *GN* one of its key texts. In the 1971 preface she rejected this view declaring that it was not "a trumpet for women's liberation" and goes on to say that it "was written as if the attitudes that had been created by the Women's Liberation movements already existed"(9). The truth is that she is a woman novelist whose antennae sensed the crucial issues of feminism and wrote about them long before they became common currency.

Lessing's Jungian Affiliation

At a particular stage in her life, Lessing embarked on a period of psychotherapy with a Jungian therapist, and the influence of Jung's ideas permeates the texture of her fiction. Particularly important to her is his concept of "individuation," the process by which an individual works toward "wholeness" through acknowledgement and incorporation of the different aspects of personality. Throughout *Children of Violence* series, the

protagonist Martha Quest is aware of the disparate and incompatible elements of her character and the novels describe her progress towards self-knowledge and transformation. Marxist thinkers and humanistic psychologists see the individual as alienated from his potential which, under the given conditions, is not realised. Marx's approach has as its central issue the belief in the possibility of a form of social organisation in which the full development of the individual potential can be fulfilled. He posits that the individual's problems will be overcome when the conditions of his/her life will allow the complete realisation of man as a social being. Intrinsically connected with this belief is the belief in rationality which is highly valued as a weapon in the struggle for emancipation. Humanistic Psychology, on the other hand had sought a solution in the potentiality of the unconscious, which according to it, is not fulfilled and is the cause of the individual's alienation and sense of predicament. It is here that we can see the connecting line and deduce the rationale for Lessing's partial allegiance to these ideologies. Lessing has examined the Marxist argument in that domain and found its exclusive dependence on collective organisation unviable as a solution. She has therefore invested it with an interest in the individual's inner realm of consciousness.

Jungian concepts of the unconscious and paradigm of the one-dimensional Western man--the belief that Western man has progressed in such a fashion that he has sacrificed his unconscious realm in order to fulfil his social role--are crucial to an understanding of Lessing's characters (*Man*

94). Lessing found Jung's paradigm of the psyche more appealing than that of Freud, for Jung is far more optimistic than Freud in envisioning the possibility that man might again become an integrated whole. Jung develops the idea of "personal unconscious" and the "collective unconscious" in *The Archetype and the Collective Unconscious* (1968) thus:

In addition to our immediate consciousness, which is of a thoroughly personal nature and which we believe to be the only empirical psyche [...] there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal and impersonal nature, which is identical in all individuals. (9:43)

This collective unconscious consists of primordial images which recur as motifs throughout myths, dreams, fantasies and fairy tales. He called these "archetypes" and they can take the form of, for example, a wise old man, a mother-figure, a seafarer, a trickster or a child. In her fiction, Lessing draws heavily on the mythical patterns such as the Golden Age, the Fall and rebirth, and an understanding of her work depends on our awareness of this framework.

Lessing and Anti-psychiatry

Mental breakdown is a recurrent theme in Lessing's fiction. Lessing's views on madness are similar to those of the clinical psychologist, R.D. Laing who sees the so-called madness as a normal reaction to the

fragmented state of the world, and also that it may be the beginning of self-healing. In *The Politics of Experience* (1967), Laing explains how mental illness, primarily schizophrenia, may serve as a psychological breakthrough since it could lead to a healing journey through “inner” space (128) but he also warns of the dangers of the experience and equally dangerous situation of those who are reluctant to take it. While Mary Turner in *GIS* succumbs to madness first and finally to death, Lessing’s later protagonists like Anna Wulf and Martha Quest confront the most feared and hated aspects of the self and achieve a healing unity. In fact, Lessing insists on the need for her characters to undergo this experience, this facing of evil, in order that they are presented with another perspective on themselves, and on the world.

Because Lessing’s viewpoint is continually evolving, she shrugs off earlier influences or rather, she incorporates them, and moves on. For this reason, she tends to resent critics who emphasise her former allegiances, and in the early 1960s when she began to be a student of the Sufi cult she looked back on Jung as part of much wider philosophy. She has said:

I think Jung’s views are good as far as they go, but he took them from Eastern philosophers who go much further. Ibn El Arabi and El Ghazzali, in the middle ages, had more developed ideas about the “unconscious,” collective or otherwise, than Jung, among others. He was a limited man. But useful as far as he went. (qtd. in Rubenstein 231)

Lessing and Sufism

Since writing her early novels, Lessing had been consciously concerned not with political solutions to social problems; but with understanding the relationship between the public and private conscience, for she believes that the hope for man lies in the balance between his private and social selves. In her first programmatic essay, "The Small Personal Voice," Lessing acknowledges this balance as her central concern: "It is a balance which must be continuously tested and reaffirmed [...]. The point of rest should be the writer's recognition of man, the responsible individual, [...]" (12). Implicitly those of Lessing's works which demonstrate the tragic effect of not connecting the private and public sphere, of not consistently balancing the inner and outer life, or not honestly and openly expressing the affections reassert that intention. The search for a means to fulfil the individual's potential is thus at the core of Lessing's interest since the outset of her career. It forms the dynamic impulse in her canon and serves as the common denominator in her allegiance to the thought of Marxism, the psychology of Jung and Laing as well as the modes of thought of Sufi philosophy.

In her autobiographical book, *Going Home* (1957), she explained that she was attracted to the Rhodesian communists not because of any specific interest in their politics, but because they confirmed her vision of faith in man and his responsibility (103,311). It is further significant that she

consistently defines communism in terms of the individual's importance, seldom discussing it in terms of class struggle or economic progress:

Communism [...] was a great, marvelous vision which was much bigger than merely eliminating poverty and redistributing wealth and that sort of thing. It was a vision of a society where every individual was immensely important, where there was no emphasis on colour, class, or creed, there was no hurting each other. Every person had a chance, and the right to develop himself. This was the dream, and it's why people are socialists, why, I was. ("Doris Lessing" 5)

It becomes clear that far from totally acquiring the communist position, Doris Lessing reworked and qualified its issues. Critics have referred to her break with the Communist Party in 1957 and her public criticism of "Smart Set Socialists" in *New Statesman* in 1961 as evidence of her shift away from political and social interests (822). However, it is more productive to note that her version of communism was from the very start qualified by her interest in the individual and his potential capacity for conscious development, and that her concern with political and social problems has not receded since her break with the Communist Party. Lessing is unique in attempting to reconcile the residue of values from Marxism with the Sufi teaching that the individual may accelerate the evolutionary development of human consciousness through his or her efforts to transcend mental limits.

Distinctiveness of Lessing's Realism

Lessing's first teachers in fiction were the great nineteenth century novelists like Tolstoy, Stendhal, Dostoevsky, Balzac, Turgenev, Chekhov--the realists and her interest in furnishing her novels with a solid realistic background, gives rise to critical approaches referring to her as a writer in the tradition approved by Lukacs, and labelling her as "the greatest realist of our time" (Johnson 66). A closer study of Lessing's allegiance to Lukacs reveals her affinities with some of Lukacs' theoretical propositions but also uncovers points of differences in that early stage. She shares Lukacs' belief that a true novel should strive to penetrate deep into "the view of the world, the ideology or *weltanschauung*" (Lukacs, *Meaning* 19). In each of her novels from *G/S*, to her later novels including the science fiction series, Lessing portrays experience in her novels as a social journey, reflecting social and political conflicts. Her characters are individuals who nevertheless represent and embody the general social laws and historical circumstances of their time. Yet they do not correspond fully to Lukacs' theory that "Man is a social animal" whose "individual existence cannot be distinguished from his social and historical environment" (Lukacs, *Realism* 19). This realistic acceptance of historical determinism is not agreeable to Lessing because of her immense faith in man's capability for psychological and spiritual evolution which explains her interest in R.D. Laing, Carl Jung and Sufi teaching. She thus breaks with an idea of realism that implies the passive observation of an already given world and transcends Lukacs' problematic dichotomy of realism representing life as it is and life as it

should be. She defines realism as the “art which springs so vigorously and naturally from a strongly held, though not necessarily intellectually defined, view of life that it absorbs symbolism” (*Voice 4*). While the great artists of the nineteenth century had different religious, political and aesthetic convictions, they shared “a climate of ethical judgment; they shared certain values; they were humanists” (Lessing, *Voice 4*). She narrows down the meaning of the general term “humanism” by speaking of “the warmth, the compassion, the humanity, [and] the love of the people” (*Voice 6*). Lessing is committed to these qualities, to this belief in man.

While sharpening her definition of humanism and indicating her own theme, she points out the limitation of two contemporary schools. With obvious oversimplification, she contends that the depiction of man in both socialist and democratic literature is “a falling away from central vision” (*Voice 11*) and argues that the antithetical vision of East and West are only opposite sides of the same coin. One sees man as the isolated individual unable to communicate, helpless and solitary; the other as collective man with a collective conscience. Lessing’s repudiating the portrayal of man solely as an individual or solely as a member of the collective may be taken as an *a priori* protest against “either/or” interpretation of her work. Further it appears, that she will strive to render “the point of rest” (*Voice 14*). When asked whether the role of the novelist is “to show us the world as it is, or the world as it should be, or the world as it might be,” by Susan Stamberg, she answers: “Why so you make it ‘or, or, or? It could be and, and, and.’ You

don't have to have an either/or over this one [...]. I don't think reality is either/or. It is always a question of interaction, and extremes often interact." ("An Interview" 4). Thus while her early novels are not fully realistic, her later novels are not a radical shift to fantasy and speculative fiction.

Lessing's Initiation into Sufism

In spite of her varied interests in Marxism, psycho-politics of Laing, Jungian psychology and Sufism, a closer study of her novels reveals that at the root of all these diverse trends is an interest in the individual and the means of fulfilling his potential in relation to his community. While the relationships between the individual and the collective is an element of the political thought of the Left, in the Marxist tradition, it is also the basis of Humanistic Psychology as expounded by R.D. Laing and the psychology of Jung. The state of a transcendental realm, *tajalli* experienced by the Sufis also endows the seeker with "a dynamic forward movement" (Shah, *Sufis* 276). It is precisely that aspect of Sufi psychology--the faith in the individual's potential for further evolution to serve mankind which particularly attracts Lessing. It will be illuminating to note Lessing's comment on this central premise in Sufism: "Man has had the possibility of conscious development for ten thousand years, say the Sufis [...]. I have believed this all my life, and that the idea is central to Sufism is one reason I was attracted to it" ("Ancient" 78). She then found that Sufism as taught by Shah, which claims to be the reintroduction of an ancient teaching suitable for this time and this place. She observes, "it is not some regurgitated stuff

from the East or watered down Islam or anything like that" ("The Need to Tell" 79).

Lessing and Idries Shah

Lessing explains her inclination to Sufi thought thus:

As for people like myself, unable to admire organised religions of any kind, this philosophy shows where to look for answers to questions put by society and experience--questions not answered by the official purveyors of knowledge, secular or sacred. ("Ancient" 78)

According to the Sufis, the Sufi Path is "the Path of Love," referring to the search for God or one's Higher Self, with whom the Sufi mystic enters into a love relationship. The line from the Koran "He loveth them and they love Him" (5.59) supports the Sufi doctrine of love and authorises "the idea of a trinity of Lover, Loved and Love" (Arberry 21). This is why most Classical Sufi poetry is written in the form of love poetry in which the poet addresses, beseeches and longs for the Beloved (God) and it is depicted as an ecstatic, even erotic love, and not a Platonic liaison. Lessing's Sufism contains within it some of the features of Classical Sufi tradition. She believes in the possibility of individual and world amelioration, and her vision encompasses not only the earth but the whole of the universe.

Lessing firmly believes that Sufi literature is integrated into the ordinary fabric of life. She endorses Lukacs' dictum that art should be integrated into reality: "Sufi literature, as well as the practices used by its exponents, must be regarded as locally valid extrapolations from a centre of experience which underlies its outward form" ("The Ones Who Know" 514). In spite of the incompatibility between Marxist concepts and the Sufi transcendental experience, both aim at fulfilling the individual's potential in relation to the world. Although the former is exclusively earth-centred and political, the latter believes in the co-existence of spiritual and material realities, and both insist on placing the individual in a larger social context. Thus it is possible to conclude that far from indicating a shift from one philosophy to the other, all these intellectual, psychological and mystical influences should be regarded as complementary. Reading Lessing's works from the one-sided perspective of any of these exclusively, seriously distorts her methods as well as her meaning.

Lessing's Connection to Sufism: its Distinctiveness

Before evaluating Lessing's complex Sufi message to her readers (especially in the West), we need to consider Lessing's brand of Sufism which is summed up by Galin: "Lessing writes of Sufi truths and teaches *islam* or active surrender to the higher will of Canopus or God, while she also demands of her characters uncompromising independence and twentieth century style of rationalism and skepticism" (155).

In a letter to Mona Knapp in 1982, Lessing wrote "I became interested in the Sufi way of thought because I was already thinking like that, before I had heard of Sufis or Sufism" (qtd. in Galin 63). One of the reasons for Lessing's preference for Sufism has to do with its comprehensive nature, its flexibility and its resistance to pigeonholing. While Westerners (in particular) are often obsessed with either/or categories, Sufis are both political *and* spiritual. They are by definition anything but one-dimensional. They are neither only this-worldly nor only other-worldly. One of the central notions of Sufism is the evolutionary capacity of mankind and this Sufi thought confirmed Lessing's insights and validated what she had suspected all along: the possibility of individual and world betterment. Variations of this belief in evolution are echoed in all of Lessing's works under one guise or another, as the following two passages from novels written twenty years apart demonstrate: Doeg, the protagonist in *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* (1982) says: "Do not sleep in all day in your dark rooms but rouse your consciousness, your knowledge, do not lose it in sleep" (49). These words recall Saul Green's words to Anna Wulf in *GN*, "We will use all our energies, all our talents, into pushing that boulder another inch up the mountain [...] and that is why we are not useless after all" (618). Both these passages signal a positive outlook. Thus "there is progress and evolution in Lessing's vision of the world, which does not align with Camus's heroism of the absurd" (Galin 63).

Another tenet of the Sufis is the relative unimportance of the intellect and the process of logical thought, compared with the value of understanding intuitively or through experience. Therefore she makes use of Sufi teaching stories to dislocate the listener's rational mind from its ordinary responses.

Sufi Teaching Stories

Noted Islamic scholar Fazlur Rahman admits that popular Sufi preachers "exerted powerful influence on the masses by enlarging Qur'anic stories with the aid of materials borrowed from all kinds of sources, Christian, Jewish, Gnostic, and even Buddhist and Zoroastrian" (*Islam* 132). Lessing has been actively involved in the dissemination of these stories in the West by way of giving public readings of Sufi stories and announcing the publication of collections by Shah, as well as by writing introductions and prefaces to collections of teaching stories such as *Learning How to Learn* (1981) and *Seekers After Truth* (1982) by Idries Shah, *The Tale of The Four Dervishes* (1975) by Amina Shah, and *Kalila and Dimna* (1980) by Ramsay Wood. In the preface to Shah's *Seekers After Truth* Lessing writes that "the teaching story is not to be considered as a parable, which the Sufis use, too; for the parable has a more limited aim, such as the inculcation of a moral, or ethics, or to transmit information" (633). The Sufis have been using carefully constructed stories for teaching purposes for thousands of years. Though on the surface they often appear to be little more than fairy or folk tales, the Sufis hold that they enshrine--in their characters, plots and

imagery--pattern relationships that nurture a part of the mind not reachable in more conventional ways, thus increasing our understanding, flexibility and breadth of vision. Familiarisation with this body of material can eventually provide answers to questions about our origins and our destiny.

Sufi Teaching Stories : What do they Do?

The teaching stories are told in public and form part of the outer activity of the dervishes. They are intended to lay a basis of knowledge about Sufism and its characteristic methods of thought. The "inner dimensions" of teaching stories, however are held to make them capable of revealing, according to the stage of development of the student, more and more planes of significance. The Sufi teaching story aims to shake the readers' existing world-view to such an extent that one stops looking at the world through a single lens. Thus the story serves as a tool for growth and enlightenment. In her introduction to Amina Shah's collection, Lessing writes: "In whatever form it appears, whatever the kind of language, each tale has its place, its kind of pleasure, and each will appeal to the people who, for that time, are right for it, as it is right for them" (xiv).

A sample protagonist of Sufi teaching stories is the popular folk figure known as Nasreddin Hodja in Turkey, as Mulla Nasruddin in Iran, as Joha in North Africa, and by many other names in other parts of the world. Nobody really knows who Nasruddin was, where he lived or when. This is truly in character, for the whole intention is to provide a figure who cannot really be

characterised, and who is timeless. It is the message, not the man, which is important to the Sufis. Stories and jokes about him have been made available to English speakers by many translators, including Shah. He is frequently referred to as "the Hodja or the Mulla," meaning "spiritual teacher." He is known and enjoyed by all in the Middle East as a spiritual teacher, a fool, a joker, a judge, and trickster as well as a victim; his witty stories are still told in tea houses, coffee houses, and houses throughout North Africa, The Middle East, and Central Asia. Nasruddin, in his capacity as a Sufi teacher, makes frequent use of the dervish technique of himself playing the part of the unenlightened man in the story, in order to highlight a truth. Many Westerners who are not familiar with the Nasreddin Hodja stories, find them silly. But when read with an awareness of the Sufi tradition, these stories tend to change the form of the thinking process itself.

Lessing's Main Deviation from Western Sufism

One of the major implications of the influence of Sufism on Lessing is that Sufism enables her to offer more faith and hope in her novels than she had before. As she imports Sufi faith, she has radically departed from the secularised world-view of the twentieth century West. This Sufi trait distinguishes her novels from those of her Western contemporaries and places her somewhere between the Eastern and Western traditions. The second advantage of Sufi faith "is the fact that the fresh subject matter she found in Sufism precipitated a new perspective that instigated her choice of a new genre and a new style of narrative" (Galín 154). Sufism has added a

new layer of thought, a new set of stories, images, and new blood to her work. This enables her to write on metaphysical subjects with great authority.

Although the resolutions in Lessing's novels may not be as positive or satisfying as the optimistic messages in *tasawwuf* poetry written by devout Muslims, the influence of Sufism has made Lessing's work more optimistic and more constructive than it might have been, and definitely more promising of a future than the works of most other canonical modern Western poets and writers. Greene notes that Lessing's novels "allow the confidence that things make a kind of sense; they offer [...] a kind of faith" (*Doris Lessing* 33). The new race of mutants who come into being in the aftermath of the apocalypse in *FGC* and the transformed Emily who survives the apocalypse in *MS* bear testimony to Lessing's optimism. It is important to note that although some of Lessing's fiction is suggestive of spiritual themes and mystical solutions, she has affirmed that she is not religious by nature. In her 1990 interview with Jean-Maurice de Montremy she said, "I am absolutely, childishly, allergic to religions--even though I have the greatest respect for our nature, which is profoundly religious" ("A Writer" 199). Though Lessing writes persistently of the collapse of society, and the existing order, she is able to conceive a way out of the realms of chaos and destruction, because of her knowledge of Sufism. Muge Galin writes:

Words in the titles of her novels such as *survivor*, *representative*, *diary*, *memoir*, or *notebook* suggest that only a single person or limited records are left behind to report the end of the world; and words such as *hell*, *dark*, *storm*, *violence*, or *descent* in various titles forewarn the reader that the end is near, and that it will be grim. (55)

In spite of the signs of destruction, Lessing's optimism is noteworthy; and in a 1980 interview with Christopher Bigsby, Lessing elaborated on her optimism:

Since the history of man began, has there been anything else but disaster, plagues, miseries, wars? Yet something has survived of it. Now our view is, of course, that we're onwards and upwards all the time. I just have an open mind about all that. But I do not think that if we have survived so much in the past we are survivors, if nothing else, and if nothing else we are extremely prolific. ("The Need" 85)

Unlike the majority of Western writers who diagnose the problems but offer no solutions, Lessing has the vantage point of Sufism from which she tries to offer hope. She can conceive of an evolved society or the evolution of the whole cosmos based on her Sufi faith in the spiritual growth and mystical transformation even under the worst circumstances.

Lessing's Didacticism

Yet another impact of Sufism on Lessing's writing is her relentless didacticism, much to the displeasure of her critics and readers alike. Western Sufism accommodated Lessing's persistent questions regarding higher powers and life on other planets. By refusing to sugarcoat her prophecy of doom and rebirth, Lessing incurred the displeasure of many of her critics like Laurie Stone and Roberta Rubenstein. But Rubenstein concedes that in spite of her didacticism, Lessing writes about "the mind discovering, interpreting and ultimately shaping its own reality" (7). Galin observes: "[...] the didactic style with which Lessing anxiously delivers her lessons appears to have been enhanced by Sufism that has permeated her life and mind" (28). As such, instead of absolute rejection of her novelistic style, it would be wise for us to appreciate her courageous insistence on adopting the value system of another tradition.

Having examined the distinctive features of Lessing's Sufism let us examine the chief Sufi elements reflected in her novels written after her initiation into Sufism. Even though critics refer to Lessing's allegiance to Sufi philosophy with the publication of *FGC* in 1969, her interest in that philosophy predates that period. Evidence of her interest in Sufism emerges in her article, "What Really Matters" published in 1963, in which Lessing criticises current methods of education. Like the Sufis, she argues against the compartmentalisation of thought and advocates a new method of education which would operate by exerting "shocks" on a candidate as a

means of initiating the individual into a new awareness: "education should ideally be a series of shocks. Every child should be dazzled, startled, shaken into realising continuously his or her unique extraordinary potentiality" ("What Really Matters" 98). This method of learning suggested by Lessing is precisely the method advocated by Sufis as a necessity to escape the trap of customary thinking-patterns. In *Learning How to Learn* (1981), Shah explains how such methods are useful to "shock" and "jolt" people as a means of overcoming the difficulty of transcending limited one-dimensional thinking into new realms of understanding (128). Further evidence of the early influence of Sufism on Lessing appears in her interview with Nissa Torrents entitled "Testimony to Mysticism," where for the first time she asserts that her interest in Sufism started "at the beginning of the 1960s" (66). Thus it would be safe to conclude that by the time Lessing started to write *Landlocked*, she had become an ardent student of Sufism and her novels from *L* onwards reflect "elements" of Sufism. Lessing who joined the Communist group in Rhodesia during the Second World War had expressed her whole-hearted enthusiasm and faith in Marxism, but resigned from the Communist Party after the 20th Congress of the Russian Communist Party in 1956. In *RS* she demonstrates not so much her disillusion with Marxism, but rather her growing certainty that its rhetoric was far removed from its effectiveness as a political force. Thus, Lessing's initiation into Sufism occurred after her Communist phase.

Lessing Criticism

Let us examine critics' overwhelming response to Lessing's turn to mysticism. The fiction of Lessing, which rejects simple binary opposites and insists on a construction of reality that rejects nothing, but includes everything by saying "and, and, and" rather than "either/or" defies the pigeonholing of her critics. Her themes include a wide range such as race, the conflict of generations, the man-woman relationship, the problems of the creative artist and politics. But beneath these undeniably vital concerns is an even more profound and utterly relentless investigation of the nature of reality. Lessing's self-imposed task has been on the massive philosophical scale of writers like George Eliot, Tolstoy or Proust, all of whom have prominent places in her literary pantheon. Lessing, however, is different and special in that she has explored philosophical questions through the medium of female experience. In Lessing's books, women and women's experience are seen as important enough to pose the big questions.

Critics' contradictory responses to Lessing's books reveal the fact that they are not able to engage meaningfully with her works. This tendency is extended in reading even her philosophical grounding. Ingrid Holmquist has referred to Lessing's increasing interest in Sufism as evidence of her retreat from social and rational concerns, indicating her indulgence in decadent attitudes. Michael L. Magie in his "Doris Lessing and Romanticism" finds fault with Lessing for deserting rationalism and realism for irrationalism and mysticism. He notes:

Lessing offers what is likely to be, culturally, for all of us, the least hopeful model and exhortation imaginable, being not only delusive but indulgent and a spur to self indulgence. She portrays our collective situation as hopeless lightened only by the adaptation of illusion. (522)

In 1978, Paul Schlueter commented that: "Most Lessing criticism thus far has been thematic in nature, with such fairly recent excursions as Sufism or Jungian or Laingian influences, or the like, still new enough not to have impressed themselves into our collective critical estimation" ("Schlueter" 6).

About Lessing's involvement in Sufism, Sprague and Tiger note, "That [Lessing] has turned to mystic themes of madness as spiritual release is no minor aberration: she herself converted to Sufism under Idries Shah" (2). Fishburn confirms Sprague's observation: "It is widely agreed among scholars that most if not all of Lessing's fiction qualifies as a kind of Sufi teaching story, intended to have profound and lasting influence on the way her readers think" (*Doris Lessing* 15). Summming up the growth of Lessing criticism in 1988, Kaplan and Rose note, "Lessing scholarship has taken a giant step, comparable to Lessing's own leap from Africa to Argos and beyond" (37). In the 1990's Fahim defends Lessing's inclination toward Sufism by elaborating upon the Sufi equilibrium in her novels "between the rational and non-ratitonal modes of consciousness" (13). Greene acknowledges Lessing's cosmic perspective: "the move from history to myth

takes Lessing back to the oldest knowledge of the race, to those ancient repositories of wisdom, the Bible, the Koran and Sufic lore” (*Doris Lessing* 26). Muge Galin tries to “foreground the difference that the Sufi context makes for understanding [...], some previously unexplored dimensions of Lessing’s fiction, and [...] some of the larger issues about East-West connections” (4).

All these critiques bring to light the force of Lessing’s Sufi affiliation; however, Lessing’s fiction continues to remain a major stimulus for fresh critical and theoretical activities. A lot more research needs to be undertaken on Lessing’s characters’ spiritual quests on the Sufi Path, and the varied stages of their spiritual progress. It is hoped that this study will initiate the process; it does not reject the previous Lessing scholarship, but adds to it. Lessing’s readers, particularly Western, were quite disconcerted with her abandoning her rational world-view. It is to be understood that Lessing has not given up her political, psychological and social stands by moving into the Sufi firmament, but she has added to her richly varied interests. In the following chapters an attempt is made to establish how Lessing’s mysticism is not a retreat into a mode which is “regressive, irrational and religious” as Ingrid Holmquist asserts (159), on the contrary, it is a means of conscious self-development, whereby with one’s own efforts and under expert guidance, one can transcend ordinary limitations and therefore strengthen the hope in the potential of the individual to serve mankind. A discerning critic like Margaret Drabble notes, “Lessing is

prophetic, but not in a vague, exhortatory, passionate mode" (52). The arguments raised in this thesis distinguish Lessing's brand of Sufism tempered by her Western outlook from the passionate optimistic Sufism of *tasawwuf* poets. It appears that the realm of "higher consciousness" explored by Sufi philosophy, the ascent to a higher transcendental realm, *tajalli*--a state which indicates "a breakthrough of the limitations of time and space" (Shah, *Sufis* 297) attracted Lessing and since then she has embraced it with passionate fervour.

The Major Sufi Elements in Lessing's Novels

All these novels written after *GN*, that is *L*, *FGC*, *BDH*, *SBD* and *MS* show remarkable influences of different aspects of Sufism. These by no means constitute an exhaustive list of Lessing's Sufi influenced novels. Critics like Shadia S. Fahim, Muge Galin and Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis have underscored the Sufi influence in her science fiction series. Nevertheless, taken together, these five novels reflect the different ways in which Lessing manipulates and incorporates Sufi ideas.

The modifier "major" in the title of the thesis needs some explanation. *FGC* has been unanimously acclaimed as one of Lessing's major novels. *BDH*, *SBD* and *MS* have also been adjudged to be significant for different reasons. *L* appears to have elicited the least critical attention, but constitutes a major link in the Lessing canon when viewed through the Sufi lens.

The search to comprehend one's self appears to be the central preoccupation of Lessing's protagonists in the five novels under study. In eastern texts, the "self" represents "purely spiritual idea, but in Western psychology the 'self' stands for a totality which comprises instincts, physiological and semi-physiological phenomena" (Jung, *Collected Works* 502). To know one's self is to realise it and realisation is liberation or deliverance. Deliverance does not signify a departure from the spatio-temporal region to a different plane. It implies only an individualistic inner light; a Hallaj-like ecstatic union with God. In Lessing's novels deliverance appears to be more or less a synthesis of the Marxian concept of the deliverance of the individual from the entanglement of socio-economic machinery of oppression and the spiritualistic view of the liberation of the individual self from worldly illusions.

The role of the initiate, and the guide and the means of communication between them and the success with which they mutually transform each other appear to be a major Sufi trace in *L*. The ease and confidence with which the initiate successfully indulges in extra-sensory perception and telepathy is another important Sufi element which finds expression in *L*. In *FGC* with the cosmic perspective obtained under the guidance of Thomas Stern, Martha continues her Sufi quest to know the essence of her being and completes it under Lynda. The various stages of Martha's quest to discover her Sufi self is yet another Sufi element. Lessing, like the Sufis, believes that mankind evolves through stress. In

Sufi understanding, the manifestations of schizophrenia or multiple personalities can be regarded as a sign of one's incomplete state and one's need to "work" on oneself. This "work" very often involves "intentional suffering" to produce a "new" person. In *BDH* Watkins's efforts fail and he does not achieve his goal but yet he is an evolving mystic. Kate Brown, (in *SBD*) on the other hand, in her quest for self-knowledge pays heed to her dreams and emerges successfully out of her one-dimensional existence. Apart from being a Sufi teaching story, *MS*, stresses the need for a "multi-levelled" perception on the part of the Sufi. The process of voiding oneself is an essential step toward acquiring real self-knowledge. Sufis insist that people must throw off the constricting bonds of conditioning with its faulty one-dimensional perception.

These novels taken together, provide an illustration of the significant aspects of Sufism: ordinary life contrasted with the Sufi Way, the role of the teaching stories on the Sufi Way, the role of the masters and disciples, guides and initiates, life as a result of the Sufi Way, and the steps an evolving mystic takes towards enlightenment. The term "Sufi elements" need some clarification. The use of Sufi teaching stories, the arduous Sufi quest with its many stations and states, the role of the initiate and the *shaikh*, and the means of communication between them and the final outcome of their quest, the attainment of the Sufi equilibrium, and the concept of Perfect Man--these are the significant Sufi elements explored. Irrational elements like extra-sensory perception and telepathy, the

manifestation of schizophrenia or multiple personalities, the self-“work” attempted by the seeker, the intentional suffering courted by the quester, also come under the umbrella of Sufi elements. Paying heed to one’s dreams, throwing off the patterns of conditioned behaviour, the process of voiding oneself, “working” towards the amelioration of the individual and society and evolution of human beings also are labelled as Sufi elements.

One-dimensional critical approaches fail to perceive the steady growth of Lessing’s aesthetic vision. Rather than isolating her Marxist phase, her psychological novels or her Sufi-influenced fiction, and highlighting the differences between these seemingly incompatible ideologies, it will be worthwhile to note that the very core of Lessing’s insights has been the same--that is, the need for perpetual evolution on all levels: individual, national, worldwide and universal, and this concern with evolution is as much biological as it is spiritual. The core of Sufi thought is the necessity for individual and cosmic evolution; Sufis believe that human beings are incomplete and expect them to transcend their merely human state of incompleteness through “work” in the Sufi Way. This corresponds comfortably to Lessing’s natural inclinations so that Idries Shah’s representation of Sufism reinforces Lessing’s own belief in the evolution of a more whole society. Therefore Lessing incorporates Sufi perception of human beings in most of her novels and short stories. In support of self-preservation and transformation, which in turn contribute to the preservation and evolution of the human race, Lessing has commented in an interview:

"May be out of destruction will be born some new creature. I don't mean physically" (*Voice* 63). Lessing, like the Sufis, expects that humanity will continue to participate in cosmic evolution. Many ideological and philosophical influences like the psychological theories of Jung and R.D. Laing and Sufi theories of literature have shaped her creative imagination and these will serve as a theoretical frame-work within which the Sufi elements in her major novels will be analysed.

Conclusion

These five novels by no means make an exhaustive list of Lessing's Sufi-influenced novels. Nor do they reflect a limit to Sufi traces in her works. After the science fiction series, Lessing wrote *The Diary of a Good Neighbour* (1983) where she overtly emulates Mulla Nasruddin's character and behaviour in her portrayal of Maudie Fowler. She relates anecdotes resembling Sufi tales and attributes them to Maudie as though Maudie experienced them. Thus this novel also becomes a tool to familiarise the Western public with Sufic subtleties and complexities. In the dawn of the new millennium, the rapid changes in the Eastern block and in the third world and larger diasporic movements of populations have resulted in heterogeneity and cultural diversity throughout the Western countries. As we resort to cross-cultural studies to solve the problems of our times we find Lessing introducing ideas from the world of Islam and demanding Westerners in particular consider Sufi literature as a vital force along with major influences from other parts of the world.

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Sufi Bearings

Geetha Krishnan S “The quest for deliverance : Sufi elements in the major novels of Doris Lessing ” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 2002

Chapter III

Sufi Bearings

Section (i)

Landlocked: Into the Life of Things

“For him who has perception, a mere sign is enough. For him who does not really heed, a thousand explanations are not enough.”

Haji Bektash quoted in Idries Shah, *The Way of the Sufi*

The major project by which Doris Lessing planned to write herself out of an African past was the five-novel sequence *Children of Violence* (1952-69), which consists of *Martha Quest* (1952), *A Proper Marriage* (1954), *A Ripple from the Storm* (1958), *Landlocked* (1965) and *The Four-Gated City* (1969). This five volume narrative centres on the developing consciousness of Martha Quest from her adolescence in Zambesia (a fictional composite of several Southern African countries) to her middle years in London and her death on a small island off the coast of Scotland. Lessing has called the *Children of Violence* a *Bildungsroman*, a kind of novel documenting the growth of the protagonist's character through a succession of social interactions. Over the seventeen years between the publication of *MQ* and *FGC*, Lessing examines a wide range of social, personal and artistic

assumptions, including the problems inherent in writing fiction. The publication of these novels was interspersed with that of other novels, novellas and short stories; thus, when Lessing returns to the sequence after a gap of seven years with *L* in 1965 (having published *The Golden Notebook* in 1962), there is a noticeable change in her angle of vision. Referring to this sequence Lessing first articulated her interest in the tension between the individual and society, pointing out that it is "a study of the individual conscience in its relations with the collective" ("Small" 14). Neither the "individual conscience" nor the "collective" remains consistent throughout the series. Martha's surname, "Quest" obviously suggests a search, a journeying towards some kind of goal or grail, and we see her clash time and again with outside forces and groups. The "collective" is variously the white Zambesian society of her parents' generation, the young colonial society of her own generation, a Marxist group, and post-war London intelligentsia. Martha is both dependent upon, and reacts against all these factions constantly redefining herself through her relations with them. The earlier novels in this sequence concentrate primarily on Martha's adolescence, marriage, motherhood, and her involvement in politics. In the later novels, she transcends the individual versus the collective dichotomy; first through erotic experience and then through mysticism. Martha's perspective widens and she realises her insignificance in the universe, the reader too sees her as a minute part of a much larger picture. In the early novels, Martha who is obsessed with herself and what she thinks, becomes much more interested in methods of transcending the individual

consciousness than in merging it with a specific political or social group. As the series progresses, we find Martha becoming concerned about the evolution of the kind of knowledge needed for survival in the twentieth century and beyond, and in this her 'self' becomes irrelevant, and her vision extends far wider.

The two volumes of *Children of Violence* published after *GN* show the clear impact of Lessing's digression from the series. Lessing in her interview with Bertelsen says: "I wanted to write about that time, and I still don't think I've done it right. I wanted to write about that extraordinary time of hanging around in Rhodesia waiting to be able to leave, which was quite the worst time in my life" (*Doris Lessing* 107-8). Martha is in every way "landlocked" in the midst of "isms" and "ologies," desperate in her desire to belong, but finding belonging increasingly impossible. Martha recognises that her involvement with the collective has brought about an ambiguous, far from wholly satisfactory dependence on others. She must explore her personality alone to see if, without the benefit of the collective, she has a personality. From *L* onwards Lessing strengthens the strain of mysticism incipient in Martha Quest's early moments of illumination, integrating the mystic development of Martha Quest with the imperatives of the *Bildungsroman*--the protagonist's growth in worldly wisdom, moral insight, and social awareness. At the same time, again adhering to the dictates of the *Bildungsroman* format, Lessing makes Martha's personal development--mystical and otherwise--both representative of, and instrumental in,

promoting an analogous advance for her society. Mary Ann Singleton notes that in *L* "Martha begins to show a more profound knowledge that reaches below the level of rational thought [...] evident partly in her increased powers of intuitions" (196). The positively strong influence of Sufism evident from this novel onwards, is echoed in Greene's statement: "*Landlocked* is the first novel in the *Children of Violence* in which real change occurs" (*Doris Lessing* 57).

By this time Lessing had become an ardent student of Sufism and this has a profound influence on all her subsequent work. As noted earlier it is not a prescriptive religion with a clear doctrine or ideology, but expresses the belief that there is one unifying truth underlying all religions. Though Sufism is without a well-defined set of tenets, official organisation, or priestly hierarchy, it centres on the individual's search for spiritual enlightenment through the experiences of ordinary life. It maintains that man is capable of achieving perfection, or oneness with God, through an evolutionary process which can be accelerated through an individual's capacity to transcend ordinary physical and perceptual limitations. These limitations include adherence to conventional systems of knowledge, and a characteristic of Sufi is that experience, rather than pure intellect, is valued as enlightening. "Stop boasting of intellect and learning, for here intellect is hampering, and learning is stupidity" says Hakim Jami, a fifteenth century Sufi teacher (qtd. in *Way* 106). In *L* Martha's new understanding is not intellectual, and her

strange telepathic and visionary experiences can be best understood in terms of what Idries Shah calls a "psychology" of Sufi ideas (*Way* 20).

Martha continues her quest seeking "something new" against "the nightmare repetition" which is the burden of history, something oppositional to the culture that has formed them. In fact the phrase "something new" recurs throughout the series. What she quests after is certitude, completeness, non-complexity, and the freedom to "stand by what one is, how one sees things" without destroying others. Her desire, is to submit her will to a collective if not the collective, but never finally, and to insist on making her own personal private judgments before every act of submission. The first three volumes of the series portray Martha as imagining that she has just taken the step that will put an end to the past and usher her into "something new" and by the end of the third novel (*RS*), Martha has lived through the central myths of her society--romantic love, marriage, motherhood, and belief in political action--and realised that nothing new can come from them or from the social structures, institutions, and ideology that express them. In *L* Martha recognises that she has arrived at a crucial stage in her journey toward self-realisation. She has reached that point at which she must disavow association with the false values of a decadent milieu. Jung claims that the first fruit of self-development "is the conscious and unavoidable segregation of the single individual from the undifferentiated herd" (Jacobi 106). To become a personality, he says, one must individualise. And only a personality can contribute anything valuable to the

collective. Like Jung, Lessing is convinced that “ the change in the collective does not begin with propaganda and mass meetings, or with violence. It begins with a change in individuals” (Jacobi 150). Thus we watch Lessing orchestrate the intertwined development of individual and society. As Martha develops individually, she pushes forth the development of her culture.

Although *L* is a realistic novel, in the sense of fidelity to reality, it is different from the first three novels in tone and style. This is because the destruction that has so altered the world cannot be rendered in customary ways and hence is rendered hauntingly, powerfully in a lyrical mode that strains against the limits of language to express the inexpressible horrors of the century and as well as “something new” that emerges from them. Lessing becomes increasingly aware of the inadequacy of language to portray Martha’s new and varied experiences--her relationship with Thomas or the war’s forty four million dead--language being a conventional system made irrelevant by the horrors of the times. And this is exactly in accordance with the Sufi dictum: “the tyranny of words” reinforces “custom” and “establish [ed] patterns of thinking” (Shah, *Sufis* 393), and “Sufism may be viewed in one sense as struggling against the use of words to establish patterns of thinking whereby mankind is kept at a certain stage of ineptitude [...]” (Shah, *Sufis* 393). Lessing, the Sufi that she is, upholds this dictum: “The Sufi’s world has extra dimensions; to him things are meaningful in a

sense which they are not to people who follow only the training which is imposed upon them by ordinary society”(Shah, *Sufis* 393).

The six year period covered in *L* concerns Martha's efforts to maintain a personal equilibrium during a series of political, social and private upheavals. We witness the aftermath of Martha's stalemated marriage of convenience to Anton Hesse, the illnesses and deaths of her father and her political friend Johnny Lindsay, and the difficulties of her intimate friend Maisie Gale. Martha also gradually gets disillusioned with the communist myth and finds that most of her political friends leave for their own countries as the war in Europe ends. Eventhough not as fragmented as Anna Wulf, (the protagonist in *GN*) Martha yearns for a synthesis of her personality and such a man appears in the form of Thomas Stern, a Polish Jew, whom Martha meets in the course of her party activities. With him she establishes a genuinely profound emotional and physical relationship, one so penetrating that it accomplishes the fusion of her disparate selves and the drawing out of her latent visionary qualities.

The title of the novel, *L* itself is very much significant as it presents “landlocked” condition of the world in general and Martha in particular because of the Second World War. What strikes one immediately is the anecdote from *The Sufis* by Idries Shah quoted as the introductory epigraph for this book. The entire novel has to be viewed within the framework of this fable, which deals with the problem of knowing one's identity and how one is

identified by others. Throughout the novel, we find Martha refashioning her identity in relation to the men in her life as she plans to escape from the "landlocked" colony. According to Michael Thorpe, the novel reflects, "through a fragmented narrative the tedium and frustration, the truly "landlocked" condition of the reactionary colonial backwater"(23).

Martha, by now, the veteran of two different but equally unsuccessful marriages, has identified the schism within herself and she tells herself that "she must keep things separate" (22). But she admits that the maintenance of such partitions is a negative effort for "keeping separate meant defeating, or at least holding at bay, what was best in her" (23). Martha has been whirled out of her rut in life by living in different countries, climates and ideas and earning her living in various ways and shedding the arrogance of white European class consciousness. She has the rich experience of an ardent communist activist, two failed marriages, the never-ending conflicts with her mother, which brings her on the verge of a nervous break down--in short, a period of a "crammed thoughtful living" (Lessing, "Ancient" 81). According to Lessing, this kind of learning is closest to the Sufi Way. While biding her time in the arid wasteland of interior Zambesia before she emigrates to Britain, Martha is thus fully equipped to embark upon a Sufic quest for the potentials of her Sufi self. Martha who has been discrediting a self which did not seem to be her own in the first three novels of the quintet, has the first intimation that she has an extraordinary self waiting to be born. Lessing who has vehemently rejected the idea that mysticism is an occasion for

eccentricity and sensationalism spells out: "You will have to learn through the most banal of all things, says the Sufi to the would-be student. 'You must learn through ordinary life. He is likely to have nothing to say to people looking for excitements and sensational experiences'" ("Ancient" 74).

Martha's Dreams

Martha being cut off from the world because of the War, realises that a wide range of psychical exploration has opened up before her. Eventhough *L* is not a full-fledged Sufi tale like *MS*, significant traces of Sufism are discernible in the novel. By embracing Sufism, Lessing has not fully abandoned her faith in communist art which is "joyful, communal [and] unselfish" (*GN* 350). By now, Lessing with her intense commitment to save the spiritual lives of people, had realised the full force of the Sufi dictum that our primary responsibility is to ourselves and without first becoming whole ourselves, it is futile to save others through an ideology. But it is to be noted that Lessing had not completely given up on group effort, for in *FGC* and *MS* Lessing seems to advocate group effort, (a major constituent of the communist dogma) but only after the protagonists themselves have "worked" to enrich their Sufi selves. Hence in *L*, we find Martha searching for means to educate herself and one such device is her recurring dreams. According to the Sufis, dreams are the result of unused creative energies and Martha dreams a lot as she is "landlocked" in Zambesia waiting for her passage to England. The dreams predict her future as well as instruct her to act wisely. Lessing makes available visions, dreams, the non-rational,

the potential released by the breakdown of accepted ways of seeing for Martha to explore and to come out with a successful solution to overcome her crisis. The growing breach between Martha's public roles and her true self is epitomised by the two recurrent dreams, the dream of the house whose rooms she must keep separate and the nightmare of being landlocked. Martha's dream which recurred

was of a large house, a bungalow, with half a dozen different rooms in it, and she, Martha (the person who held herself together, who watched, who must preserve wholeness through a time of dryness and disintegration), moved from one room to the next, on guard. These rooms, each furnished differently, had to be kept separate.(22-23)

Martha's different and contradictory roles in the society are represented by the different rooms in the dream; each room signifies one aspect of her personality. Martha fears that the failure to obey her dream will ruin the house and as she dreamt, she watches "the house on the kopje, collapsed into a mass of ant-tunneled mud, ant-consumed grass"(23). This ruin looks forward to the disintegration of the Quest house which is later described as "rooted [...] in a fierce compost" (236). "Ruin" has a double significance in Sufi circles. Annemarie Schimmel observes that the theme of breaking for the sake of construction is in full accord with the ascetic practices of Sufism. "The body has to be broken, and the heart, too has to

be broken and everything in it naughted so that God can build a new mansion for Himself in it. For the ruined house contained treasures--such treasures can be found only by digging up the foundation [...]" (190). Robert Graves in his introduction to *The Sufis* quotes Shah: "In Sufi Literature [...] ruin stands for the mind ruined by unregenerate thought and awaiting reedification" (xiv-xv). Martha's perspective moves "back in time, or perhaps forward--she did not know" (23) and the house is "no longer the farm house of grass and mud; but [...] tall rather than wide, reached up, stretched down [...] built layer on layer, but shadowy above and below" (23).

Regarding the prophetic nature of the dream, Greene notes that "past, present and future conflate, as the dream points both forward and backward in time--back to the South London scene of Mrs Quest's childhood and forward to Mark Coldridge's Bloomsbury house" (63). The dream described surrealistically instructs her to keep things separate because allowing them to merge would cause chaos and disintegration. Strictly obeying her dream, she says no to Robinson's offer of a job, she refuses to be bullied by Mr. Maynard; she disagrees with Anton's suggestion that they remain married in spite of the marital incompatibility. She even separates herself from her parents, lest they "drag her down into the nightmare house like a maize where there could be only one end"(96). Thus Martha who abandons her family and all kinds of relationship and bondage to find herself appears to be outrageous, in fact more radical than Anna Wulf who refused the traditional role for woman and who sought psychotherapy to find her identity.

According to Lessing, dreaming like writing is creative. In her Stony Brook interview with Jonah Raskin, she observes: "The unconscious artist who resides in our depths is a very economical individual. With a few symbols, a dream can define the whole of one's life, and warn us of the future, too"(Voice 74). Like a psychoanalyst, Lessing has drawn close links between her use of dreams (which may involve meeting previous identities or selves) "as windows on to her daily life and as tools resolving artistic block"(Scott 3). Further, Lessing holds the traditional nineteenth century view that writers "are the traditional interpreters of dreams and nightmares"("Small" 11). Dreams have constantly played an important role in both her personal and artistic life. Like Freud, Lessing believes that visual images are the language of dreams and the unconscious, and she uses them profusely to evoke the rich world of the unconscious.

Because *L* offers a mode more dependent on lyricism than plot, a mode that works by a richly allusive system of imagery, both pictorial and metaphorical, it has been dismissed as "sketchy and perfunctory," "hardly a narrative at all" (Sage 58). In fact, imagery relating to landlocked, desert-like landscapes, ruined cities, nightmare houses and to the regenerative forces of water and light is drawn both from Martha's dreams and from her experience in a way that breaks down ^{the} distinction between objective and subjective. Greene notes:

Dreams prefigure and influence events in ways that register dream reality as equally valid to conscious experience and render an altered sense of temporality, teaching Martha to cast imaginatively backward and forward and to speed time and slow it, in the sort of refiguration of time that becomes pronounced in *The Four-Gated City*. The imagery patterns become "what the novel is about" more than anything that actually happens. (58)

This lyrical mode of the novel can articulate experience made unspeakable by modes dependent on more conventional means. According to the Sufis, the spiritual man has a number of means for acquiring knowledge, other than the five senses and the five inner faculties. They include prophetic dreams and inspirations from beyond the material world. To the extent that a man adheres to the truth in his waking state, his dreams too disclose a similar degree of certainty. The Prophet expressed this in the saying, "The more truthful you are, the more prophetic [your] dreams." Although knowledge through dreams comes in a state of sleep, insights through inspiration are gained in a state of wakefulness. Martha's dreams and inspirations help her to understand her problems and resolve her doubts and uncertainties.

The other dream--the dream of isolation and psychic drought acts as a guide and expresses Martha's landlocked condition: "on this high dry

plateau where Martha was imprisoned, forever, it seemed everything was dry and brittle, its quality was drought" (247). Like the dream of the house, this dream too cautions her against a condition and suggest a way of avoiding it. "Far away, a long way below, was water. She dreamed, night after night, of water, of the sea" (247). This dream is prescient, prefiguring the deaths of Athens and Thomas: "Across this sea, which she could not reach [...] sailed people she had known [...] Athens [...] Thomas"(160). Literally this dream reflects Martha's actual geographical isolation in the interior Zambesia not only physically landlocked but morally dehydrated by its racial and political divisions. This dream of imprisonment reflects the sterility of both her personal life and her political life. The Africans, suspicious of their white sympathisers, whose open help would in any case bring the charge of communism, organise their own strike and thus pursue their own nationalist goals. Martha disillusioned with political activity, understands that she will never find her true self through a collective role. Gayle Greene notes:

The fact that the [two] symbols, house and landlock, can signify the internal, psychological states as well as external phenomena, breaks down the conventional empiricist/realist distinction between subjective and objective; and dream imagery intermingles with Martha's conscious thought and actions in a way that further undermines such distinctions.

(93)

Martha's Mystical Experiences

Apart from her prophetic dreams, Martha has a number of mystical experiences that demonstrate her development of new faculties. On the drive across the countryside with Jack, Martha looks into "the empty space beside her" (200) and as instructed by the dreams, she moves backward and forward in time conjuring an image of Maisie as she would have been if there had been no war and juxtaposing this Maisie now; conjuring a Europe two hundred years past and contrasting this to a Europe years hence. This dislocation leads to "a new kind of knowledge"(196). Idries Shah notes that the creation of the "new" requires the destruction of the "old villain," which is a name for patterns of conditioned thinking" (*Sufis* 45). Martha, while drinking and dancing at the Parkland Hotel in the company of Thomas and other friends feels that "she and Thomas were breathing, as it were, through each other"(181). She felt herself to be "a space of knowledge" and she looks at others with a comic perspective that is required of a Sufi thus: "The others [...] sat around her like many colored ghosts of people she had known a thousand years ago, under the cool, light trees over which the stars stood--but differently [...]" (183).

In that moment of wakeful insight, Martha realised that:

Her mind worked fast, registered everything within miles,--she felt everything together, the starlight thinning overhead, the charred smell of chilling iron from the braziers, stale, sour

wine, cold metal from the table top. Thomas's warm hand, the dark smell from the river, She was fused together [...]. (188)

Thus the world of nature and of man converge in Martha, who is said to be "fused together" (188) and she discovers the source of her energy for inner growth and learns to develop it under Thomas's tutelage. Lessing here demonstrates how Martha gradually moves to a state of wakefulness, an individual evolution which the Sufis see as a part of the necessary evolution of humanity. Lessing's concern for developing the potential energy which exists in the human psyche is apparent in her 1972 talk at Rutgers when she addressed herself to "all those who want to do something with their lives but who somehow have not been able to. One needs to know both the source of one's creative energy and how to husband it" (qtd. in Seligman 192).

Lessing along with the Sufis, believes that mankind evolves through stress. The stressful situation in which Martha finds herself offers her an opportunity to evolve. Just as in biological evolution, organs survive and multiply because of the need of a species to adapt to the particular requirements,

In this age of transcending of time and space, the complex of organs is concerned with the transcending of time and space. What ordinary people regard as sporadic and occasional bursts of telepathic or prophetic power are seen by the Sufi as

nothing less than the first stirring of these same organs.

(Shah, *Sufis* 60)

Martha develops such organs and evolves to a higher state through consciously directing her inner growth. Gayle Greene observes that *Landlocked* resembles *The Wasteland* as we note a shift in this novel to Lessing's turn to the mystical and mythical and to a lyrical mode. She remarks: "What is new in this novel is an increasingly strong intimation of a transcendental reality and a sense of an 'essential self' which is in touch with it [...]"(65). Consequently, Martha has the first intimation that she has an extraordinary self awaiting to be born:

If she lived, precariously, in a house with half a dozen rooms, each room full of people (they being unable to leave the rooms they were in to visit the others, unable even to understand them, since they did not know the languages spoken in other rooms) then what was she waiting for, in waiting for (as she knew she did) a man? Why, someone who would unify her elements, a man would be like a roof, or like a fire burning in the center of the empty space. (41)

Martha wants to be alchemised so that her elements will cohere and the essence of her being transmuted. The Sufis believe that the goal of mankind is the regeneration (and therefore transmutation) of man's essence, for it is the separation of man from his essence that constitutes his

unfulfilment. Allegorically Sufis describe the regeneration of the divine essence--or "sunshine" in man thus: "[Man's] quest is the purification of the dross and the activation of the gold. The means of achieving this is found within man--it is the Philosopher's Stone" (Shah, *Sufis* 219). Thus the transmutation occurs through the Philosopher's Stone or essence, so potent as to transform whatever it contacts. Traditionally in Sufism the Stone is concentrated in the doctor's mind and transmitted to the patient by him. The Sufi hopes to reach his essence and help it to grow into maturity. He believes that one's inner world needs to be kept up with one's external development in every day life. Of course, a mind that could possibly begin to think creatively about its improvement is one which is uncluttered. Sufis believe that a person's essence, and hence his real identity, is not something automatically known to himself, but rather that self-"work" under the guidance of a teacher may lead a person to illumination into his essence.

Martha-Thomas Liaison

Martha begins that work which leads to illumination under Thomas Stern, a Polish Jew and a farmer intellectual, whom Martha meets in the course of her party activities. For the first time in her life, Martha experiences a profound emotional and erotic relationship with Thomas, one so intense that it changes the shape of her consciousness and incidentally discloses to her how emotionally destructive her previous marriages had been. Her relationship with Thomas proves to be just the opposite of the

highly touted union of the marriage manual, which forms the epigraph of the second part of the novel. The epigraph on marriage is ironic, for Martha finds a man she can be really married to, but not in any pedestrian textbook sense. Martha's affair with Thomas, the cultural superman demonstrating sensitivity, intelligence and spirit lacking in other men, frees her from her bond of convention and she learns how to be self-contained and independent. The emphasis in the second part of the novel is on personal relationship and their effect on human personality. "Love is, for the Sufis, the only legitimate way to educate the base faculties" notes Annemarie Schimmel (141). The love of Martha and Thomas is presented as a process of mutual education of the senses and the spirit. Lessing attains a wonderful complexity of narrative levels--advancing Sufi beliefs on the one hand and a critique of the sexual cycle in married life on the other. Robert K Morris identifies the novel as celebrating love and passion:

More than an identity search, the novel is really a love story that sometimes gains the intensity and gutsy hysteria and passion of Lawrence. While in love, with the former intellectual, Thomas Stern, who tries absorbing her in his mission, Martha experiences some of the most penetrating changes in the series. She becomes aware of herself--her mind, psyche, being--first through another, then independently, though still not quite understanding herself [...].

Out of this [...] passionate affair [...] she uncovers fresh fragments of her being and fits them in place. (23)

Thomas and Martha meet in a tree-top loft on his brother's property to conduct their love affair. Martha discovers whole new areas of her being through her union with Thomas in the lush atmosphere almost equalling the Garden of Eden. Her involvement with Thomas permeates her entire being in all its dimensions and accomplishes the fusion of her disparate selves. She realises that her affair with Thomas takes her into "an altogether new dimension" (191), breaking down the boundaries of her self in a way she can barely describe, and teaching her new powers of intuition. She exhilaratingly feels that:

Adding a new room to her house had ended the division. From this center she now lived--a loft of aromatic wood from whose crooked window could be seen only sky and the boughs of trees, above a brick floor hissing sweetly from the slow drippings and wellings from a hundred growing plants, in a shed whose wooden walls grow from lawns where the swinging arc of a water sprayer flung rainbows all day long, [...]. (122)

Thus in Thomas Stern's green house, Martha undergoes an alchemical transformation whereby she experiences herself for the first time as an integrated organism, which operates out of the centre of her being, or her

divine essence. This centre, the green house where Martha spends most of her afternoons combines all the four elements: earth (plants), air (sky), fire (rainbow of water) and water (slow dripping of the plants). According to Seligman, "Within these four elements of the macrocosm, Martha discovers the unity of her own microcosm, or the center of her being"(196). That the relationship between Thomas and Martha is unique is brought home to the reader through many references to it. No one, not "newspapers, films, literature, the people who are supposed to express us" ever told her this sort of thing was possible "in a way she could believe" (193).

Martha's relationship with Stern is a necessary component of her quest: two disappointing marriages to believable and flawed men, a few perfunctory affairs with other men, and Stern's teaching her "what loving a man was" (182) complete her sexual and political education. Consequently Martha makes the connections necessary for a Lessing character to emerge whole--intellectual conclusions follow a "brief descent" into sexuality with Thomas. Their union in the midst of the "leaf smelling warmth" of Thomas's shed and "reflected beams of orange light [...] greenish sun lanced light" (121) is terrifying as well as ecstatic as her illumination on the veld (detailed in *Martha Quest*). Using a metaphorical language, evoking a sense of vague, powerful forces beyond reason or language, she says that:

[...] their relationship--whatever the right word for it--was in an altogether new dimension. They were in deep waters, both of

them. And neither understood it, could not speak about it
[...] the sensation of sinking deeper and deeper was
stronger. (191)

Thomas, equally aware of the unusual nature of their relationship sums up:
“something happened between us--I mean, not just loving each other. [...] No one knows anything about that sort of thing, [...]” (269-70). Thomas explains to her that they must “think of the trees breathing in at night, out at day. Feel the earth turning under you and the planets moving around together. [...] feel it with every bit of you, [...]” (239-40). Thomas teaches her that true gnosis is not attained through books and like a true Sufi asks her, “to lock up books” (283). Thus Thomas kindles Martha’s imagination and she senses the whole in a more coherent way. Martha reaches the centre of her psyche in her love affair with Thomas, and they feel themselves dissolving into each other, not an immolation of the self, but a passage into something containing it and yet beyond. Pickering observes:

Martha’s sense of herself in time, as part of the historical development of the human race in relation to the larger world of the universe, becomes as real to her as her place in nature did on the veld. Through Thomas Martha feels attached to the human race past, present and future. (66)

Lessing, with all the force of her Sufi orientation reminds us that our personalities and our self-styled attempts at change more often than not

seem futile placed beside cosmic continuance. No matter how much we think ourselves changing, we can never rival the immutable, non-intelligence of things that endure above and beyond us. Our life should be less a matter of yielding to the implacability of necessity than understanding its matter-of-factness. The Sufi teacher that she is, she insists on our need to grow all the while realising our inferiority. It is what Thomas tells Martha in one of their last meetings:

[I'm smaller than] that star over there, that star's got a different time scale from us. We are born under that star and make love under it and put our children to sleep under it and are buried under it. [...] Now we try all the time, day and night, to understand: that star has a different time scale, we are like midges compared to the star. (146)

According to Syed Mohamed Zaqui Shah, Thomas acts as Martha's *shaikh* who

Initiates you [the aspirant] into the Unseen within you [the aspirant] and into the harmony with the Unseen without. [...] He acts as a medium between the high and the low, between the Deity and humanity, between where you are and where you ought to be, or in plainer language between you and your God. (par.3)

Thus Thomas becomes an indispensable necessity for Martha's spiritual emancipation and Martha's journey begins. In *FGC*, we see Martha gradually move on to the Unseen from the seen and after plunging into the fathomless depths of the Unseen, she comes back to the seen to complete her course. And beyond "understanding," Lessing tells us to *do* something, for "something new is trying to get born through our thick skins" (145). Doing and becoming are the only ways to combat what might seem hopeless and lost. Lessing seems to suggest wars will go on; people will die of starvation and slaughter; holocausts have come and will come again; but there is something in the will--not necessarily indomitable, merely human--that will seek to escape from the cycle of violence.

According to the Sufis, teaching through words is of limited effect for two reasons. First, that they operate on one level--that of the rational consciousness--and therefore, are not apt in communicating the "multi-levelled" experience. Secondly because the process of learning depends on the degree of reciprocity of the candidate, through his experience with the teacher and not on an argumentative basis. The teacher's presence initiates a heightened means of communication which is based on the recipient's level of development. Thomas and Martha communicate by means of "the secret language" or "the hidden tongue" which according to the Sufis is "a form of communication among the enlightened ones. It has the advantage of connecting mundane with the greater dimensions: the 'other world' from which ordinary humanity is cut off" (Shah, *Sufis* 195).

While her marriage with Anton provoked in her “only the enemy, feeling so ancient and, it seemed, autonomous, they were beyond control” (140), her relationship with Thomas drives her “back and back into regions of herself she had not known existed” (125). That love can effect such transmutation in Martha is in keeping with traditional Sufi wisdom. Attar, the famous thirteenth century Sufi chemist in *The Conference of the Birds* talks about the quester’s regeneration through love thus:

This is the fire of love which purifies, which is different whenever it occurs, which sears the narrow and makes incandescent the kernel. The ore separates from the matrix, and the Perfected Man emerges, altered in such a way that every aspect of his life is ennobled. He is not changed in the sense of being different: but he is completed, and this makes him considered powerful of men. (qtd. in Shah, *Sufis* 122)

Martha is wrenched away from her arid self-containment and by the force of Thomas’s energy she reaches a state of being wherein the boundary lines of her own personality are dissolved and becomes a “new self.” By surrendering herself fully to the warmth of Thomas’s love, Martha finds herself in touch with a new source of energy, which is considered by the Sufis to be an important stage in a person’s evolution. Martha recognises that “she now lived from this new centre, this room she shared with Thomas, a room that had in it, apparently, a softly running dynamo, to which, through him, she was connected” (135).

Martha becomes aware that through her extraordinary relationship with Thomas, she has been “reborn” and in this “evolved” stage, she glimpses complete reality, which ordinary mortals never know nor experience. According to the Sufis, after attaining the blissful contact with the divine, there comes the Dark Night of the Soul, when he experiences not only the intense sense of the “Absence of God” (Underhill 390) but “the apparent withdrawal or loss of that impersonal support, that transcendent Ground or Spark of the soul on which the soul has long felt its whole real life to be based” (Underhill 390). Thomas’s leaving her and finally his death teaches that the human instinct for personal happiness must be abandoned and “the self [...] has got to learn to cease to be its own centre and circumference” (Underhill 397). Martha grieves over Thomas’s death; but this leads to the expansion of her visionary capabilities like Al.Ith’s grief in *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five* (1980). Thus this relationship, like the attainment of Love in the Sufi Path, is not itself an end, but only a means to enlightenment.

It will be illuminating to study the relationship between Thomas and Martha in terms of the relationship between a Sufi teacher and a learner, so that Martha’s development as an evolved being can be perceived. According to Shah, the relationship between a Sufi teacher and a candidate transcends the conventional relationship between a teacher and a learner, since

a part of the teaching stands outside time and space, [...] this relationship, therefore, far transcends in ultimate meaning the usual scope of teaching and learning. The Sufi teacher is more than one who is passing on formal knowledge. (Shah, *Sufis* 394)

Sufis also insist on the two-way co-operation between the teacher and the learner without which the teaching is futile. In the course of her affair with Thomas, Martha recognises the need for a new perspective and a new kind of understanding. Thomas explains to her that they must “feel the stars and their times and their spaces” (239-40) and the star has “a different time scale from us”(146). He teaches her that such an understanding will change them: “Perhaps there’ll be a mutation [...]. Perhaps that’s why we are all so sick [...] everything’s changed” (145). Thomas suggests to her that people like themselves split between “nerves” and “principles” (145) are transitional beings in the evolution of consciousness. He continues: “I tell you, Martha, if I see a sane person, then I know he’s mad. [...] It’s we who are nearest to being--what’s needed”(145). These words, particularly in their emphasis on a reversal of the normal concepts of sanity and madness are extremely important. According to the Sufis, the sensitivity that drives people like Thomas mad, is the same capacity that, if directed positively may lead to a higher synthesis of being as in Martha’s case. The Sufis can experience something more complete. Thomas’s suggestion that humanity is in the process of evolving and that “something new” may “get born

through our thick skins" (145) is reminiscent of the Sufi dictum that the creation of the new requires the destruction of the old.

Like R.D. Laing, Lessing too regards schizophrenia as a natural process of mind-healing; that is, madness or loss of one's self is regarded as a positive affliction that eventually can help one achieve self-knowledge and true identity. In Sufism, the necessary step for attaining harmony and perfection to replace chaos is self-knowledge. Sufis believe that not knowing oneself, one appears to be not one, but many, for one is unaware of the body's needs, the spirit's wishes, and the mind's intentions. This necessitates one's need to "work" on oneself. In the Sufi context, madness with its attending insights, is regarded as a better alternative to ordinary life on earth. Rubenstein identifies a connection between Thomas Stern's madness and his potential for "a higher synthesis of being" as taught in Sufism (121). Sufism thus serves as an organized system which identifies and emphasises certain otherwise ineffable capacities like madness of the twentieth century man. In the same vein, to Laing as well as Lessing, the mad person is the "prophet of a possible new world, a world governed by forces of unity rather than separation" (Vlastos 246).

Thomas finds in Martha an unconventional consciousness which is a pre-requisite for further inner growth. Lessing like the Sufis believes that "man has the possibility of conscious self-development, becoming able--with his own efforts and under a certain kind of expert guidance--to transcend

ordinary limitations: this is not for 'kicks' or for self aggrandizement, but to serve mankind on its path of planned evolution" ("Revolution" 31). Lessing's own firm belief in man's development coincides with the central premises of Sufism stressing the individual's growth toward a greater unity of vision--the gnosis that transcends the apparent contradictions produced by the more conventional logical thinking. Further, the Sufis conception of the self is "[...] in one sense the personality of man, [...] is used to handle outside impacts and employ them for gratification. But it also means the inner essential quality of the individual" (Shah, *Sufis* 182).

This dual focus permeates the Sufi teachings as a way of acknowledging the separation between inner and outer spheres of being that must be overcome to achieve wholeness of vision. The scholar Nasrollah S. Fatemi observes:

Sufis divided the works of God into two kinds--the perceived world. And the conceived world. The former was the material visible world, familiar to man; the latter the invisible, spiritual world. The Sufis tried to show that in the relation existing between them could be found the means whereby man might ascend to perfection. The one watchword in his philosophy is continuity or evolution. (58-59)

This Sufi orientation is easily compatible with Lessing's own preoccupations and patterns visible in her later fiction: her interest in breaking through the

conventional ways of thinking, the urge to understand and extend the parameters of consciousness and the overriding desire of her characters to achieve wholeness. Martha's evolution seen in this perspective is one small step in the necessary evolution of humanity. Rubenstein sums up this process like this: "In Thomas Stern's nursery, Martha Quest is reborn" (116).

When Thomas comes to Martha in an agitated state some months after their relationship has begun, he speaks for her, as if he could read her mind: "You're thinking: I came here to be with my lover, not with this madman [...]. More and more often I look at you and you are thinking: How did I land myself with this maniac?" (206). Thomas because of his acute 'awareness' actually "hears" Martha's thoughts and articulates them for her. When Thomas goes to Israel, Martha experiences a similar telepathic sensitivity to Thomas's thoughts. She understands the phenomenon quite unremarkably as a kind of imaginative sympathy that creates channels of profound emotional communion between personalities. The fusion of their personalities transforms both of them, regenerating Martha while exacerbating Thomas's inner split. Shah observes that "contact between Sufis sometimes takes place by means of signs, and communication can be carried on through methods which are not only unknown, but could appear incomprehensible to the mind conditioned in the ordinary way" (Shah, *Sufis* 99). Martha muses: "a person who has gone away is still here as long as one can hear what he says [...]. Ten times a day she caught herself in discussion with Thomas" (240). The only way to comprehend the Sufi

mind is to shake loose from logical modes of thought. The Sufi Way or Path leads a person to a direct perception of objective reality without the need of the mediation of the logical mind. Mystical experience (detailed in *Martha Quest*) is considered merely a prelude or instrument for attaining this state. According to Jalaluddin Rumi, the master Sufi poet, logic is quite adequate for the plane of the material world but the Sufi works on a series of different planes which go beyond the material. "Logic has its place, but it is a limited sphere" (Shah, *Sufis* 135-36). Rumi states that "If you follow the ways in which you have been trained, which you have inherited, for no other reason than this, you are illogical" (Shah, *Sufis* 135). According to the Sufis, man is a bundle of conditionings--fixed ideas and prejudices, automatic responses which have occurred through the training of others. Man is not as free as he thinks he is. The Sufis believe that the first step for man is to get away from the delusion that he can understand everything by the process of logic. True knowledge is a higher form of thought than the beliefs of most men which amount to little more than conditioned learning.

In fact all the five novels under study underscore Lessing's conviction that the Western rationalism has impoverished them and therefore the need to go beyond logic. *L* is replete with passages resonating with illogicality but which contain irrefutable truths. Part IV of the novel is introduced by a Sufi tale which shows how Nasruddin believing himself to be dead because his hands and feet were cold, loses his donkey to a pack of wolves. Martha comprehends that Thomas has succumbed to violence; he is destroyed by

what Lessing terms "the self-hater," that is, a projection of one's hatred on to others. She puts a series of unanswered questions like "what does it mean saying: I don't believe in violence? What does it mean to say: I don't believe that violence achieves anything?" (242). And the "answer" that concludes the passage is as illogical as it is irrefutable: "Martha did not believe in violence. Martha was the essence of violence" (242). Another Sufi tenet which needs to be emphasised is that like the quester in the Grail legend, it is the asking rather than the answer that matters; it is the effort rather than the achievement that is significant.

Martha's dream of Thomas as "the hanged man" suggests the resemblance this novel has with Eliot's *The Wasteland*. Again the series of questions Martha asks in this dream appear to be versions of the questions that the Grail seeker must ask of the dying fisher king if the curse is to be lifted from the land. Greene observes: "Thomas is the 'hanged man,' the fisher king; and there is the further suggestion in the dream's medieval setting and scene of execution, that he is the Christ of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor" (99). After Thomas's death in the tribal reserve, Martha receives a strange document written by him, a journal that documents the extent of his self-division. In his "last testament" he has juxtaposed his observations on the conditions in the rural areas with anecdotes from his Jewish childhood in Poland; obituaries of tribal members and facts about the tribes' daily life alternated with nonsense sayings, illogical annotations, recipes and private jokes. While painstakingly copying Thomas's journal from the damp,

stained original, Martha gradually discerns a pattern in the jumble of "sense" and "nonsense" and realises that it is the psychic split more than the fever which had driven him to death. Martha solely depends on her senses and she wholly takes in the message sent out by Thomas. The message that Thomas communicates to Martha through their physical and psychic union, and later through his posthumous journal reflects Lessing's theme of evolution of consciousness toward higher and more unified manifestations. It so happens that Thomas is ultimately a victim rather than a successful mutation himself, but his insights influence Martha's future. With her "new knowledge," Martha is able to recognise that his madness had been a desperate attempt to "get messages out" and she perceives sense and meaning in the apparent chaos of his raging mind only because of her own sensitive consciousness. Thomas's fate is that of a Jew in this century, one whose family has been destroyed in the death camps of Europe from which he is forever exiled. His self hatred may be understood as a sort of "survivor's guilt." Projecting it onto Sergeant Tressel, who oppressed the native soldiers under his command not out of cruelty but out of "carelessness, of sheer indifference" (174), he becomes Thomas's dark side, what Jung calls the Shadow, a repository for all the unacknowledged evils of the self. Martha understands that what Tressel represents will eventually take Thomas away: "a red-faced fattish man in a badly cut dinner suit [...] was an enemy too strong for her" (182). At one point in the journal, Thomas articulates his subjective distortion through a parable with an unexpected ending:

Once there was a man who travelled to a distant country. When he got there, the enemy he had fled from was waiting for him. Although he had proved the usefulness [sic] of travelling, he went to yet another country. No his enemy was *not* there. (Surprised are you! said the red pencil. So he killed himself. (334)

The unpredictable ending of the Sufi story is one of the techniques of the Sufi teachers designed “to free the thinking from the adhesions of rigid thinking,” and “to create thought in mind and combat the tendency to sleep.” (Shah, *Sufis* 52-53). The ironic bitterness of Thomas’s scribbled notes reminds one of many Sufi jokes which also mock the ultimate inadequacy of logic.

Thomas’s death leaves Martha feeling “as if some part of me has died [...]. Or it is in another room, looking on” (271). The image of “another room” which she uses to signify dislocation appears in the tales of Mulla Nasruddin to suggest increased potential: “They were like children born in a house from which they had never been allowed to stray, doomed to walk from one room to another without knowing that there could be another house, elsewhere” (Shah, *Thinkers* 194).

Evelyn J. Hinz observes that Martha’s and Thomas’s relationship is hierogamic or sacred marriage. Their union takes place outside social

structures--they are separated by social class and each is married to some one else--and in a natural setting: "Hierogramus unions must take place in the open or in an elemental setting because their object is to evoke the primordial marriage of the elements" (Hinz 909). She adds that "The object [...] the regeneration or rebirth of the cosmos [...] is less a matter of 'getting back to nature' than a matter of getting nature to come back" (909). Such a union requires "that one abandon one's connection with history, or [...] reverse the process of civilisation" and "shed [...] the whole orientation toward rationalism and empiricism" (908). Martha's intense relationship with Thomas achieves such a degree of mutuality as would have been unimaginable for Anna and Michael in *GN*. Martha is more intelligent than Thomas, but he is ahead of her on the way toward self-realisation. Martha, setting out on the search herself, having cast off her *Matty* self, is a strikingly different person and this change is clearly indicated by the narrator's attitude towards Martha. The author-narrator preserves a high degree of immediacy, which is extended also to the relationships that Martha forms in *FGC*. This urgency can be attributed to the influence of Sufism whereby Lessing is at pains to inform her readers of the necessity of the "work" on one's self.

Thomas in the role of a Sufi teacher operates as the "Philosopher's Stone" which according to the Sufis:

is the *dhat*, the essence, which is so powerful that it can transform whatever comes into contact with it. It is the essence of man, which partakes of what people call the divine. It is [...] capable of uplifting humanity to a next stage.
(Shah, *Sufis* 219)

Martha now realises that motherhood is the only collective role she has not tried in her quest for selfhood. She has worked through other collectives, marriage and Communism, but she has managed to avoid dealing with the collective of motherhood because of her unresolved difficulty with her own mother. Coming face to face with her daughter, eight-year-old Caroline, Martha wonders whether “one day she’ll thank me for setting free [...]” (295). Martha who had disassociated herself from her daughter, now realises that by her “act of setting Caroline free” (295) she has inadvertently consigned her to the very situation she was obsessed not to repeat.

Thus Martha does find her way to “something new” not as she has been taught to expect by conventional narratives with their linear progress, denouements, and resolutions, but by a slow living through each stage of the process, by submerging herself in it until it works itself out. Lessing’s Sufi affiliation enables her to solve the paradox that informed the earlier novels: she finds a way beyond determinism, a place beyond culture, by positing an essential self for Martha in touch with a “universal consciousness.” The novel marks the change in direction of Martha’s

search for the wholeness of her true self. The collapse of the revolutionary dream, the death of Thomas, her painful recognition that leaving Caroline has not been the success she had hoped, have taught Martha that she must abandon her outward search and turn inward to the space she had discovered inside herself. As she leaves Africa, where she is landlocked both literally and symbolically, she takes Thomas's manuscript with her baggage. Thomas's account of his journey of the abnormal consciousness becomes Martha's guide as she willingly chooses to enter the chaos of mind and finally becomes a conduit for the evolutionary psychic mutations that Thomas had envisioned. The crazy, fragmentary manuscript which is the fruit of Thomas's self-imposed vigil with a doomed tribe in the bush, is his legacy to Martha. It is a version of anthropology done not by an 'objective' observer, but by a crazed and haunted man who speaks in many voices and it gives us a foretaste of *FGC* whose form is, as Lessing puts it, "a shot to Hell" (*Voice 73*).

Section (ii)

The Four-Gated City : In the Tavern of Ruin

“When Love comes, reason disappears. Reason cannot live with the folly of love, love has nothing to do with human reason.”

Farid ud - Din Attar *The Conference of the Birds*

One may safely assume that for Lessing, the introduction of Sufi elements into her works is almost a reflex. Having imbibed Sufi thought in earnest, she brings in fragments of Sufism intermittently and almost naturally in *FGC*; yet this novel is not radically quite different in mode or style from the other novels of the quintet so as to suggest a completely new train of thought. She not only directly employs Sufi teaching stories in her fiction, but also attributes Sufi or Sufi-like anecdotes to her characters in many of her novels. Many of her characters are potential Sufis who indulge in the relentless exploration of their consciousness through daily struggle and much suffering. In this section, a systematic analysis of how *FGC* communicates the Sufi message through the direct use of quotations as from the wealth of Sufi literature, through the use of characters as constructs, role models and potential Sufis and also other Sufi concepts like intentional suffering, “remembering,” self-“work” etc. is undertaken.

In a 1973 lecture on Sufism, Lessing stated: "man is woefully underused and undervalued, and he does not know his own capacities" ("Ancient" 78). She has acknowledged that what attracted her to a serious study of the Sufi Way was precisely this idea of developing one's potentials, which is central to Sufism. Lessing with her Sufi affiliation, includes all humanity in a large plan in which a person is both unique and individual and also completely subordinate to the whole, as a finger is to the hand-- that is, we are both ourselves and subjects who surrender to serve the needs of the greater community of humankind. The protagonist of *FGC*, Martha Quest "works" to rise to a higher level of being for the sake of a greater common cause: the survival of humanity in the post-holocaust world. In *FGC* the readers recognise that like the mangrove seedling, whose life process is described in the epigraph to Part One of the novel, Martha's future, and that of all mankind, depends on her capacity to unite her life with that of others of her species and to strive to stem the tide of destructive forces. Frederick R. Karl acknowledges the comprehensive nature of *FGC* when he observes: "In Mrs. Lessing's novel, there is the mixture of sacred and profane, of realism and fantasy, of the loving and the obscene, of large vision and carping detail, of panorama and locales" (26). Linda Kuehl in *Commonweal* while conceding that the novel has no novelty to offer in terms of plot, characterisation or technical innovation, pinpoints that "it is nonetheless the most intelligent novel to come out of England since her own *Golden Notebook*" (394). Paul Schlueter finds the book "inconsistent with the series' earlier volumes" (121). To D.J. Enright, the novel has "declined

into the reliance of a gimmick--the gimmick of the apocalyptic or science fictional" (26). On the other hand, Joyce Carol Oates, found the book "a powerful, prophetic work, a truly extraordinary work" (48). And to Kingsley Shorter, it is a "brave book" with richness and complexity (13).

Lessing believes with many others that our civilisation is slipping ever-faster toward the precipice. Almost from the beginning, her work has explored what in human nature is causing this catastrophe and what, if anything, can be done about it. She insists that mankind is at a crucial point in history and that artists must paint the possible evil as well as strengthen "a vision of good which may defeat evil" ("Small" 11), that is, art for society's sake. Lessing's criteria for art fit her own work. Not simply an artist, she is also a critic and a prophet, dissecting in minute detail the faults of a society hypnotised by the idea of Armageddon and prophesying the calamitous results of those faults. At the same time she attempts to delineate possible solutions to the world's problems.

FGC--the most complicated novel in the series--stretches from the early fifties to the late sixties, longer than the time span of the other four novels together, and has a prophetic afterword reaching into the nineteen nineties. At the beginning of the novel Martha has just arrived in London to start a new life. Promising herself she would remember the "clear-lit space" (50) she had just rediscovered, Martha decides against a reasonably well-paying secretarial position, and takes a job, temporarily, as assistant and

secretary to Mark Coldridge, an author trying to finish a book. Not having a place to stay, she moves into an empty room in the Coldridge house on Radlett Street and stays there almost twenty years. As if by providence the Coldridge household on Radlett Street provides her with the perfect opportunity to reexperience, assimilate, and understand her experience. Martha's services are needed because Mark's wife, Lynda is mentally ill and unable to look after their son Francis, who has never known any normal mother-child relationship. When Mark's scientist brother defects to Russia, and his wife Sarah, a Jewish refugee, kills herself, another child is added to this family group. Paul, like Francis, is one of the new generation of "children of violence," deprived of normal childhood experience and therefore, unable to form 'normal' family relationships. These children are symbolic of a whole damaged generation, a symptom of the sickness at the centre of the Empire. Mark covers the walls and ceiling of his study with newspaper cuttings, maps and other evidence of the gradual breakdown and growing insanity of society, evidence also of the links between these apparently disparate items. A society in which nothing works properly, in which young people are disillusioned with politics and turn either to violence or alternative societies, in which the needs of industry override everything else, inevitably moves to the nuclear accident with which the novel ends. The Appendix focuses on the race of children born on the island that Martha inhabits after the Catastrophe. These children are mutants with a wisdom that both comprehends and transcends human history; they possess extraordinary and strikingly diversified capacity for extra-sensory perception

and communication. One of them, Joseph, tells Martha that one day the whole human race will be like him, an advanced evolutionary form replacing all previous inadequate models.

Ever since the publication of *G/S* in 1950, Lessing has been consciously concerned with understanding and exploring the relationship between the individual and the collective, revealing her belief that the hope for man lies in the balance between his private and social selves. Her insistence on the importance of developing the inner realm of consciousness as an initial step in order to achieve a healthy relationship with the collective--forms the pivot of this novel. Prior to the 1960's, Lessing was perhaps anxious to rescue Martha Quest out of her marriage trap and she may have been impatient with apartheid, but it was not until after she was immersed in Sufi thought that she dared to bring about an apocalypse--as a warning, if not a threat, to all of us (or humanity). In a 1984 lecture Lessing claims, "I hold some very old-fashioned views, very different from what I thought any age up to forty. I think that we are here for a purpose--to learn--and that there is a God : I don't think that we are purposeless" (qtd. in Galin 26). Thus Lessing herself encourages a spiritual reading of her novels; Martha in *FGC* is involved in what she calls "work." By trusting that "great hand" and through "work" on the self, the Sufi believes in the possibility of achieving a higher state of being--not higher as in "superior," but higher in the sense of becoming more than what one already is. At the heart of Sufi thought is the necessity for individual and

cosmic evolution and the idea that men and women do not know themselves, nor their potentials. Lessing makes Martha draw on the Sufi Path to self development and transformation--a remedy that was not yet part of her vision when she wrote *GN*. A Sufi reading of the novel sheds light on some aspects of the novel that otherwise remain hidden.

Martha's favourite dream of an ideal "broad-thorough-fared, tree-lined, four-gated dignified city" in *MQ* (163) becomes the title of the final volume of the series, *FGC*. Martha's city is in the tradition of Blake's Jerusalem; both Blake's and Lessing's cities are a judgment of the fallen city, with an aim to build a holy city against the injustice of the unholy city of experience. *FGC* is an apocalyptic novel incorporating elements of apocalyptic literature including the biblical Revelation of Saint John. The references to an ideal, mythical, or golden city evoke the Holy City, the New Jerusalem of the biblical apocalypse. Mary Ann Singleton in her *The City and the Veld* (1977) identifies Lessing's city, with Blake's "Los," Augustine's cities of faith and of disbelief, Bunyan's Celestial City and City of Destruction, and Huxley's contrasting cities in *Brave New World* and *Island* (186). The modern London, portrayed throughout the novel as decadent, diseased and exploitive, is the Babylon of the modern world. The New Jerusalem that the novel gradually defines will not be a literal, physical city, but a greater city, a body of citizens who are linked together by a concern for each other, by a willingness to contribute to a communal effort and by a strong desire for survival. Lessing concedes that the title of the novel

comes out of mythology, and it is in the Bible, spread all over the folklore of every conceivable part of the world. I chose it because the structure of *Children of Violence* goes in fours--each book is divided into four--and this is four again. It is a very ancient symbol, and also I had a dream in which I saw what I later discovered to be an Egyptian theme: the sacred cow stands on great white legs and the hind legs are the people of the city. ("Learning" 25)

The word "gate" in the title is also symbolic for it refers not only to the five senses as the gates of knowledge, but to higher mental faculties. Melissa G. Walker comments: "In Lessing's cosmology, the four faculties that must be opened are creativity, memory, vision and love" (101). In the Sufi context the breaking down of these faculties is the necessary hard "work" that must be done in order to "complete" ourselves. Various characters in *FGC* work very hard to break down the fragmenting barriers; though some characters have success, others do not achieve wholeness. Like *GN* with its structure of repeating fours, there are four major sections of the novel, each of which contains four chapters. The Appendix forms a synthesising conclusion to the novel. The four sections of the novel have a circular as well a linear design. More or less, each first section portrays a series of events characterised by flux; the second sections in each larger unit focus on the experimentation and alternatives tried by the characters

which lead to the third section, in which significant changes and transformations within either characters or situations, or both, occur; and finally in each fourth section, we have a tentative transition to a new stage of "understanding." The dedication of the novel is a Sufi teaching story about the fool who is sent to buy salt and flour and is cautioned not to mix the two. He places the salt on one side of the dish. When given the flour, he inverts the dish, thereby losing the salt. Likewise when he looks for the salt, on the other side of the dish, he loses the flour as well. This tale, alludes not only to a foolish man's misunderstanding of the obvious but to the loss that results from categorisation, from trying to keep things separate.

This dervish story sets the tone for the whole novel and explicitly demands that the characters in the novel be regarded as kindred spirits to the fool in the story. Lessing makes direct use of this tale to demonstrate the equally futile and senseless human endeavours described in the first three parts of *FGC*, endeavours that fail from a lack of integration similar to that of the flour and the salt. Characters suffer from the separation of their knowledge from their experiences, and of their thoughts from their feelings, so that each is affected by the various results and side-effects of segregation. On this human tendency Shah observes:

Doing one thing which they think to be right, they may undo another which is equally right. When this happens with thoughts instead of actions, man himself is lost, no matter

how, upon reflection, he regards his thinking to have been logical. (Way 212-13)

As an epigraph for Part One of the novel Lessing has chosen a paragraph from Rachel Carson's *The Edge of the Sea* which speaks of continuing change "brought about by the life process of living things" and describes how illusory the appearance of the torpid panorama of the southern Florida coast is to one aware of how the water gaps between islands are continually being bridged as the mangrove seedlings root, how coral reefs are continually adding walls to the mainland. This continuous process of diminishment and enlargement, fluidity and solidity, is used as prelude to Martha's drifting through London and getting lodged in Coldridge house on Radlett Street, Bloomsbury to which she becomes attached and where she continues to stay for about twenty years.

The epigraphs to Part Two from Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* and Part Three concern themselves with interrelationships of--earth, water, air and fire. The several epigraphs to Part Four emphasise organic evolution as both a biological and a spiritual process. The Sufi quotations in the beginning of Part Four of *FGC* are placed exactly at the point in the novel when the old order as it had been established in the first three parts begins to disintegrate, and the necessity for a new order becomes apparent. Lessing's quotation from Rumi declares the urgent need for a revolution of minds. Lessing also quotes from Shah (in the last of the

epigraphs) whose words reinforce the idea of new organs coming into being as a result of necessity--and signal the change that is about to take place in the protagonist's world and in the people around her. A basic Sufi supposition is that just as we have developed from primitive tool-using animals into intelligent beings capable of philosophic inquiry and complex technological accomplishment, so we shall further develop into beings capable of establishing contact with forces and with levels situated beyond earth and that a few people have developed the spiritual and psychic powers that enable them to achieve that level. Thus using mystical or esoteric symbols of transformation from one level to another, Lessing makes explicit the central theme of *FGC*. Nicole Ward Jouve has conceded that the various epigraphs make it abundantly clear that in "*The Four-Gated City*, the attempt simultaneously to know vastness and smallness takes a different form, becomes a kind of 'atmospheric' or 'biological' mysticism" (86).

Unlike *GN* where Anna Wulf's points of view from different fictional perspectives are narrated, in *FGC* the story is told through a central intelligence which describes the world as seen and interpreted by Martha Quest. Though this narrative mode appears to be simple, the content of the novel actually discloses an equally complex fictional universe. The medieval Sufi alchemist Jafar Sadiq wrote: "Man is the microcosm, creation the macrocosm--the unity. [...] Start with yourself, end with all. Before man, beyond man, transformation" (Shah, *Sufis* 223). The novel exemplifying this

Sufi concept, unfolds on two levels simultaneously: the literal or phenomenal traces the development of events in the macrocosm, the world of other people, while the symbolic plane connects those events to the microcosm of Martha's consciousness. The characters who populate the external reality that Martha inhabits are projections of Martha's inner reality. Through this technique Lessing formulates the psychological as well the Sufi truth that the macrocosm and the microcosm are merely two aspects of the same reality.

Like a true Sufi, Martha's world has extra dimensions. To her things are meaningful in a sense which they are not to people who follow only the training imposed upon them by ordinary society. She is able to find meaning in "the banalities" (47) and her enlightenment comes through banal experiences. In an attempt to determine who she is, Martha wanders through the streets of London incognita, trying on various aliases and roles. The answer comes to her one evening when "the current of her ordinary thought switched off." "In this area of herself she had found," she discovers that "behind the banalities of the day" such as her social role, her clothes, her name, even her physiognomy, she is "nothing but a soft dark intelligence, that was all" (47). "Switching on" this "receiver," she discovers that she is "tuned in" to a "wavelength, a band where music jiggled and niggled, with or without words" (48).

In her talk at New School for Social Research, Lessing commented: "We do not have opinions of our own. [...] It is becoming possible for people to trust their own experiences. There is no way of communicating this. What matters is to learn it for yourself" (qtd. in Hardin, "Doris Lessing" 569). Lessing clearly wants the reader to consider her characters like Martha as experiencing their individual roles in a form of conscious evolution. One major phase of this growth is an openness to extra-sensory perception: "A man or a woman walking along a street gives no evidence of what he is thinking, yet his thoughts are playing all about him in subtle currents of substance. But an ordinary person cannot see these subtle moving thoughts" (*BDH* 57). In a reply to a question about ESP, Lessing admits her own abilities with ESP and those of a number of people thus:

You can see someone pick up what you are thinking and start talking about it. It happens to everybody. [...] or you will say something and someone will say that's funny I've been thinking about that. In actual fact what we are doing is using ESP. [...] What energy is reaching you? We don't know why, do we? There is something there to be explored [...] if we don't get upset. (qtd. in Hardin 570)

Jack, the Negative Educator

Martha has a similar experience with the sexually adept Jack. Eventhough Jack's primary mode of existence is physical, together, Martha

and Jack set up a "current" between them that ultimately connects them with "an area where no words could be of use," "a high, vibrating place," where again, Martha can "tune into" the "wavelength" (69). Thus with Jack, Martha learns that the "wavelengths" she had discovered through Thomas Stern have different valences; Jack has the same ability to tune in to that area in the psyche to "go into it, as if it were a *place*" (69). Martha though always quite at home with Jack, foresees Jack's transformation very early in the novel--"The jiggling wavelength was telling her: Jack fell down and broke his crown, Jack fell down and broke his [...]" (49). Clair Sprague aptly calls Jack "the principle of evil in the novel and his house the anti-house to the Coldridge house" (99). Jack undergoes a reversal as the novel progresses and Martha recognises: "Sometime while he had been ill the old Jack had simply died, or gone away, and this new person had walked in and taken possession" (426). The real Jack never returns; unlike Thomas Stern, Jack turns his knowledge of the self to destructive ends. Moreover like a true Sufi, Martha does not follow the attractive means of Jack, instead she goes about her path with her Sufi dedication; nor does she allow her "work" to suffer, for as Shah notes, "The real Sufi has something within him which cannot be reduced in value by association with lesser men" (*Sufis* 116). Symbolically, Jack is an aspect of Martha's many-sided self; through her association with Jack, Martha comes to terms with her own sexuality through her male opposite before she can reach a kind of androgynous wholeness. Metaphorically, the deeply buried irrational aspect of the self must be confronted and integrated into the whole personality.

Martha's erotic relationship with Jack is more specifically physical lacking the sense of total emotional fusion that she had experienced with Thomas Stern. This disillusionment born out of erotic love eventually presses her to seek alternative psychic routes for wholeness of personality. As the Sufis believe, the most ordinary experience, which certainly includes sexual activity, can provide a path to enlightenment. With Jack, a man resembling Thomas in his attitudes towards time, sex, and death, she gains a kind of sexual communion that brings her a double visionary experience: the first, a version of her experience of wholeness on the veld, which shows "a golden age" before the birth of consciousness, when the human family walked in unity with the animals; the second is a prophetic picture of herself as a middle-aged woman, "thickened and slowed" (72) in a London house full of children with tortured, hurt faces, and with its inner schisms and problems.

Though Martha is initially employed as Mark Coldridge's temporary secretary, she soon becomes a permanent friend and indispensable member of the Coldridge household. She remains to play the roles of secretary--and lover--to Mark Coldridge, nanny to his son Francis and his nephew Paul, housekeeper and hostess for the family, nurse and friend to Lynda, Mark's psychotic wife. As she plays these roles, her action is like the action of the mangrove seedling in the Carson epigraph as it goes about its very private business of putting down its own roots: she becomes part of a "public" world; her tasks are simultaneously domestic and social;

she is affected by, and herself affects, the communal life--the politics--of the city. To Mark, the left intellectual and writer, Martha confides her dream of the four-gated city and in his novel, he elaborates on this dream city with an inner layer which has harmony, order and joy. Outside the city are power-hungry people fighting for money and recognition. The inhabitants of the outer city wish to buy the secret wisdom of the inner city that makes one happy. When they are advised that they cannot buy but earn the secret, they overrun and destroy the inner city only to find that knowledge is not a material to be carried away, and it is to be acquired with experience. In the Sufi context, this story can be read as the destruction of the inner circle of humanity by the outer circle who cannot understand or tolerate it. One may recall an example from the history of Sufism reminiscent of this incident:

Some Sufis in the Muslim world today would claim that their own particular brotherhood was similarly attacked and forced to go underground at some point in history, as indeed many Sufis were, as a result of the wave of nationalism and secularism at the end of the nineteenth century. (Galil 17)

Mark, Martha's Alter Ego

In a fragmented society where human beings are divided, are becoming more and more divided and more subdivided in themselves, Lessing's plea for mutuality that is, through fruitful personal relationships between men and women, women and women gains strength. Martha-Mark

relationship is one of the most successful heterosexual relationships in Lessing's oeuvre. As they "work" on Mark's writing, they are more involved in the process of absorbing one another's personality characteristics. This relationship recalls Anna Wulf and Saul Green's mutual "breakdown" into each other's personalities in *GN*, the condensed positive form of which process takes place between Martha and Thomas in *L*. Martha helps Mark to develop his inner spirit, and indicative of the psychic symbiosis that has temporarily developed between them, Mark writes a novel based on Martha's imaginary four-gated city. The heavily annotated manuscript pulls in two directions, much like the journal that documents Thomas Stern's divided psyche. When Martha compares Thomas's journal with Mark's novel, she finds that:

the insertions into the original manuscript made by Mark [...] were the same in 'feel' as a good part of Thomas's writing. They had come from the same place, the same wavelength. Somewhere, those two extraordinarily different people, Mark, Thomas, inhabited the same place, made contact there. (196)

As suggested earlier, Martha's two selves are projected onto the figures of Mark and Lynda, both functioning as Martha's alter egos. Martha collaborates with Mark and helps him to regain his creativity; she joins Lynda in exploring "the walls of her own mind" (516), thus breaking down the barriers between "them"--those she had previously labelled as mentally

ill--and "us" asserting her identity with Lynda and her kind. The identification between Martha and Mark is articulated in detail wherein Martha recognises that Mark is going through the same political crises, conversions and disillusionment as her younger self. Though Martha is not a writer like Anna, her creative consciousness finds vicarious embodiment in his novel, *A City in the Desert*. Later he rejects this novel as "ivory tower rubbish" (195) under the influence of his new role as "the Defender" (195), a conversion in which he takes on the position Martha herself had held before coming to the Coldridge household.

"Mark could be called the 'public' side of Martha as Lynda is her innermost self [...]. He is the best kind of public conscience" notes Sprague (92). For some time, Mark temporarily gives up novel writing, and surrounds himself with charts, figures and maps from his own life and from the rapidly accumulating events of contemporary history. Thus in the process of clumsily assembling the fragments of his world, Mark at last tries to develop his own capacity to confront the chaos of contemporary history and of his own life. Mark's obsession with Rachel and Aaron, stemming from his guilt about the suicide of Sally Sarah and the death of Thomas Stern is finally metamorphosed into the story of a Jewish boy who survived the concentration camps and who denied his Jewish heritage. Desiring nothing more than to go to Israel and to fight back as a soldier, he sought a future "planned as death in the holocaust" (481). Walker notes:

The act of creating a character who is death-oriented and whose future lies in still another holocaust is what finally frees Mark to see the apocalyptic message implicit in the charts, figures, maps, and fragments that cover the walls of his study. (105)

Martha's new telepathic abilities open a new dimension of her relationship with Mark; she engages him as a sympathetic partner in what is called "work" on the area of herself sealed off by the anxiety, pity, and pain generated by her mother. The word "work" appears throughout esoteric and hermetic traditions, including Sufism, as the term for the discipline facilitating greater spiritual development. To put it in other words, Martha, the Sufi recognises the visionary in Mark, as psychologically, the reasonable and rational self against which she tests the insights about the way she relearns what she already knows.

As the self-proclaimed hysteric, Martha Quest, walks the streets of post-war London, she is horrified to witness that the Londoners:

Walked and moved and went about their lives in a condition of sleepwalking: they were not aware of themselves, of other people, of what went on around them [...] each seemed locked in an invisible cage which prevented him from experiencing his

fellow thoughts, or lives, or needs. They were essentially isolated, shut in, [...]. (529)

The entire world seems to her to be numb, blinded. Martha with her "wakeful insights" alone perceives her own plight and the plight of others as she muses: "there's something wrong with me that I, do see what's going on as ugly, as if I were the only person awake and everyone else is in a kind of bad dream, but they couldn't see that they were" (80).

Society seems oblivious to the fact that it is suffering from political and philosophical oppression--which includes racism, sexism, any sort of "ism," which manipulates powers and which in turn unleashes unspeakable acts perpetrated on human beings and on the physical world in which they live. The fragmentary nature of the London life of Martha Quest, is like Anna Wulf's and Lessing ironically indicates the compartmentalisation as follows:

It is at least possible that the most fruitful way of describing the human brain is thus: 'it is a machine which works in division: it is composed of parts which function in compartments locked off from each other' or: 'Your right hand does not know what your left hand is doing'. (545)

Mark realises that he must discipline himself to learn what Martha, in her acute state of perception, already feels: he takes upon himself the task of reminding himself of reality by filling an entire room with maps, newspaper

cuttings and other evidences of the gradual breakdown and growing insanity of the society. By documenting areas of destruction and failure all over the earth, Mark is able to see the world as a whole, to determine the true drift of man's intentions by fitting one fact with another.

The novel's prophetic ending, however non-realist in the conventional sense, follows the inner logic of the text and grows out of these guarantees of authenticity. Even after the holocaust, Mark continues to explore the links between his consciousness and the larger human community. Mark, who is capable of creativity and love but who never encounters his own past directly through memory as Martha does and, lacking the power of vision, his view of the future is based largely on his interpretation of the present. Thus his vision is fragmented and therefore through his characterisation, Lessing suggests the need for co-operation of people of varying capacities pooling their diverse resources in the very strenuous and demanding work of building a viable human community. Lessing criticises Mark for his fatalistic resignation. She presents Mark as the foolish Nasruddin of the Sufi tale which she prefixes for *L*. Mark resembles the Mulla who thinking that he is dead, loses his donkey to a pack of wolves. Through the entire sequence, Lessing shows that though it may be illogical to retain one's sense of free will in the face of determinism, however, it is wise to do so for. Martha proves that the "face of the world's horror could be turned around to show the smile of an angel" (656).

Although so much is going on in the house, Martha herself feels uninvolved, becalmed, dormant. She tries to evolve an image of the organism of life, comparable to a plant, which grows in "a shape that is inevitable but known only to itself until it becomes visible" (213). Even in Bloomsbury she has visions recalling the unity of life on the veld and implying a larger wholeness:

The moon rose. Light came into the room and the tree's shadow dissolved. Over the earth's shoulder the moon was catching light from the sun. A quietness came into the room, with the vision of the little world, one half bathed in moonlight, the other in sunlight. (216)

This vision is reminiscent of Anna Wulf's exercise of holding both the whole world and a single drop of water in her mind simultaneously and it is definitely a larger whole than the terrestrial unity she experienced in the veld in *MQ*. Martha, like Jane Eyre is unsuccessful in her search for mother's love, but unlike Jane, Martha has a great capacity to assume the maternal role herself, at least with others than with her own daughter. Her relationship with Mark, is distinguished by a "protective compassion" (514); she would like to surround both him and herself with "invisible arms vast, peaceful, maternal" (514).

Jimmy, the Emotional Moron

Another character who suffers from the separation of his knowledge from his experiences, of his thoughts from his feelings, thereby causing untold misery to himself and others is Jimmy Wood. As his name suggests, Jimmy Wood has done away with his feelings by turning solely to his reason and remains a fool despite the books he owns on Rosicrucianism, Buddhism, Yoga, Zoroastrianism, the I Ching, Zen and Sufism. He appears to have gone "insane" losing the ability to bridge his knowledge and daily experiences. He has read voraciously, but has never internalised them to make them his own. He is not able to exercise any wisdom in these books when his prudence and discretion are called for. Lessing makes use of this character as an example of a fool whose actions are separate from what he has learned intellectually in his readings just as the salt is from the spilled flour in the epigraph. Jimmy is an ethical and emotional moron with an "almost pathological indifference to any ordinary ideas of decency" (556). Jimmy exposes the Coldridge family secrets to the prying journalists, he even does not hesitate to give the family's new unlisted phone number to the news reporter justifying his action. Despite all the pleas to him to use discretion with the news-hungry journalists, he discloses all secrets when he is questioned. Jimmy represents the blind forces of military, science and government which, with velvet glove, offer salvation while they are missing a human dimension: "It was as if Jimmy had been born with one of the components of the human mind developed to its furthest possibility, but this was at the cost of everything else" (536). Jimmy has worked on and

perfected a machine for "stimulating, artificially, the capacities of telepathy, 'second sight' etc" (554). In a way, Jimmy's invention works, for certain people like Lynda and Martha do have psychological reactions as telepaths. The drift is toward the interchangeability of people and machines, until life itself is indistinguishable. Lessing through this character, unleashes a powerful attack on the mechanised contemporary society. Jimmy joins the band of fools who people the fragmented society of the sixties in the novel. However, Jimmy becomes, Martha's educator as he introduces her "to the enormous resources of the 'occult' [which] lead her to search there for further entrances into herself" (Rubenstein 154-55).

Another character (or fool in the Sufi sense) who demonstrates her own lack of integration and wholeness is Dorothy, one of the lodgers in the Coldridge household when she ineptly tries to hire help to repair a leaking faucet. She notes in her diary:

I rang five plumbers. Three didn't answer [...]. The fourth said he would come at nine. He never came at all. The fifth said he would come on Saturday morning at ten. Saturday morning [...] I went out shopping. Lynda went to sleep. The man came while I was out. I telephoned him. His wife answered. (203)

At last Dorothy turns off the main valve because the 'leak gets worse and she is in a state of frenzy and has to go to bed to hide from the world.

Martha's Quest

Martha's quest has its own uncompromising logic. She starts from the mud house on the kopje (in *MQ*) to the anonymous shell of London flats. Showalter notes that Martha's journey is from "the individual to the collective, from the personal to the communal, from the female to the global consciousness" (309). Lessing's focus on her favourite concept "the individual conscience in its relations with the collective" continues in *FGC* also, but with a difference. Episodes concerning Martha alternate with collective scenes like the election party, the garden parties at Margaret's country home, the Aldermaston March etc. . Martha's quest becomes less important; she becomes involved first with the Coldridge family and then disappears into the general fate of humanity. Though the characters that fill the novel are typical and even stereotypical representatives of politics, arts, media and letters in England, the collective by the end of the novel, emerges as a "kind of universal consciousness" or cosmic oversoul or "the evolving consciousness of the world" (Kaplan 172). As Lessing's conception of the collective has changed, she has abandoned the traditional narrative conventions that express the significance of the individuals and in Greene's words, "Whereas in *The Golden Notebook* she breaks through the forms of realism, here she simply drifts away from them" (77) using "such alienating techniques [that] have alienated even Lessing fans" (77). The series started with Martha as the focal point, but her individual destiny becomes so irrelevant by the end that her death is revealed in parenthesis. We are not allowed to identify with a strikingly delineated protagonist or to

become involved with anyone too personally. As a result, there is a refusal of drama, a reporting of all incidents as equal, individual case histories alternate with essayistic descriptions of the collective life, strictly in accordance with Lessing's own assertion that she "heaved the rules out" when she wrote the novel (*Voice*, 65).

Martha, the Surrogate Mother

One of the ironic features of Martha's quest is that from the beginning she has capacities to gain transcendence, but she fails to recognise them and use them to shape her life because she does not "remember" them. While it is Lessing's conviction that aspiring Sufis must remember at all times that their purpose is to rise on the vertical ladder of enlightenment, she portrays how it becomes problematic for women who have no stories, models, or guides to remind them of what they know. Martha begins to remember the times of her solitude when she gained insight. She learns to protect her right to those times. The loneliness and flexibility of her personality, combined with the self-imposed stress of eating and sleeping too little and walking long distances at night make her "move back in time, annulling time, [...] and stand in another country" (47). She prizes this heightened consciousness which was first drawn out by Thomas, whose influence remains with her in spite of his descent into madness and death. Unlike her two marriages, which added nothing to her self-development, Martha's involvement with the Coldridges enables her to play the role she has so far declined and recognise the value of "working" on her self.

Eventually, Martha, with a certain ironic distance, acts as surrogate mother to Paul, Mark's abandoned and orphaned nephew, Francis, Mark's and Lynda's son and their cousins Gwen and Jill. She experiences motherhood, and through children broadens and deepens her understanding of herself and the times in which she lives. She confronts her mother and understands how she had struggled to create an identity different from her mother's. Her last experience with Mrs. Quest helps Martha to see herself in the perspective of the entire life cycle:

Oneself [...] had to be, for as long as was necessary, screaming baby, sulking adolescent, then middle aged woman [...] reflected off the faceted mirror that was one's personality, that responded [...] every second, to these past selves, past voices, temporary visitors. (375)

In her relations with the adolescent members of the household, she perceives that it is possible to speak past these temporary roles to the "permanent person" (375). Thus the watchful Martha misses no opportunity to understand from life's situations and pays debts and relives past experiences that she had not integrated or understood. Her encounter with her mother ends in depression and she resorts to a mythology of liberation offered by the culture--psychology--and finds it lacking. She decides to pursue her own growth and thus frees herself from the mythology of sexual love. Martha is drawn to the Coldridge household precisely

because they are familiar, for she has not only stopped seeking something new but has renounced the search for the new. For she instinctively holds the Sufi attitude that real learning comes from the ordinary sources. She realises that real learning is suddenly understanding something you have understood all your life but in a new way. New words are irrelevant. "But I want to take words as ordinary as bread. Or life. Or death. Cliches. I want to have my nose rubbed in cliches" (111). Through her relationship with the Coldridge household, especially with Lynda, Martha develops a new skill, one showing the influence on Lessing of the Sufi belief in the evolutionary possibility of planned spiritual growth. As the centre of the house, Martha becomes attuned to the other inhabitants: she begins to "overhear" what some of them are thinking, as she did with Thomas. Hoping to learn more about what she suspects is collective-induced mental illness, Martha explores the region of "madness" with her friend, guide and teacher, Lynda and gains visionary powers.

Each character who lives or associates himself/herself with the Coldridge household is marked by the chaos and violence of the times--from Paul, whose Jewish refugee mother committed suicide after her husband, a spy, defected to the Soviet Union, to left-wing Patty Samuels, who has a nervous breakdown when Stalin's death revealed the repressiveness of his regime, to Lynda, whose powers are labelled madness by psychiatrists, to John Patten, whose arrest for homosexuality becomes a cause of shame. In her position as mother, matron, and

counsellor, the one who holds everything together, Martha absorbs the experiences of other characters. Through others, she completes the unfinished struggles of her childhood and young adulthood, heals the old wounds, and pays her debts. She emerges stronger, able to cope with almost anything. For according to the Sufis, as well as Lessing, "A great deal did not need to be said: there being no substitute for experience" (218). For Martha, motherhood is a time for gaining insight, for living in that "clear-lit space" that is the "watcher's." In her role as mother-counsellor, Martha experiences not only the currents of the various personal lives that she holds together, but, through them, the currents of their times. This is the basis from which she later develops prophetic powers. The Martha of the earlier novels has disappeared, leaving room for the new Martha, a transparency, a porous medium. This is because Lessing observes that Sufism often appeals to artists or to those who have learned "that truth is to be gathered through the pores of one's skin, from the air at any rate, with one's whole being and not just part of it" ("Elephant" 373).

The extraordinary powers that Martha begins to develop are a direct result of her intense concentration on the dynamics of the relationships in the house. The powers Martha develops come from experiencing events more intensely than others. Martha learns that there are currents of energy she can "plug in to." Carol P Christ notes, "[Martha's] whole life as a mother and counselor is a process of tuning in to currents of energy or what some might call the psychological dynamics in the house" (62). Martha takes the

process a step further than most mothers by virtue of her concentration on the processes of her own inner life and this becomes fruitful because of Lynda's presence.

To develop her "intelligence" Martha requires a readiness to go beyond ordinary experience, as she learns through her developing relationship with Lynda, the mad/wise wife of Mark, who lives in the basement with her friend Dorothy from the psychiatric ward. To Martha initially, the basement flat with its occupants appeared menacing, "as if it was a territory full of alien people from whom she had to protect herself" (234). However as she begins to talk to Lynda, she gradually comes to realise that Lynda's vision of life is not qualitatively different from her own. And when she wants to investigate further her own intimations both of the world's destruction and of a higher kind of existence to come, it is Lynda to whom she must go. Just as the inner house in Mark's book contains a hidden octagonal white room under the library, the basement in his own home serves as the inaccessible recesses of the mind, where Lynda lives. Mark, Martha, Paul and Francis live upstairs or in the outer layer, from where each pays visits downstairs to Lynda's inner domain for friendship and advice. For years Lynda has been in and out of mental hospitals and on and off prescription drugs, her "heightened sensitivity" long ago diagnosed by doctors as schizophrenia and thus converted into her own uncontrollable self-hater. Further more, it is from Lynda, a victim of society's mistrust of the strange and the acutely sensitive that Martha

receives the warning that teaches her to be discreet about what she knows and she tells Martha to be careful, "you mustn't say what you know, they'll lock you up, they want machines, they don't want people" (524). This cautioning parallels the concept of secrecy and discretion with which real knowledge is taught in Sufi circles as referred to earlier. In the society of the 1960s, Martha recognises the fact that sex is an act in which people temporarily "plug in to" each other (518), in fact sex itself is "as impersonal as thunder or lightning"(517). Similarly emotions like "love" and "passion" which permeate and dominate the consciousness of people hardly exist as a concept in the novel. Martha also sees marriage as a part of this universal mockery, because like all other human relationships, it is based on subjective need, selfish concerns and the use of one person by another.

Martha concludes that words like "love" and "hate" have no significance. All human feeling can in essence be reduced to subjectivity which Lessing sees as synonymous with alienation. However, as Lessing has indicated in the introduction to *GN*, Martha "grows up" because she comes to see her own schizophrenia and subjectivity projected into the world at large. Lessing posits that only through the recognition of one's own madness as a reflection of the world's madness can a higher state of sanity be achieved. "Conscious madness, as opposed to the world's *unconscious* madness is the way to truth itself for Lessing" observes Rigney (74). "Madness" and "sanity" thus become, like "love" and "hate," meaningless terms, their significance merely a matter of perception.

Martha's Journey Through "Lynda's Country"

Laing in his *Politics of Experience* (1967) maintains that there is a positive function for what society terms madness; that is not "what we need to be cured of, but that is itself a natural way of healing our own appalling state of alienation called normality"(116). Normality, for Laing and Lessing, is the negative and truly insane state, because it implies the clinging to uncertain certainties and the dependence on a reality that is, in fact unreal. Rigney observes: "To go mad in a positive sense is to give up all certainty, according to Laing and Lessing, to lose the distinction between the real and the not-real, between the self and the not-self" (75). Thus the result of going mad in this sense may well be the emergence of a state of mind far saner than that understood by the normal world. Martha Quest quests for this superior sanity by inducing a virtually self-conscious and planned inducement of hysteria:

This country, the country or sea of sound, the wavelength where the voices babble and rage and sing and laugh, and music and war sounds and the bird song and every conceivable sound go together--was approached, at least for her, or at least at this time, through hysteria. (540)

In the novel, Lessing subverts Charlotte Bronte's portrayal of the archetypal mad woman in the attic in *Jane Eyre* (1847). In both these novels, there is the classic love triangle of the man, his mad wife and his

beloved/lover. But Lessing symbolically rescues Bronte's Bertha Mason in her portrayal of Lynda. Instead of the isolated wife in the attic, *FGC* has an acutely sensitive woman in the basement to whom Martha is increasingly drawn, in whom she seeks mental succour. Though madness entails loss of identity, Martha willingly and actively seeks to confront madness. She experiments in this way because, paradoxically, only through the loss of self is it possible to find the self.

In this venture, Martha is directed by Lynda, who leads her successfully from hysteria into the insane experience where the true identity of the self is to be discovered. It is she who teaches Martha the Laingian premise that madness is vision. In Sufi terminology this relationship can be equated to the Sufi master-disciple relationship whereby the teacher guides the *murid* on the Sufi Way. Throughout the novel, Lynda repeats: "I know things" (187). Part of what she knows is that all people are really at least two people: "Sometimes you are more the one that watches and sometimes that one gets far off and you are more the one that is watched" (239). Martha too becomes aware of the somebody in her "who always watches what goes on, who is always apart" (252). Rigney observes: "As Bronte's Bertha can be seen as Jane Eyre's mad, bad self, so Lynda can be seen as Martha's mad, good self. She serves as both guide and doppelganger." (77). Martha feels this identification even before she meets Lynda:

She had not met Lynda, save through improbably beautiful photographs, but she knew her, oh yes, very well, though she and Martha were not alike, and could not be, since Martha was not "ill" and in the hands of the doctors. But for a large variety of reasons, Lynda Coldridge who was in a very expensive mental hospital because she could not stand being Mark's wife, and Francis' mother, came too close to Martha. (125)

Because of Martha's mysterious affinity with the insane Lynda, she cannot simply leave the Coldridge household and assumes Lynda's role and becomes Mark's surrogate wife, caring for his son and nephew, managing his house, providing him with ideas for his novel and plays. When Mark turns his attentions from Martha, she moves into Lynda's apartment in the basement, where their relationship as doubles is emphasised, where Martha realises that she is "in love" with Lynda as "with a part of herself she had never even been introduced to--even caught a glimpse of" (388). As noted earlier, when Martha enters Lynda's mad world, both physically and emotionally, she sometimes wonders where she ends and where Lynda begins. Thomas Stern of *L*, who is Martha's educator or guru is a precursor of Lynda: Lynda's "great eyes that, like Thomas' once, were full of depths of light into which one could lean, like pools or clouds or trees; and was invaded by great washes of understanding, insight, knowledge" (542). Martha places herself entirely in Lynda's hands and enters Lynda's world

symbolically by imitating Lynda's deeds. She watches Lynda closely and never puts questions as she knows that:

A disciple learns less from his teacher in the way of literary or therapeutic tradition than from watching him deal with the problems of daily life; and must not plague him with questions but accept on trust a great deal of apparent logic and foolishness which will make eventual sense. (Shah, *Sufis* xxi)

Whenever Martha feels close to a breakdown, she knows that there is no one else, who can understand her but Lynda and she rushes to the basement where Lynda and her possessive and complementary pair, Dorothy and her friends from the psychiatric ward congregate to share their acute perceptions which are almost dangerously honest to be uttered in the upper layer (part) of the household. In the upper level, the various members of the Coldridge household including Martha inhabit their rooms, engaged in their own pursuits. Commenting on this parallel situation, Muge Galin observes: "This disjunction between what happens above and what happens below is best explained by the parallel with the underground Sufi communities that find themselves uncomfortably surrounded by secular societies" (118). Lynda, in spite of being Martha's guide never bothers to explain the course of things; for she believes that Martha should discover truth not by repetition of Sufi teachings, but by the perpetual experience of it. Shah in *A Perfumed Scorpion* (1978) notes: "And it is in the *experience*

of truth that the Sufis have always reposed their trust. Sufism is therefore not 'Do as I say and not as I do' or even 'Do as I do,' but 'Experience it and you will know' (25).

Martha is able to identify her rival in love for Mark, Patty Samuels as "her younger self" (216) she is able to "like" Margaret, Mark's mother "once she had got past that enemy" (154). She realises as if "her past had become fused with Mark's present. Almost, or as if Mark was herself, or she Mark" (198-99); also in young Francis she identified her joking "Matty" self (200). Thus Martha progresses from personal, self-centred concerns to a larger awareness of others and the world around her pursuing various beliefs to attain psychic wholeness. With Lynda, at her side Martha comes to realise the limitation of rational thought and seeks to embrace and understand the higher truth of her intuition. In fact *FGC* is remarkable for its skilful evocation of apocalyptic and psychic elements.

On the eve of her mother's arrival, Martha involves herself in "hard work, on recovering some of her past" (249) knowing very well that her "'work' on her memory, the salvage operation" (302) will enable her to rise to a higher level for achieving harmony and also for the sake of a greater common cause. Martha, in the course of her "work" identifies herself as "an elderly man," "a young man, Aaron, Rachel's brother" and even allows her sense of herself "go into a different shape [...] a small white horse" (245). She considers "this 'work' was more important than anything" (249) for she,

like the Sufis, believes that the treasure which a Sufi disciple like her seeks should be derived from one's work in the world. Shah does not advocate that Sufis abandon their worldly duties. On the other hand, he exhorts for a commitment to the evolution of all of mankind through the struggles that everyday living provides. Through the self-"work" one becomes perfect; the "work" which goes on in the basement apartment is an instance of self-"work." This self-"work," according to the Sufis, helps one to attain harmony and perfection and it helps one to replace chaos and finally leads to self-knowledge. In Sufi understanding, the manifestations of schizophrenia can be regarded as a sign of one's incomplete state and one's need to "work" on oneself. This "work" is done by relentless self-observation. Martha realises: "one talked, one did this or that: finally, one 'heard' for the first time what one's life had been saying over and over again, in various ways, for years" (249). This self-knowledge is similar to Anna Wulf's observation in *GN*: "All self-knowledge is knowing, on deeper and deeper levels, what one knew before" (239), again anticipating the Sufi context. The Sufis argue that without resistance, there is no work, and without work, one's mind, heart and muscles will atrophy.

Martha has to "return" to her miserable childhood, especially her painful encounters with her mother, in order to be able to move forward in her adult life. This is why the Sufi poet Rumi speaks of awakening in the dungeons before achieving the rose gardens. In the Sufi context, this choice of concentrating on the hurdles in life, or deliberately engaging in

conscious labour and intentional suffering is essential for real transformation to take place. In *GN*, Anna Wulf chooses this kind of suffering saying, "if what we feel is pain, then we must feel it, acknowledging that the alternative is death. Better anything than the shrewd, the calculated, the non-committal, the refusal of giving" (545-46). These psychic journeys contribute to balance the various aspects of Martha's character within a unified person and to bring her closer to completion and psychological and spiritual rebirth. Lessing who appreciates adventurers like Edward Wilson (explorer and scientist) who embarked upon tedious winter journeys simply for the sake of securing penguin eggs while expecting no monetary rewards expects us to look upon her characters as models, persons who have truly fulfilled their destinies and found their place and duty in the "Big Picture."

Martha with her "wakeful insights" has long realised that Lynda and her companions in the basement represent the irrational and repressed levels of her own being that she must confront in order to dissolve the pain she has carried within herself for years. Consequent on the inner pain precipitated by her mother's impending visit, Martha visits Lynda in the basement and questions her about psychoanalysis, wondering if it can help her to deal with her panic. She boldly ventures to explore that pain, she understands that: "for years, she had been listening, half listening, to talk in the basement which she had thought was too crazy to take as more than pitiable. Now she was understanding it--or a lot of it. She was even learning the language"(240). These small openings into the basement and

into her self are parallel processes; literally, mental illness loses its alien quality; metaphorically the "crazy" language of her own deeper psyche becomes more comprehensible.

What happens when Martha goes to live with Lynda during one of her "bad times" approximates much more closely to the basic therapeutic principles established by Laing. Although Martha is not a doctor and has no intention of "curing" Lynda, she attempts to help her friend by transposing *herself* into Lynda's view of the world. Thus Martha allows herself to be initiated into madness, a process whereby she can sink herself into Lynda. As Martha sits listening, "receptive" her "whole body, organism vibrated, shook and was being shattered to bits, by the force with which the sea of sound entered her" (521). At that point in their shared experience at which the world seems further removed, Lynda and Martha together, sitting on a carpet, perform a kind of ritual, like a communion, Lynda cautioning Martha as she gets "through the sound barrier" (521) to be careful. A scene like this is a common occurrence in a *tekke* (a Sufi retreat) where men and women sit on the floor in segregated quarters. As one group of the Jalalis sing excitedly, another group begins to go through the motions of whirling after receiving the admonitions and blessings of the master. Eventhough Lessing absorbed Sufism originally through Shah's books and lectures in London, she encountered much more of Sufi thought than she did of Sufi practice of a Sufi community. Lessing did not have to abandon her Western socialisation and move into a community of Sufis to worship God. Even

though for the most part, her characters do not suffer alone, most of them wilfully seek a teacher and the teacher and the disciple “work” together. The relationship between the two women is the vehicle for their psychic experiences which are parallel but separate. Martha’s gesture of drinking milk from a piece of the glass pitcher that Lynda has smashed is highly symbolic for it establishes Martha’s willingness not to judge Lynda on conventional terms and eliminates in Lynda the hostility that is stimulated by any threat to her already circumscribed autonomy. By associating herself with Lynda, Martha achieves insight both into Lynda’s motives and into the source of her own existential restlessness.

Right from the beginning of the novel, we are warned that extraordinary psychic phenomena are to be taken seriously and Martha’s preparation for madness begins as far back as her experience of illumination on the African veld in *MQ*. Essentially, all of Martha’s psychic experimentation and study in *FGC* emanate from her vision on the veld as a teenager and are directed toward rediscovering that moment in such a way that she can incorporate its full meaning into her adult life. The Sufis claim that ordinary people are capable of experiencing a higher working of the mind, transcending ordinary limitations, through which humanity can proceed to a higher level of evolution. Because enlightenment is to be achieved by working with the material world, Sufism aims to reconcile the spiritual and the practical, the irrational and the rational, the unconscious and the conscious. It thus offers the possibility of a unified self, and restores

visionary experiences like Martha's to a valued and integrated role in life. In her middle age, therefore, Martha is able to look back over her past and see her various selves as mere variations on her 'real' self, her permanent self, to use a Sufi term. Martha's awareness of her own permanent self remains elusive, but she comes closer to realising it once she recognises its basis in her childhood self. Beginning with her foreknowledge of Dorothy's suicide attempt, she starts to "pick up" voices and visions more regularly and consults Dr. Lamb because she wonders if she is going mad. The psychiatrist's failure to explain to Martha's satisfaction the distinction between schizophrenic hallucinations and her own experiences makes her conclude that Lessing's theory of consciousness is not so easily compartmentalised into madness and sanity. Lessing like Laing and other radical theoreticians of psychopathology believes that the images of madness, dreams and visionary experiences originate in the same dimension of the psyche.

Besides hearing voices, Martha also begins to dream profusely. "It was, as if something in [her] that needed to talk, to express, to speak, to advise, could use this channel or that [...]" (344). All these experiences are channels to and from the deeper levels of the unconscious, which may be nurtured by conscious attention. In her Stony Brook interview with Jonah Raskin Lessing commented:

The hidden domain of our mind communicates with us through dreams. I dream a great deal and I scrutinise my dreams. The more I scrutinise the more I dream. When I'm stuck in a book I deliberately dream [...]. I fill my brain with the material for a new book, go to sleep, and I usually come up with a dream which resolves the dilemma. (*Voice 67*)

As Martha becomes more sensitive to these extra wavelengths of consciousness she feels "herself (or rather, the surface of herself) to be a mass of fragments, or facets, or bits of mirror reflecting qualities embodied in other people [...]" (375). Unlike Mary Turner in *G/S* who unsuccessfully attempts to escape from facing the inner self, Martha's overriding concern appears to be able to develop as an individual and to define herself outside the traditional roles imposed by the collective. This is the case of a Sufi quester who willingly traverses the Path of Love braving all the hazards. Rather than ignoring the confusing voices she overhears, Martha learns to "tune in" more consciously, and is rewarded by a breakthrough in consciousness when she stumbles once again upon the psychic truth that she must continually forget and remember, that "one could never be told what one did not really know; though of course the 'knowing' might be hidden from oneself" (390). Rubenstein observes: "Just as the conscious and unconscious domains of the psyche (in the Jungian schema) complement each other, the two women are reciprocally enriched by their partnership [...]" (146). The two women realise that: "It was as if doors kept

opening in their brains just far enough to admit a new sensation, a glimmer of something [...]. What they wanted, looked for, searched for was everywhere, all around them, like a finer air shimmering in the air of everyday" (393). Lessing uses a similar language in her review of Idries Shah's various books on Sufism: "I wish I could have the experience of reading it [*The Way of the Sufi*] again for the first time: it was like a door opening where one least expects it" ("What Looks Like" 41). Lessing uses this language as the closest verbal equivalent for a heightened state of consciousness whose description defies language, since matters of soul cannot be expressed explicitly.

Strictly following the Laingian prescription that the therapist must have the plasticity to transpose himself/herself into another strange and even alien view of the world, whereby he can draw on his own psychotic possibilities, Martha puts her finger on the weak spot of the western culture:

Perhaps it was because if society is so organised, or rather has so grown, that it will not admit what one knows to be true, will not admit it, that is, except as it comes out perverted, through madness, then it is through madness and its variants it must be sought after. (394)

Having been personally involved with mental illness for quite a long time, Lessing categorically states: "These people [schizophrenics] I maintain, are

probably not mad at all [...] a lot of perfectly normal people, with certain capacities, are being classed as 'ill'" ("Learning" 19-20).

Martha's Retreat

Voluntarily accepting Lynda's fractured reality, leaving behind Mark and what he represents, Martha stays in the basement with Lynda for a month opening herself completely to what she can learn by "looking at ordinary life from another dimension" (512). Through hysteria, Martha tries to explore the sea of sounds, she felt as if she was being racked by emotion and one of the voices, a "jaunty" "intimately jeering" one uttered accusations of "hatred" (540) and she found herself grovelling on the carpet crying out against it. Lynda cautions Martha but encourages her, "You mustn't get locked up, Martha. I can't do it, but you can. And when you do it, you'll do it for me too" (541). Implicitly obeying Lynda, as would a Sufi disciple, Martha resolves to find out about the "sound-ocean" (541) by herself. All on a sudden Martha began to understand what Lynda like Thomas had been trying to tell her: the significance of the different "organs" with which one can "see" and "hear" and how these "mutants" are labelled mad by modern psychiatrists like Dr. Lamb. In her state of heightened perception, Martha also remembers that as a young child she had the ability to "see" pictures and hear sounds but that the faculties, until quite recently in adulthood, had been suppressed and consequently had atrophied. Even when she had had these faculties they had been uncontrolled. Now she seeks conscious control over these developing powers. Listening carefully

to her self-hater in the sea of sound, Martha realises that it was this internalised conditioning which had defeated Lynda when she had not been strong enough as a vulnerable adolescent to deal with it. Eventually she realises that the capacity to hear voices or see pictures is merely one of those capacities of the new people “who are in the main line of evolution” (547).

Sufis believe that human beings fail to remember:

what we have been in the past, and also to remember what we are at the moment, [...]. [Therefore] exercises for remembering present and recent experiences are designed to provide us with the capacity for remembering farther back [...] remembering [...] that for which we long, though we do not know it. (Shah, *Way* 262)

The central spiritual method of Sufism is *dhikr*, this word often translated as “invocation,” has the dual meaning of “remembrance” and “mention.” The Sufi seeks to practise *dhikr* under the guidance of a spiritual master, without interruption. The two main supports for the *dhikr* are the *majlis* (session or meeting) and the *khalwa* (spiritual retreat). The *dhikr* may be done silently or in the form of a chant, motionlessly or accompanied by a rhythmic swaying which may take the form of a dance. *khalawat* (plural of *khalwa*) are solitary spiritual retreats for the purpose of invocation. These are made from time to time and may last several days. Symbolically, the “leadern”

soul of the seeker in its chaotic, unregenerate state in contact with the Divine Name is transmuted into "gold" which is its true nature. Martha's "alchemical work" in solitary retreats thus symbolises the work of spiritual realisation to recover the true nature of her soul. Martha discovers that Lynda's psychic energy manifests itself as a lighter, finer capacity than hers. Slowly developing a finer receptivity herself, by finding in her consciousness a "listening space" (516) she tunes in with more control to the stream of impulse from a dimension where time does not exist. Her emergence from the basement after a month of exploration of those sounds and images is a euphoric rebirth. Martha exclaims: "Everything was so much there, present, existing in an effulgence of delight, offering themselves to her, till she felt they were extensions of her and she of them, or at least, their joy and hers sang together, [...]" (527). Her union with the natural world is a manifestation of that same peak experience she had experienced intermittently as an adolescent on the African veld. According to John White, this identification with the universe is "one's total union with the infinite [...]. The usual ego boundaries break down, and the ego passes beyond the limits of the body" (vii).

Martha on her own part makes one more "descent" into the collective unconscious in a room at the top of Paul Coldridge's house. Like a quester on The Path of Love, Martha deliberately undertakes the most difficult and dangerous stage of her journey. That her journey is essentially spiritual is emphasised by the religious metaphor "the progress through the Stations of

the Cross" (573). Recalling the *murid's* forgoing food and sleep on his Path to the Beloved, Martha sends herself "over the edge" on a "brief trip into a totally uncharted interior" (557). Martha tries her level best to capture the essence of her experiences in a journal form in order to "remember" the perilous journey she has undertaken. In this most remarkable section, Lessing maps Martha's highly symbolic journey into the abnormal consciousness, transcribed into the inadequate language of ordinary discourse. Rendered in alternating sections of stream-of-consciousness and more conventional narrative style, the journal is almost a "Memorandum to Herself" (565) of the various stages of her confrontation with her self-hater in privacy. Again she goes through physical rituals such as walking, sweeping, and doing exercises which lead her through the sea of sound. She encounters the self-hater, as the inner antagonist that every person must confront sooner or later in order to transcend the boundaries of limited self-awareness.

During her experiments with madness Martha sees, as she had seen in smaller glimpses before that her personality is multifaceted, divided into opposing tendencies: "*every attitude, emotion, thought, has its opposite held in balance out of sight but there all the time*" (572). In order to learn from and survive these very frightening experiences, Martha needs every ounce of analytical intelligence. Detachment is necessary for self-analysis as much as for social analysis. In her final collection of notes written before she leaves Paul's house, Martha writes: "I've been turned inside out like a

glove or a dress. I've been like the negative of a photograph. Or a mirror image. I've seen the underneath of myself. I am the watcher, the listener" (576).

Martha's perception of the union of opposites within herself is exactly what Sufism marks as the significant stage. "When apparent opposites are reconciled, the individuality is not only complete, it also transcends the bounds of ordinary humanity as we understand them. The individual becomes as near as we state it, immensely powerful" (Shah, *Sufis* 143). However, the Sufis note that progress at this point is immensely complex and perilous unless it is carried out with a method developed through the ages. She must come out of her "madness" to avoid getting stuck in it as a permanent listener/observer. After reaching this stage, according to the Sufis, the quester will be able to understand "true meaning behind inexplicable worldly happenings" (Shah, *Sufis* 143). Martha's ultimate aim is not to live as a mystic, or in a mental asylum, but to return to everyday life. Thus her inward journey corresponds to the activity of Sufi which connects and balances all areas of experience--understanding, being and knowing. Marion Vlastos in her seminal article observes:

The essential patterns and effects of her trips are sufficiently comprehensible--Martha seems both to descend and to ascend psychically. Facing the "self-hater" and the "Devil," she confronts the depths of her own nature and of the collective

consciousness of humanity. In some sense Martha is able to recognise her own participation in human evil, [...] she gains psychic strength and, in Laing's terms, greater "ontological security". (252)

Having fully repossessed her own mind, she is able to accept her personal life for what it literally is, for its reality by musing: "Here, where else, you fool, you poor fool, where else has it been, ever?" (615). Having recognised that the next step is always under one's nose, where she cannot see it without extraordinary effort, Martha now can see more clearly how she can work to save what is most valuable in the world from destruction. While Lynda's special sensitivity to other people's natures and hear their thoughts made a tragedy of her life, Martha taps the same capacities to save humanity from the coming Catastrophe. The Socratic injunction "Know Thyself" finds its culmination in the Prophetic saying: "He who knows himself knows his Lord." According to the Sufis the greatest achievement that man as man is capable of is to become a Perfect Man (*insan al-kanil*) a friend of God, saint or sage.

Although the fulfilment of ascent is the consummation of the quest, it is the return to outer social reality which is the crucial test for equilibrium according to the Sufis. The Sufis regard mystical illumination and the ascetic union with Nature, Divinity and perception of cosmic order as valuable only if they result in making the Sufi a more useful member of the

community so that "he returns to the world, to guide others on the way" (Shah, *Sufis* 29). Unlike other modes of mysticism, which believe that reality is primarily spiritual and regard "ascent" as the end of achievement, Sufis believe that reality is the interaction between the spiritual and the material world and therefore insist on a start from and return back to ordinary reality. Shah puts this clearly:

Mankind, according to the Sufis, is infinitely perfectable. The perfection comes about through attunement with the whole of existence. Physical and spiritual life meet, but only when there is a complete balance between them. Systems which teach withdrawal from the world are regarded as unbalanced.

(Shah, *Sufis* 27)

Martha notices the different personalities, past and present, of the Coldridge household becoming merged--Francis becomes "Matty," her younger self; Paul becomes Sarah--each generation going through the same experiences and mutations as the last, because one can learn only through experience. While it took Martha and Lynda much exhausting "work" to realise that one needs to defend oneself against the self-hater which can destroy one's sanity, the "mutants" of the Aftermath show a distinct evolution: they are able to shorten this process, eliminating the need to experience and able instead to tap directly into the collective experience of humanity.

Women in Lessing's major novels attain plateaus of selfhood through "work" on their selves. At each plateau they reach an apex of sociopolitical, psychological, and spiritual development. These plateaus are self-reliance, emotional fortitude, sagacious wisdom, spiritual awakening and restorative power, the highest levels of selfhood. To attain plateaus, these women have to break the pattern of "nightmare repetition" which refers to the attitudes and codes of behaviour with which one patriarchal generation indoctrinates the next. Lessing, in *FGC* apparently adheres to Goethe's original insight (about the hero's development in a *Bildungsroman*) that the hero must develop naturally out of what he is and that, to that end, receptivity is fully as important as a trait as assertiveness. Martha who has been continually making the wrong choices--her two marriages, her abandonment of her child--remains passive especially in the early part of *FGC*. This depiction of Martha's nature shocked many perceptible critics like Patricia Spacks who castigates Martha like this: "She [Martha] stands for nothing, defies nothing successfully, [...] she is passive when she should be active, obtuse when she should be perceptive. Her heroism consists merely in her suffering and her rage, not in any hope or promise of effect" (157). In contrast to Spack's view, it is possible to argue using Sufi dictum that there is a time and a place for everything. That is, Martha keeps herself open to the wisdom that Thomas Stern, Lynda and others bring to her, while waiting for the right time when her instinctual intuitions develop as she comes to true maturity.

Another critic who finds the mature Martha problematic is D.J. Enright who notes that,

there is no true--no artistically true--connection between the Martha Quest whom we first met as a fifteen-year-old in the novel named after her and the old woman whose death on a contaminated island somewhere off Scotland is casually mentioned in the 'Appendix' to *The Four-Gated City*. (22)

As Martha joins the Coldridge household, the perspective of *FGC* shifts; she slowly but surely moves from the focus of attention and becomes instead a participator in a group development, observing and learning alongside a complex set of characters as they battle to come to terms with themselves and their role in an increasingly violent and disintegrating world. It is in the course of living for others that Martha comes to know and develop her talents, her clairvoyance and her capacity to save others from the coming disaster. These talents are an extension of the capacities shown by the young Martha Quest. Mark instils confidence and optimism in Martha with his assurances that her youthful vision of the four-gated city can be a reality at the time of the Catastrophe. Lynda kindles Martha's capacity to see things outside the frame of "normality"; and these perceptions enable Martha to act as the saviour of mutants. The young Paul and Francis, incite Martha to recall her youthful fury against the blindness and the stubbornness of authority and her willingness in youth, to take terrible personal risks in order to live outside the net of that authority. Such

recollections prompt Martha to defy governmental authorities and risk her life in her attempt to establish a counter society on Faris Island at the time of the Catastrophe. If we interpret Martha's odyssey on ordinary grounds of reality, her transformation appears to be out of character. But when Lessing's mystical side is acknowledged, it not only becomes easy to expect Martha's exceptional wisdom but becomes necessary to anticipate greater changes in her being; thus Enright's charge is refuted. It will be interesting to note that the nameless protagonist in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972) resorts to maternity and achieves selfhood by recreating herself anew.

The Appendix of the novel elaborates upon the condition of the post-cataclysm era through various letters, private notes and other lesser exchanges and correspondences. Its burden is that "Catastrophe," a nuclear accident of some unspecified kind has left England uninhabitable. The Catastrophe had been predicted by Lynda who had a vision of England looking like "the corpse of a poisoned mouse" (643). The suggestion is that the cataclysm resulted not from extraordinary events, but from the cumulative momentum of ordinary ones. Lynda and Martha who were able to tune in on some wavelengths, were able to describe their knowledge to Francis in a way that he could finally "hear." Martha and Lynda had become a part of surreptitious group of "sensitives" including several psychiatrists who had the courage to defy the establishment view, dedicated to channelling their intuitions of the future in order to rescue civilisation from impending annihilation. In the Sufi terminology Martha and Lynda function

as transmitters of "that current which can develop man to a higher stage in his evolution" (Lessing, "In the World" 133). The final sections of the novel concern a letter from an old and worn-out Martha, addressed to Francis. At that time Martha is barely surviving in Robinson Crusoe style on a contaminated island off the coast of Scotland. While Lynda and Martha and even to some extent Jimmy Wood, had been nature's "experimental models" for increasing powers of consciousness, the new generation on Martha's island is the true evolutionary mutation containing the seeds for the psychic and spiritual renewal of the race. The youngest members of the new generation live on a higher plane of reality, having various forms of extra-sensory capacities. Several of them even seem to have already matured psychologically, having assimilated the wisdom of the collective consciousness that Martha needed a lifetime to accomplish. Martha notes: "They are beings who include that history [of what the human race is in this century] in themselves and who have transcended it. They include us in a comprehension we can't begin to imagine" (660).

Most significantly, the children possess extraordinary and strikingly diversified capacities for extra-sensory perception and communication. As Martha says, it is the children who do not only contain but are also sensitive to the "crystalline gleam" in the air. Moreover, there is an indication of divinity on the island, foreshadowing the gods and goddesses of *BDH* and reminding us of Laing's conviction that opening the doors to the inner world can generate the emergence of "divine power" (*Politics* 143). During

Martha's time on the island it becomes invested with rare qualities that defy precise description, such as "a sweet high loveliness somewhere, like a flute played only just within hearing" (656). Lessing implies that representatives from another world may be accompanying and perhaps stimulating a new stage in the evolution of humanity. Just as Martha in her madness experiences both the extreme heights and depths of human consciousness, so it is during the year when the inhabitants of the island suffer the greatest hardships and fear that they also become aware of "a high sweet loveliness somewhere." During this year some of the inhabitants of the island meet and talk with strangers--"people from the sun." Evolving and expanding, this beneficent element in their lives becomes the source of the people's hope and reveals the extreme lineaments of Lessing's new faith: "It was from that time, because of what we were told, that we took heart and held on to our belief in a future for our race" (656).

According to the Sufis, the immense power that the completed individual has can only be exercised in association with fellow Sufis and fellow men. It is Martha's evolution which prevents her from being manipulated by governmental secrecy and mass-media presentation. Lessing suggests that contemporary man in general can avoid being controlled if there is conscious evolution. According to Laing, opening oneself up in the fullest sense to the whole of existence is an experience that everyone must go through "in order to reach a higher state of evolution" (*Politics* 158-59). Those people who are schizophrenic or, like Martha, are

able to achieve schizophrenic insight without losing their sanity, are in both Laing's and Lessing's terms most capable of furthering the development of humanity. Predicting her approaching death, Martha recognises that she and Francis are evolutionary forerunners who must become obsolete, "People like you and me are a sort experimental model and Nature has had enough of us" (660). Martha seeks to shield the mutants from corruption and sends out as an emissary one child Joseph (the Biblical association with the young man who foresaw and saved Egypt from starvation is rather strong) to the rehabilitation camp administered by Francis. Martha suggests that one day perhaps the whole human race will resemble Joseph; and indeed the future generations must show the signs of evolution at birth if they are to survive. Rubenstein observes:

Symbolically, he is both Martha's spiritual legacy to the next generation and, through her, the spiritual offspring of Thomas Stern [Martha's lover in *Landlocked*]: not only the seer who had predicted the psychic mutations of the human race which in fact develop on Martha's island, but the loving man who had awakened in Martha the potentialities of higher, unitive vision.

(165)

Joseph who will become a gardener like Thomas Stern, is one of the new generation's children of violence, heir to the endless dialectics between collective cataclysm and extraordinary vision. When Joseph is sent to

Nairobi, to a rehabilitation settlement, he is classed as subnormal, "fit for 3rd grade work" (661). Mark comments that "the human race is united at last," but "all busily looking into each other's faces for marks of *difference*" (664). The challenging implication here is that violence, instead of being irrational, is a product of man's *reason*. Lessing is highly critical of the Western humanism, where reason is the measure of all things: what is "unreasonable" or "irrational" is by definition undesirable, wrong-headed. However, such a belief rests on a divisive system of thought which attributes value to one thing only at the expense of something else, repeatedly turning difference into opposition and conflict. Apparently innocent value-free contrasts like big/small, light/dark, man/woman, white/black, all too easily lead on to ideologically loaded pairing like major/minor, good/evil, masculine/feminine, Aryan/non-Aryan, White/non-white. Lessing concludes that violence is a consequence of man's obsessive use of "reason" to differentiate and divide, whether radically, sexually, politically or physically. The novel does not reject the use of reason, it highlights the limits of rationalism, and of cultures, especially Sufi cultures that are totally irrationalist. As scientists have observed, there are two sides to the brain--the left which is analytical, rational and verbal, and the right which is holistic, intuitive and spatial. Western civilisations have tended to encourage the left side, only allowing for the existence of the other through the clearly defined area of religion. This is where the significance of the sayings of Rumi quoted in the epigraph to Part IV of the novel becomes crucial. Rumi warns that "civilised man" as he evolves forgets the "earlier forms of intelligence

[...] he has fallen asleep [...]. He says "My sleeping experiences do not matter" (467). Its potential evolution being thus delayed, society has reached the point where it is unable to exercise even its rational powers; all it can do is label and compartmentalise anything unknown to stop the process of thought. In such a system, truth can be found only in "madness," in the margins.

Lamenting the lack of unity of individual and environment, the novel appears to advocate the Sufi view that we must change the inner consciousness before we change the society, shifting away from the Marxist view that social and economic change must come first. Many readers strongly feel that Lessing's turning away from political commitment towards the inner life is a form of reactionary romanticism, which simply overlooks the political options. Again, this vision of a future in which hope lies with individuals who are able to communicate without speech, and who are distinguished by what they share rather than what differentiates them, raises questions which are more fundamental to realist fiction than the obvious ones of credibility, for it runs counter to the highly individualistic perspective of realism. Subverting realism, Lessing insists on the need to go beyond the here and now to construct an alternative image of reality.

Lessing presents her hopes for a better society born of collective groupings and intermingling of races. The dervish teachers expect a similar harmony among their pupils: "the organizing of local and other groups,

composed of people chosen because of the inherent possibility of their harmonizing in an esoteric community, encourage[s] the development of something within the community” (Shah, *Way* 115). Shah also advocates working in groups like this: “The creation of working communities by selecting locally approved vocational and other groupings which can also be of use in the dervish ‘work’ [...]. Dervish operation is [...] a highly skilled and complex endeavour” (*Way* 114). The Sufi “work”--the salvaging operation--performed by the evolving mystic Martha, the seer Lynda, the writer visionary Mark and his clairvoyant son Francis--facilitates the escape of some human beings from the after effects of the nuclear holocaust. Thus through *FGC*, Lessing advocates the Sufi dictum that the treasure which a Sufi seeks should be derived from one’s work in the world: she calls for commitment to the evolution of all of human kind through the struggles that everyday living provides.

As Lessing became intensely involved with Sufism, its influence gained momentum in her novels written after the 1960s. The initially marginal influence of Sufism later becomes much more central in Lessing’s later fiction. This affects her narrative style as well. A sense of urgency can be discerned throughout the novel and this new “change” can be attributed to the emergent impact of Sufi world-view on Lessing’s degree of patience with her readers. Most of the novel consists of narrative summary “where we are told what happened and what to think about it. It is almost as though

a new urgency possessed Lessing at the time of writing, convincing her that she no longer had the leisure to show how but must tell what" (Fishburn 17).

Lynda, the Sufi *Shaikha*

Yet another significant feature that one notes in this novel is juxtaposing of a novel of interiority which runs parallel and simultaneous with the interrelated realistic novel of people and society. Martha's psychic explorations along with Lynda and by herself provide an inner reality which to them is more significant (as for the Sufis) than the reality of the ordinary man. Lynda at times resembles the renowned fool and teacher, Mulla Nasruddin, especially in her observations about her identity as is exemplified in the following interchange between Martha and Lynda.

"Lynda, do you know who you are?"

"Me," said Lynda.

"Do you see that when you look in the mirror?"

"No. Not often. Sometimes."

"When?"

"Oh, I don't know. There are times, you know" (239).

The following Sufi anecdote which Lessing quotes in *L* resembles the above interaction in content as well as in its cryptic style:

The Mulla walked into a shop one day.

The owner came forward to serve him.

"First things first," said Nasruddin; "did you see me walk into your shop?"

"Of course"

"Have you ever seen me before?"

"Never in my life."

"Then how do you know it is *me*?" (Shah, *Sufis* 79).

For Lessing "madness" is not a disease but a natural state. According to her schizophrenia and multiple personality disorders, must not be treated as illness but respected as signs of a person's high sensitivity or as an incomplete state and of one's needs to evolve. Sufis believe that the mad are mad because they can see more and yet are not developed enough to comprehend and sustain their hallucinations, which come and go at random. The enlightened ones are those who survive their madness, (like Martha), who have learned to understand and control their visions and can achieve those visions at will. According to Sukenick, "She [Lessing] wants [...] an abolition of the traditional hierarchy of the sane and the insane, a recognition of the revolutionary nature of madness" (531). When a seeker on the Sufi Path appears--or is pronounced--"mad," he or she may be in a state of heightened perception and sensitivity, or in a state of ecstasy at finally having got a glimpse of the Beloved and tasted his/her love. If that is the case, a Sufi would say we could all become *that* mad. In order to understand Lessing's sense of madness, her belief in the creative potential of all men, and her feelings about the application of this potential in the

twentieth century context, it is necessary to understand the significance of Sufism for Lessing. It serves as an organised system which identifies and emphasises certain otherwise ineffable capacities of twentieth-century man. She sees this ancient Eastern Way as something which has been rejected by many Westerners but which should be considered as another possible source of wisdom. The influence of Sufism has made Lessing's work more optimistic and more constructive than it might have been, and definitely more promising of a future than are those works of most other canonical modern Western poets and writers like William Butler Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Joseph Conrad and others.

Lessing can conceive of an evolved society or the evolution of the whole cosmos based on her Sufi faith in spiritual growth and mystical transformation even under the worst of circumstances. Lessing seriously offers Sufism as a practical way with the help of which we may be able to become citizens of the world instead of the American or British victims of the holocaust. In *FGC* Martha completes her search for reality by envisioning a new race of human beings whose minds have been expanded to fit them for life involved with distances: extra-sensory perception which enables them to "tune in" to a shared consciousness. It is at this point that one becomes aware of the difficulties inherent in containing this level of consciousness within the confines of the conventional novel. Lessing has often expressed her concern over the limitations of language, especially in regard to its inability to communicate the richness of dreams and other

manifestations of deeper levels of consciousness. This is not to say that her novels are failures; they provoke, they stimulate, they disturb and most importantly they serve to teach, they tend to become social instruments of prophecy as *FGC* with its forecast of the destruction of Western civilisation and its suggestion that individuals with the capacity for extra-sensory perception are the evolutionary forerunners of a race of humans more fit for survival in the fragmented contemporary society.

In the end, one cannot feel that Lessing has given up, for to give up is to give up entirely. As Robert K. Morris notes:

Belief in the present, hope in the present, salvation in the present, change in the present, continuing and reviving beginnings in the present is the new myth she offers us, the last myth we can cling to, the myth we had better believe if we would escape the doom of the old myths. (26-27)

So long as there are those who sow violence, there will always be, alas, children to reap it, but also children like Martha and Lynda who remain relentless in their quest to tame it.

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Sufi Moorings

Geetha Krishnan S “The quest for deliverance : Sufi elements in the major novels of Doris Lessing ” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 2002

Chapter IV
Sufi Moorings

Section (i)

The Summer Before the Dark :¹
The Blue Print for 'A Proper Marriage'

“Sufi knowledge is the knowledge of something beyond customary human perceptions, yet reached through the very world whose characteristics often stand in the way of such perceptions.”

Idries Shah, *A Perfumed Scorpion*

In the novels of the seventies, that is *BDH*, *SBD* and *MS*, shifting away from the large canvas of the collective, Lessing focuses more on the private experiences of an individual and the self exploration of characters. In these novels, she also attempts to find a language and a narrative structure that can convincingly portray a union of self and society. These three novels constitute the third stage in Lessing's development as an irrationalist. They delineate how Sufi elements become a source of creative energy, of awareness and even of salvation.

Instead of continuing the exploration of the soul, Lessing in *SBD*, regresses from her path and tells the tale of the middle-age crisis of Kate Brown, whose marriage has disintegrated and whose life has become suddenly hollow, without meaning. In an interview with Joyce Carol Oates in 1972 Lessing remarked that her own marriages were not "permanent," and did not permanently affect her; but "this phenomenon of a woman so totally defined by her marriage has long interested her" (36).

Like her middle-aged predecessor Jack Orkney, (the main character in the novella called "The Temptation of Jack Orkney") Kate is initiated into the resources of the underside of consciousness she had never known before, and she is equipped to undergo the process of psychic integration not by a radical self-division but by a state of receptivity. More philosophical and decidedly less polemical than her other novels, *SBD* has at once a serious sense of ethical purpose and a form which will support and advance the moral positions examined by Lessing. Kate recognises that the various roles she has espoused--that of wife, sex object, lustful teenage girl, nurturing mother, efficient organiser, soother and mistress--are examples of isolated states of madness, and these are responsible for her dementia.

Eulogising *SBD* for its artfulness, John Leonard observes: "I think *The Summer Before the Dark* is not only Doris Lessing's best novel, but the best novel to have appeared here since Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred*

Years of Solitude" (47). Edward Grossman applauds the aesthetic completeness of *SBD* like this:

If anything, the novel is even more convincing and artistically satisfying than *The Golden Notebook*, perhaps because of its compression. Mysterious illness, madness, memories, and dreams are swiftly and skilfully interlaid with a concrete visualization of the world as it is and as it manages, somehow, to continue functioning. (34)

Ever since its publication in 1973, critics have been engaged in a heated debate as to whether to interpret Kate's quest as successful or not. While critics like Lorelei Cederstrom, Barbara F. Lefcowitz and Janis P. Stout find the novel's ending disappointing, others like Sydney Janet Kaplan and Ralph Berets have come up with their own positive interpretation of Kate's decision not to dye her hair any longer. This brilliantly realistic novel where Lessing courageously charts out a paradigm for Kate's liberation suffers the greatest critical neglect of all her novels.

Lessing believes that a Sufi can be any one--a scientist, a poet, a writer, a shopkeeper--who has the potential to grow and who can realise who he is and develop his real, inner self, which is the "permanent part" (Shah, *Thinkers* 198). The human tendency--to mistake externals for centrality, and to be excited by superficials is decried by the Sufis. "The superficials [...] are the very barriers to their [Men's] understanding,"

observes Shah (*Way* 122). Lessing has always been exploring personal and social relationships which are gradually revealed as inadequate and limiting. Gradually she shifts her perspective and takes a much more detailed view of the human race which she sees as doomed unless we learn to evolve and change. As Shah points out "The real Sufi is a 'changed' man (*a bda*), change being an essential part of Sufism" (*Way* 123). Her later novels explore the nature and mechanism of change, and in this phase of her work, there is a sense of urgency and frustration: either we learn to transcend our earth-bound limitations or the race dies, either physically or psychically. Lessing's emphasis on personal change is related to her interest in Sufism. In her novels, one of the first signs of change is a character's perception--an ability to see oneself and fellow beings differently. As in the early volumes of *Children of Violence*, the protagonist of *SBD* has been shaped by biological and societal forces; much of the novel concerns her gradual recognition of the degree to which they have determined her character.

Less eventful than *BDH*, *SBD* charts the journey of Kate's inner discoveries and her successful recovery of selfhood and reintegration. The middle-aged Kate reaches a severe personal crisis, and like Mary Turner in *G/S* tries to avoid confronting her self and indulges in the needs of the collective first by taking the job as a translator at Global Foods, then letting herself go to Istanbul and finally going to Spain with a young American, Jeffrey. When Jeffrey becomes ill, Kate nurses him; however, refusing to

stay in Spain with Jeffrey, she realises that it is time to concentrate on her once neglected inner self. Staying in "a room of her own" in a hotel in Bloomsbury, during this summer solitude, Kate recovers from an illness of her own, and from there moves on to share a flat with a young woman called Maureen. There she finishes a serial seal dream which expresses her "voyage of self discovery" and learns to operate from her own choices.

In contrast to Anna Wulf in *GN*, Kate in *SBD* written eleven years later--is taken much further in her self discovery, which suggests that perhaps Lessing later knew and did not intuit, that there was a further place to which one could go. While Lessing could not have pushed Anna in her context any further, she is able to carry Kate and later the narrator of *MS* into new worlds that she created and which she later explored at greater length in her space fiction. Sufism makes a noticeable difference in Lessing's vision as she moves from *GN* to *MS*. Like Anna, Kate too is aware of the unease that perturbs her, but Lessing here draws on the Sufi Path to self-development and transformation--a remedy that was not yet part of her vision when she wrote the earlier novels. At the heart of Sufi thought is the necessity for individual and cosmic evolution and the idea that men and women do not know themselves, nor their potentials. This corresponds comfortably to Lessing's natural inclinations, so that Shah's representation of Sufism reinforces Lessing's own belief in an evolution of a more whole society. Sufis look upon human beings as incomplete and expect them to

transcend their merely human state of incompleteness through "work" in the Sufi Way.

A.B. Markos's excellent study of feminine pathology in Lessing's works summarises this focus: "The family, regarded by the uninitiated as a bulwark against isolation is shown by Lessing to be inimical to parents and children alike" (93). Like the protagonist in Atwood's *Surfacing*, Kate Brown pursues true memory and admits responsibility for her life, even for its delusions. Bonnie St. Andrews notes, "For the Kate Browns and the Martha Quests, re-examining memory constitutes [...] 'a salvage operation' essential to reclaiming the self [...]. Because memory involves volition and selection, [...] Lessing considers it a revelatory faculty" (123).

Kate guiltily and shamefully feels that she had "scaled herself down" (12) to please her husband and children and in return for her services, the only freedom she has been granted is the permission to tint her hair, to keep her weight down and follow the fashion of the day carefully "so that she would be smart but not mutton, dressed as lamb"(9). But this persistent conscious effort to keep up an image proves to be rather a strain; yet she knows that she is not bold enough as Mary Finchley, her friend and neighbour, to go against the entire set up and thus she continues in her role of a conventional woman, a happy and a successful wife. But underneath this image of complacency there lies a personality, yet to be given a particular name, who deserves to go "bare-footed, to discard the stocking and to wear a something like muu-muu or a sari or a sarong [...]" (11). She

felt sorrowfully, when the house was rented out, she the "kingpin" will not have "so much as a room of her own" (22). This state of emptiness and fear experienced by Kate is similar to the state described by R.D. Laing in *The Divided Self* (1960) as "implosion"--a form of "ontological insecurity" in which a person unable to reconcile his inner schisms finds it exceedingly difficult to achieve a healthy or vital self in dealing with the world (47). This state, in which an individual escapes from facing the inner self by seeking solutions through involvement with the collective, is doomed to failure, since it is soon threatened by this sense of "ontological insecurity." Abiding by the collective at the expense of the inner self, the individual is divorced from himself/herself as a centre of experience and identifies with the collective as an alternative.

In *SBD* Lessing uses the form of a psychological novel to talk about much broader issues. Kate's recognition that she is starved despite her marriage is a prefiguring of that impending disintegration and starvation all over the globe. The personal situation is an integral part of the global one since global survival is dependent upon individual spiritual salvation. The summer experiences of Kate Brown closely resemble the quest of the Sufi initiate: Kate's twenty five years of selfless dedicated service to her family has helped her to develop humility and discipline. Her dream sequence, the serial seal dream in particular, wherein her consciousness undergoes tremendous transformation can be compared to the hazardous Path (*tariqah*) of the seeker who experiences different states of consciousness

(*hal*) in the course of his self-"work" to attain union with his Beloved. The final stage of the Sufi seeker is the ability to see the truth or reality (*haqiqah*) that God is one. Awake by the end of the novel, Kate catches a glimpse of "release" (or that highest stage of consciousness that Sufis call *fana'*) although she does not attain it. Her dreams' ending reveals its possibility, when the seal re- enters the ocean. The dream is not the release; through her dream, Kate now recognises the *possibility* of release because she has achieved awareness of her confinement.

Lessing has always recognised the importance of full engagement with ordinary life, not retreat from society and its demands. Using the third-person objective technique to describe Kate's movements Lessing emphasises that Kate is Every Woman and her life is one of stereotypes. In fact, phrases denoting the repetitive and ordinary nature of life and attitudes is expressed twelve times in the first section of the novel. This is in keeping with the Sufi tenet that one can really learn even from the most ordinary sources. And real learning is understanding something which you have already known. The ordinariness of the housewife, Mrs Michael Brown is implicit in her name as well as in her lot being an average, middleclass, British wife and mother with a limited imaginative range. For all Kate's sense of unease, there is yet none of that anguished panic over being bombarded by so many conflicting feelings, perceptions, possibilities in experience, fears, and unresolved crises that filled the pages of the earlier novels. As Kate waits for the kettle to boil, thinking of how for three years, since a

family confrontation in which her youngest son (then sixteen) had accused her of smothering him, she has felt that gnawing sense that she must reflect on her domestic life. But she postpones it till her husband is about to depart for the United States for a summer lecturing commitment, her four children with different travel programmes, and she is persuaded to take up a temporary job as a translator for Global Foods. Thus her Sufi traits, her "passivity, adaptability to others" (21) sweep her into a series of choices which enable her to have a control over her own identity. The five sections of the novel correspond to the different stages of "ascent" in the "Gardens of Paradise" through which "the mystic makes use of the thinking function in its highest form" (Laleh Bakhtiar 28). As the entire novel centres around the concept of appearance and role playing, Lessing makes Kate refurbish her hair and clothing to reflect the new professional role she has assumed. The Sufi that she is, she is quick to realise her real self is an invisible core, while her public self is actually a fluid mask or image that can be almost arbitrarily manipulated to create a variety of identities.

Lessing very often portrays those intense, troubled women for whom life is a succession of traps created by their mothers, their lovers, and finally by themselves. The abrupt negligence of her children, the agitated concentration of her husband on his own concerns, shock her and Kate feels that she is not needed. She realises the truth, "A lot of time, a lot of pain, went into learning very little" (8). In these musings, Kate reveals deep

attachment to her family, her attentiveness to their needs, her respect for their independence and for their judgments than her own, and most importantly her sorrow at their indifference to her. Utterly disgusted with their “solid, demanding, satisfactory marriage” (23) she starts preparing for the interview for the translator’s job. This marks the end of an important stage in Kate’s summer quest.

Draine in her *Substance Under Pressure* (1983) pinpoints the twin processes at work:

Just as in her personal life Kate seeks to break the codes of conventional thought and false memory in order to think about her experience truthfully, so at the Global Foods conference, Kate’s job is to break the code of a foreign language so that diplomats can communicate accurately. (117)

In her job her employer requests her to stay on because she fulfils an equally important, though unconscious need as an “organiser” providing the “invisible manna, a consolation, warmth, ‘sympathy’” (47). But she was soon to acknowledge that her job for the summer was providing her with a temporary rearrangement of external circumstances, so as to enable her to examine her “confinement” from a fresh perspective. This condition is a pre-requisite to a quester for according to Wescott, “Striving for release can occur only in one who has achieved an awareness of confinement” (33).

Kate's Interpretation of her Seal Dreams

Thus caught up in the clutches of her "invisible chains" (215) Kate tries to receive information from her dreams; and in her dreams she initiates a journey that is to give her guidance for her fragmented life. The dream world which Kate frequents very often, is clearly a metaphor for her inner life, which like the infinite rooms behind the wall in *MS* unfolds into a rich realm of exploration and self-discovery. In this search for a once obscured meaning, "Kate is very much in the position of the questing knight, she seeks an equivalent of the Grail" (Draine 117). Tzvetan Todorov in his "The Poetics of Prose" notes, "The quest of the Grail is the quest of a code. To find the Grail is to learn how to decipher the divine language" (qtd. in Draine 117). Thus while on the outer level, Kate deciphers a foreign language literally, on another level, she tries to pay heed to a higher language, the language of her dream to grasp its message. Draine avows the divine nature of Kate's quest thus: "One might say that her dreams are couched in a divine language. It is at least a language beyond words, and it does at last deliver a message of salvation" (117). In her later works, Lessing has focused on the importance of not only of recognising, but of maintaining moments of wakeful insight. For this Lessing makes her characters dream profusely. St. Andrews notes, "Kate Brown's sleeping consciousness informs her study of language and memory; thus her dreaming is active rather than passive. Through dreams, she gains strength of purpose and redeeming self-knowledge" (125). Almost all Lessing protagonists heavily depend on dreams: Martha Quest gains much insight through the

subconscious and acts religiously upon such information. In *SBD*, dream functions as a structural device which unifies the novel. Margaret Drabble, a novelist of considerable reputation cites Lessing as “a great dreamer” and “a creative dreamer” (50). She remarks on Lessing’s ability to develop character and fortify themes with this tool and notes how Lessing seems to unite the timeless with the contemporary in dreams. Kate’s dreams identify her, help her to recognise a self obscured by years of selflessness.

Lessing’s interest in dreams is linked with her knowledge of Sufism. Indeed, the fable-like content of her characters’ dreams is reminiscent of the fables used by Sufis. Shah observes: “Do you imagine that fables exist only to amuse or to instruct, and are based upon fiction? The best ones are delineations of what happens in real life, in the community and in the individual’s mental processes” (qtd. in Hardin, “Sufi Teaching Story” 320). Dreams, when considered as fables, bespeak another level of consciousness and as such allow a different degree of self-understanding which develop in characters. Shah notes,

Most fables contain at least some truth, and they often enable people to absorb ideas which the ordinary patterns of their thinking would prevent them from digesting. Fables have therefore been used, not least by the Sufi teachers, to present a picture of life more in harmony with their feelings than is possible by means of intellectual exercises. (*Sufis* 1)

Towards the end of *SBD* Lessing poses the question: "Do you think dreams are just for the person who dreams them? Perhaps they aren't" (231). This question has a special significance for Kate Brown who experiences a series of about fifteen dreams which extend over a period of several months.

Lessing has addressed the same the question in "The Temptation of Jack Orkney" where she delineates how Jack Orkney's dreams offer insightful revelations. Hardin acknowledges Lessing's Sufi affiliation thus: "With both these protagonists, Lessing is one step further into her continuing exploration of an understanding of self, of life, and of Sufi knowledge" (320). Just like Martha who owns that knowledge is within her, Kate also rediscovers that her sleeping experiences do matter:

Ever since she was very small, five or six, she had been able to reach her hand into the country behind the daylight one, to touch a familiar object that lived there, or to walk through it at ease, not astonished, or afraid. Nor was she surprised by a dream that developed like a fable or a myth. She accommodated several such long-running dreams, and when a new stage of development of a familiar theme was presented to her, she would lie awake for as long as she could, before letting it be seen that she was awake, thinking of the ideas that were taking shape in her, and which she

could not see except in the reflections like firelit shadows on the walls of her sleep. (125)

By exploring the ways in which the consciousness of Kate Brown is enmeshed in "convention," Lessing exposes how public impinges on the personal. As a Sufi she is highly critical of the social and sexual conditioning that has shaped the protagonist's life, her socialisation as woman-in-love, wife, mother and sex object. The problem that Kate faces is to separate "what she really feels" from the conventional phrases that fix her choices. Gayle Greene citing the significance of Kate's voyage of inner discovery through the seal dream notes: "The real 'events' of the summer are internal: in a continuation of the process articulated in *The Four-Gated City*, 'the revolution had gone inwards'" (*Doris Lessing* 125). The spiritual path is the pathway where one can gradually emancipate oneself from the limited self and limited society which are inter-related. By taming one's limited self, one can become emancipated from it. Kate resorts to dreaming because in dreaming, the psyche is not working on one's ordinary conscious level and great wisdom is manifested therein.

The first instalment of Kate's dream sequence begins immediately after she has started working for Global Foods. The narrow, barren room, which represents Kate's self, stripped off its paraphernalia, forms Kate's environment as Lessing sets the stage for the dreams. In Lessing's novels,

dreams function prominently as a narrative device for presenting condensed images of psychological and thematic issues, particularly as they work themselves into the protagonist's awareness. Kate dreams of a heavy and moaning seal "lying stranded and helpless" (32) in an unfamiliar landscape, which she takes up, hoping to get it to water. The dream thus expresses Kate's dissatisfaction, her sense of abandonment by her family members, her caretaking behaviour, her journey towards revitalisation imaged as water. Further, each dream episode provides comment on Kate's progress in her waking life towards old age. That the dream is central to Kate's future development is brought home by referring to the dream as if it were an "epic" (32), a heroic tale of national import. In her interview with Jonah Raskin, Lessing confessed:

Dreams have always been important to me [...]. The Freudians describe the conscious as a small lit area, all white and the unconscious as a great dark marsh full of monsters [...]. But the unconscious can be what you make of it, good or bad, helpful or unhelpful. Our culture has made an enemy of the unconscious [...]. Other cultures have accepted the unconscious as a helpful force, and I think we should learn to see it in that way too [...]. With a few symbols a dream can define the whole of one's life, and warn us of the future, too.
(Voice 67)

In the subsequent dreams Kate doubts whether she is "going in the right direction" (49)--a doubt which plagues her throughout the dream sequence. Kate recognises that the seal becomes her responsibility, for without her, she knows that it will die. Kate waits for sometime before any contact is made with the seal. The seal, returns again to her dream after Kate has started an erotic adventure with her callow American lover, Jeffrey in Spain. Unlike the various fruitful heterosexual relationships Lessing portrayed in her earlier novels, Kate-Jeffrey liaison ends up in sterility; however, Kate recognises that her life can no longer be enriched through sexual connection, but only through self introspection. Thus this affair is indicative of Kate's growing selfhood. As she 'mothers' the ailing Jeffrey, she realises how motherhood becomes an obsessive fussing rather than a loving concern and a virtue which she imagined she had been developing to meet the needs of her growing family. She even starts wondering whether the qualities like patience, self discipline, self-abnegation, chastity etc. are ever "virtues" and she feels that she has acquired not virtues "but a form of dementia" (91). This insight forces Kate to pay heed to her series of seal dreams and reap benefits from them. In her dream, Kate finds the seal "slowly, painfully, moving itself towards the distant, the invisible ocean. She gathered the slippery creature up in her arms--oh, she ought not to have left it there" (99). From this dream, whose flavour was that of an old tale, she learns that: "going to sleep and entering this dream was as much her business for this time in her life as [...] wrestling with her emotional self

which seemed like a traitor who had come to life inside her. What she was engaged in was the dream, which worked itself out in her" (125).

Approximately midway in the novel, with all the pressures taken off her, Kate indulges in a long, somewhat murky meditation on where she stands in relation to her self. Kate painfully realises how her sexuality had betrayed her into a life situation utterly inimical to her sense of self, a situation compounded of her husband, children, friends and duties. She resolves that "the future was not going to be a continuation of the immediate past [...] the future would continue from where she had left off as a child" (122). Significantly, her betrayed self is described as something she had been holding in her hands and offering to those around her--but with no response. The true Sufi that she is, Lessing reminds us that Kate "had always been on good terms with her dreams, had always been alert to learn from them" (125). This movement of Kate between the two realms--realism and fantasy is suggestive of an individual who is in the process of establishing creative links between different levels of perception and who has recognised a privileged mode of survival. The co-existence of motifs from the two realms is illuminating in studying Lessing's development towards the use of the Sufi method of "scatter" which aims at creating a shift in perspective from the dominant linear mode of thought to a "multi-levelled" one. Such a realisation very much resembles the Sufi quester's perceptions which propel him forward in his quest. Four prominent dreams and the

insights Kate learns from them are illustrative of the significant stages in Kate's inner journey.

The dream where Kate envisions herself in the middle of an amphitheatre where she and the seal are being attacked by the wild animals exemplifies the idea that if she manages to sustain her responsibilities toward her self and her burden, then she will survive and will feel stronger as a result. The fact that children and husband pose a threat to a woman's inner self finds a dramatic expression in this significant dream. In yet another dream, the mutually beneficent nature of the relationship between Kate and the seal is emphasised. In the wintry landscape of the dream, the seal shields Kate's shivering body. Symbolically the seal represents the inner core of Kate's essential personality, and it also allows Kate to present herself to the world as an experienced and hardened individual. Commenting on the prophetic and instructive nature of the dream, Ralph Berets notes:

The seal has a precious coat and provides a protective shield from the antagonistic barbs of the community that harshly attack any one who does not conform to the prescribed patterns of behaviour. To pay attention to this self, Kate must suffer from being cut off by those who have supported her up to this point, but at least her newly found self will also protect her from the external world that seeks to impose its value on her behaviour. (126)

One of the most illuminating dreams occurs in the dramatic centre of the novel when Kate is recovering from her breakdown in a London hotel. In her imbecile condition, she has a dream of a ritualistic dance in which she dances with a king who races from one dancing partner to another. For a while Kate and her partner are the cynosure of the village; the moment of triumph ends abruptly when the king deserts her for a young girl with red ribbons. Having lost her sexual trophy, Kate tries to escape in grief and shame, but the villagers catch her and imprison her in a pit as if she were an animal. During her imprisonment she can still see the king dancing with his new consort, and her protests only elicit taunts from him about her "lack of generosity, her niggling and critical spirit, her failure in communal feeling, but above all [...] her lack of understanding for the laws that governed life" (139). The dream ends with Kate imprisoned, mocked by both the human and natural landscape. Yet she is aware that another calling awaits her, that of continuing her rescue of the seal, if she can free herself from the pit. If we place this dream in the narrative context of the novel, we recognise how futile and foolish were Kate's romantic idea of her marriage and family and how her altruistic feelings have deprived her of attaining her own sense of accomplishment. In short, the dream reinforces the plight of a middle-aged woman in a sexist society, particularly of the sort of woman who has acted all her life in complicity with the patriarchal demand that she exist only as a sexual toy.

In yet another gloomy landscape, Kate finds herself trying to revive the moaning seal by rubbing its skin with melted ice and salt crystals found in the seam of a black rock. Though she has resumed the carrying off the seal “north, north, always north” (141), she fears it is dying. Kate’s heroic salvation measures are rewarded by her knowledge that the seal “was breathing and alive” (141). Rewards of this kind are usually obtained by the *murid* in his Sufi quest; such incentives push him forward in his arduous journey. This dream of abandonment reinforces her commitment to the seal and she senses that her journey in life will be a return to her self and to pledge herself to that which is individually satisfying. This decision to stick to the seal and what it represents becomes a difficult period of transition for Kate, during which phase, she becomes physically and psychologically ill, reflecting the state of uncertainty that surrounds her choice. When Kate acts upon the commitment she has made, the seal responds and becomes revitalised. In a similar manner, Kate comes through her crisis and emerges as a more complete personality. Janis P. Stout interprets this dream as a “parable of aging”:

It offers reassurance that old age, though seemingly a time of dreariness and decay, may after all provide, out of its very nature, the means to restore her real self. Kate does not consciously assign this interpretation. She is still searching, but the dream provides her the emotional state of hope and expectation [...]. (15)

Something inside Kate insists that she must examine and incorporate entire areas of her being that she has locked off from everyday knowledge. The final movement in Kate's journey occurs in the basement flat that faces north:

[Kate's room] was small, and had in it a narrow bed and a cupboard. It was many degrees colder than the front of the flat, which was on the south. This room had a chill on it that connected with the cold that lay permanently around Kate's stomach. (159-60)

Kate's sojourn reminds one of the Sufi initiate's forty-day seclusion in a dark room in his master's robe in order to enable him to change his consciousness deeply. Her room-mate, Maureen, with her preference for baby food expresses her ambivalence about growing up to assume the adult role of a married woman, thus recalling to our minds, Violet Stoke of *BDH*. Though Kate's journey is decidedly less mystical than Martha Quest's, she feels that she has to complete a difficult task: "in her sleep she felt like someone a couple of yards from the centre of the maze, but no matter how she turned and tried, she could not reach it" (170). In her next seal dream, she found that the seal was heavier than it had been, she even wondered whether it had died. In the penultimate dream, the revived and restless seal forces Kate, to notice a glimmering silvery-pink cherry tree in full bloom, symbolising that regeneration has taken place beneath the deeper recesses of her psyche. Kate plucks a flowering twig from the tree

and holds it along with the seal. In the last dream, the seal is full of life "and like her full of hope" (230). She reaches the sea, puts the seal in water, the place where it belongs and it acknowledges that she has completed her task. Tutored and changed by her dreams, Kate returns home to communicate her abandonment of her earlier accommodating personality.

Thus what is symbolised is not so much Kate's literal independence of her family--she loves them--but the more subtle integrity of the private self within the social framework. Nancy Hardin citing the instructive value of dreams observes that " So it is that Lessing, by closely examining dreams as a form of information, confronts those levels of consciousness that our world today, for the most part has taught us to ignore" ("Sufi Teaching Story" 322). On the insightful quality of Kate's seal dreams, Hardin remarks:

In *The Summer Before the Dark*, Lessing uproots Kate from her conventional existence and forces her to immerse herself productively within the dark inner self of her dreams. Drawing materials from the actual world on the one hand *and* from the mental process on the other, Lessing suggests the possibilities of a single, whole experience. (323)

As expounded by Watkins (in *BDH*), Lessing, like the Sufis, does not see the two realms as separate; the secret lies in the process of assimilation. Painstakingly charting Kate's interior journey Lessing seems to elucidate the

Sufi saying: He who tastes not, knows not" (Shah, *Sufis* 62). Janis P. Stout's assertion that Kate's journey begins and ends in "uncertainty" (7) cannot be accepted. It is true that unlike Martha's quest, Kate's departure on a quest is more a "drifting-forth than a setting-forth" (7). But once Kate is in it; she is determined to complete it, as all Sufi questers are, against all odds. Kate's humility which is characteristic of a Sufi, need not, and should not be interpreted as "uncertainty," that is how all Sufis, even the greatest *shaikhs* behave at the beginning of a quest. Idries Shah points out that the self which normally one takes to be his real one is the result of conditioning:

As a consequence of Sufi experience, people--instead of seeing things through a filter of conditioning plus emotional reactions, a filter which constantly discards certain stimuli--can see things through some part of themselves that can only be described as not conditioned. (qtd. in Hardin 323)

In her quest, Kate undergoes severe physical changes: she loses weight, and the grey of her hair roots creeps through the red tint. Her outer appearance is thus a physical manifestation of that inner process of change. Her appearance mirrors the rigours of her journey, as she strips off the physical and psychological trappings of her mother-wife image and tries on other images that express her evolving self more authentically. She realises, what Lessing has explained elsewhere:

An attractive young woman finds it very hard to separate what she really is from her appearance. Because you only begin to discover the difference between what you really are, your real self, and your appearance when you get a bit older which is the most fascinating experience. [...] It's one of the most valuable experiences I personally ever had. A whole dimension of life suddenly slides away and you realise that what in fact you've been using to get attention has been what you look like. (qtd. in Josephine Hendin 85)

This important realisation prompts Kate to make a covert visit to her London house and to her annoyance and then delight, she is not recognised by her close friend Mary Finchley; also she finds herself strangely detached from the house "in which she had lived for nearly a quarter of a century" (143). This is a long way from her identification with it at the beginning of the quest. Incidentally, "To follow Sufism is to die gradually to oneself and become one Self to be born anew and to become aware of what one has always been from eternity, (*aza!*) without one's having realised it until the necessary transformation has come about" (Nasr 17).

Back in London, she attends a theatrical performance of Turgenev's *A Month in the Country*, where the exaggerated situation of the theatre itself, highlighting the concept of 'role playing' amplifies Kate's own turmoil. She concludes that role playing--a phenomenon of everyday life--is the real

form of madness, a ritualised pretence in which the audience also takes part. Just as Martha looks at her fellow men as animals in *FGC*, Kate perceives the people around her as varieties of animals who wear and eat other animals and who attempt to disguise their own animal natures. Like the players on the stage, Kate discovers that she has been playing a role, wearing a set of masks which had received social approbation but she had limited herself only to those people who applauded her. This insight along with the perception gained from the integration of her unconscious through her assimilation of the seal dreams, leads her to attain a more inclusive sense of her self and a new perspective on life. At such moments of heightened awareness Lessing's characters are often filled with revulsion at themselves or at their fellow human beings, and Kate is not exempt from this. She feels disgusted at her years of vanity which have confined her to a limited range of roles. Her illness, combined with her isolation from employment and family, has forced upon her a new persona--or rather, cracked the old one: "the image had rolled itself up and thrown itself into a corner, leaving behind the face of a sick monkey" (155). It appears as if the potential for growth can be set to work only if all the roles sustaining the old personality are wrenched away. Rumi, the Sufi philosopher poet says: "The priceless treasure is the reward of pulling down the house" (Bakhtiar 359).

Kate-Maureen Bonding

Kate's growing self-knowledge permits her to establish a productive relationship with Maureen, who persuades her for a retrospective narration

of her (Kate's) experiences. Kate's remembering in response to Maureen's request "recalls Sethe's and Denver's remembering in response to the needs of other people in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and suggests a social dimension to memory" (Greene, "Feminist Fiction" 32). Maureen helps Kate to make a private stock taking of her life and dreams and draw lessons from them. Kate's relationship with Maureen is very much similar to Anna-Saul bonding, which allows Anna and Saul to play roles off one another in way that enables them to extend the boundaries of their experience. By observing and interacting with Maureen, Kate recognises in Maureen, her younger self, her difficulty in making choices then, and how Maureen though, she appears to have "some kind of freedom" (209) is not free. Through Maureen's characterisation, Lessing seems to emphasise how every woman is doomed to live through each stage of the life process and to endure it. Significantly Kate dreams of Maureen as a bird in a cage. Unlike Maureen, Kate summons the will to change and to admit the lessons of her experience. Her exile from home, her memory and her dreams help her to pursue and find her self. In doing so, Kate accomplishes the Sufi goal that the purpose of life is not fulfilled only in rising to the greatest heights, but also in diving deep into the deepest depths, whereby the self is lost, but finds itself again as a result of the widening of its sphere of consciousness.

Now "awake" Kate works toward awakening Maureen from her own confinement. Kate thus functions as a guide or teacher to Maureen. No longer mistress, wife, mother, organiser, in Maureen's flat, Kate feels lonely

and abandoned, "outside a cocoon of comfort and protection" (165). Kate finds it extremely difficult to recognise that youth has freedom to do whatever they like and the price one pays as one grows is a heavy one. She tries her level best to assuage her assaulted self, and goes to a restaurant only to be insulted by the waitress. She resolves to "build up energy" to kill the "monstrous baby" (168) demanding everybody's attention all the time. But a letter from her youngest son, wanting her to come home snaps Kate back into the housewife and mother roles and she desperately tries to rehabilitate her house for her family members. Kate's situation opens Maureen's eyes and she breaks off her engagement with Philip, a staunch activist of the British League of Action. When Kate asks her why, Maureen says in horror, "I'd do anything, I'd live alone for *always* rather than turn into *that*" (emphasis added) (195). 'That' is the concept of the superwoman role Kate is very good at, and which she now recognises as a trap. Immediately she cancels all her engagements, leaving herself free for a few more weeks, as she realises that her "work" of self-discovery is not yet finished. Kate relives her seal dreams by relating it to Maureen, whereupon she actually assesses her own situation: her time for self-scrutiny is running out and she can neither solve her doubts of what she is to make of her life nor help Maureen decide what to make of hers. She recalls moments of her own past for Maureen's benefit, she realises that she "must have been mad" (201) to disguise her physical aging; more realisations seep in, including her discovery that the success lies not in escaping responsibility altogether but to create a life style that can

accommodate it. After finishing the narration of the dream, in place of compliance and acquiescence, Kate discovers rage and freedom--freedom to let her greying hair show.

During an impromptu party given by Maureen Kate simply picks up her suitcase packed with the assortment of clothes which she has collected over the past months, and goes to catch a bus and "so home" (236). Returning home, Kate feels certain that her family will not be pleased with her appearance, especially with her unstyled hair showing a wide band of grey at the roots. But she is determined that, whatever may happen, she is not going to let her hair be dyed again. It is a matter, for her, of facing facts. This Kate-Maureen solidarity, like the Kate-Jeffrey connection, provides opportunities for Kate to develop. She now finds how she has been playing the outworn maternal roles--supplying maternal warmth and comforting smiles on demand--which had not been noticed. She also recognises how "all her life she had been held upright by an invisible fluid, the notice of other people" (173). This awareness of the absurdity of the collective facade results in her recognition of her new sense of self and as she closes the door to Maureen's flat, Kate becomes another Nora, on a smaller scale, closing the door on the social games people choose to play.

Kate, the Sufi Seeker

SBD is not directed towards teaching Sufism; but Sufism underlies the conception and creation of Kate Brown, who painfully re-discovers her

own identity, which has been obliterated by the demands of her husband and children. Together she and Maureen explore the disparity between appearances or created images and reality, by trying on different identities for one another; they extend this serious "game" by parading different styles of clothing and bearing in front of others to gauge the effect of such external cues. When Kate walks in front of some workmen on a building site, wearing her jacket, she is not noticed. Then she removes her jacket, revealing her fitted dress, and ties her hair back with a scarf. She walks past seductively, this time to a chorus of wolf-whistles and invitations. Seething with inner rage, she tells herself that all her life has been a performance to gratify other people. Using the language of clothing and appearance as a vehicle for her insights, Lessing exposes the confinements of the female condition with its emphasis on appearance and image. The major responsibility of a female protagonist in Lessing's fiction is her own maturation and the development of her essential self within a series of enclosures like body and clothing. Each enclosure limits and defines, reveals and conceals, and can be a trap or tool for the self within. Not until Kate loses her interest in sexuality can she develop into a mature self for whom the body becomes another garment to be shed in the process of enlightenment.

The summer quest of Kate, is in fact, an elaboration of what the Sufis call a "blow"--an impact which enhances the seeker's Sufi understanding. The Nasruddin tale which is looked upon as "nutrition" runs like this: A

monkey threw a coconut from a tree top at a hungry Sufi; he picked it up, drank the milk, ate the flesh and made a bowl from the shell. Similarly Kate who had been waiting for a break in her life, seizes upon the summer work as a translator and reaps full benefit from it by a retrospective inspection of her past and attains selfhood. As a Sufi Kate knows that spiritual life has its cycles and there are moments of great opportunity that must be grasped and totally surrendered to. It is better never to reject what life brings, for the light is hidden in darkness, but the darkness must be fully accepted before the light reveals itself.

Right from the beginning of the novel, Lessing establishes an instability or uncertainty in Kate regarding her undertaking the translator's job when she wants to keep the house open for her son, Tim for summer. The narrative also progresses as a result of another instability that is established between Kate and Maureen. It immediately strikes Kate that Maureen with all the vitality of a youthful dancer can never tolerate middle-aged matron like her. But gradually they understand that they can help each other out. Kate's seal dream and her sweet reminiscences of her family help Maureen make up her mind just as Maureen's breaking up her engagement with Philip opens Kate's eyes. Maureen's decision not to marry Philip and Kate's decision to let her family take care of themselves serve as shocks that propel the narrative to its obvious conclusion. A minor character like Charlie Cooper comments that Kate has been "a god send" (29). One of the delegates at the conference Madame Phiri openly

congratulates Kate at her efficiency in getting things done. Such comments serve to add further credence to Kate's competence as a spirited survivor--a potential Sufi.

SBD remains one of Lessing's less self-consciously didactic and less overtly Sufi works when contrasted with her other novels. Still, it makes a definite point about self-"work," self sacrifice, service and the inevitability of old age. It focuses particularly on Kate's spirit, which is her saving grace and Maureen's accommodating mentality. These two characteristics bring these two women in a bond of friendship that helps Lessing advocate Sufism much to the consternation of her critics. Kate's journey, in its geographical locations alone, hints at a connection with Lessing's overriding concern with Sufism. Istanbul and Spain, the two foreign destinations of Kate's initial wanderings, are both centres of ancient Sufi wisdom. Moreover, watching a bird fly past her window in Istanbul Kate feels "that subtle approaches were being made to her from an unknown world"(51).

Alison Lurie's complaints about the novel's ending is worth examination here: "It is a puzzling, unsatisfactory conclusion to what up to the point has been a brilliantly realistic, wise and courageous novel [...]" (18-19). Similarly Elizabeth Hardwick in *New York Times Book Review* observes: "Darkness is the end of the journey. And what is the documentary, spiritual or aesthetic consequence in the destination? This is never rendered [...]" (1). It is very difficult to say what Kate has brought

back from her quest. Kate is a special survivor of a mid-life crisis and we can say that she has gained some measure of self-understanding and self-acceptance, a clearer vision of the forces limiting women's choices and a calm acceptance of the inevitable process of aging. The "old age" in this novel means rediscovering and defining one's self, gaining the strength to act out of one's own needs, and developing the courage to make "statements of intent." Now Kate does not need to attract attention or to demand that others cater to her. It appears that she wishes to maintain some margin for self-determination when she returns to her family.

Taking into consideration, Kate's self-confidence, self-determination, mature acceptance of self and aging, the ending of the novel is not merely adequate but is emphatic. Lessing here subtly tries to tell the tale of a housewife who painstakingly overcomes the inevitable catastrophe that has befallen her. She returns home a more independent, self-possessed woman than when she left, but she has not resolved fully as to what she should do about her marriage and family. Like the reader, she is also not at all sure how well she will hold on her own in the future. The ending thus expresses hope for the completion of the quest, not completion itself. A Sufi interpretation of Kate's summer pilgrimage highlights the dictum:

The Seeker is given an enterprise to complete [...]. For the purposes of his self-development he has to carry that undertaking out with complete faith. In the process of planning

and carrying through this effort, he attains his spiritual development. The alchemical or other undertaking may be impossible, but it is the framework within which his constancy and his application, his mental and moral development, is carried out. (Shah, *Sufis* 224)

Even though many critics refuse to accept the grey streak as the answer to Kate's problem, given Lessing's Sufi affiliation, this solution seems acceptable. Moreover the Sufis accord significance more to the effort or the experience of the aspirant rather than to the result accomplished; thus Kate's result though disproportionately small when compared to the struggle and sacrifice that preceded it is laudable. Thus Kate's determination remains one of the many of Lessing's subtleties that will remain eclipsed unless her critics make a concerted effort to understand Sufism. It appears Lessing, the Sufi master, through Kate's quest for a means to face loneliness, old age and death advocates a fresh approach to those female concerns which are not trivial at all. She urges her readers to undertake quests like Kate only to be rewarded with potentially positive outcome. Lisa Alther, the author of *Kinflicks*, *Original Sins* and *Other Women* brings out the special significance of *SBD* for her: "I learned from her [Lessing], to my enormous surprise, that a novel could be serious and philosophical even if the protagonist were an ordinary woman, [...] even if the content were nothing more ambitious than the stuff of daily life. Lessing's books were a revelation" (qtd. in *Alchemy* 6). We have much to

learn about the art of inner “work” from the examples of Anna Wulf, Saul Green, Martha Quest, Kate Brown and others who compose Lessing’s team of boulder pushers. Through their individual struggles within and through “work” on themselves they persevere and bear the cross of our moral and spiritual education.

Like Kate Brown, Susan Rawlings in “To Room Nineteen” (a short story) is the specimen of a well-documented and much studied phenomenon of a woman with grown up children and not enough to do. Invaded by restlessness, irritation and resentment, like her nineteenth century counterpart, *The Awakening’s* (1899) Edna Pontellier, Susan returns finally to her rented room only to turn on the gas and swims into that ultimate anonymity, death. It appears that writing the short fiction in the early fifties, Lessing did not enjoy the optimistic vantage point of Sufism. Thus *SBD* --which came out after her exposure to Sufism holds out a hope, rarely found in post-modern literature--invites us to see the sunshine and new growth rather than the faint soft hiss of the gas that fills the room.

Sufi Symbolism

Laleh describes the function of symbolism in Sufi philosophy as follows: “Everything in creation is a symbol” and “It is through symbols that one is awakened; it is through symbols one is transformed” (25). According to the Sufis, symbols are the means of mediation between the phenomenal and the spiritual world. It is only when the Sufi is able to perceive such

symbols that he ascends to levels of understanding which transcend the phenomenal world. Perceiving and expressing symbols, therefore, mark for the Sufis stages of understanding referred to in terms of light and darkness. Bakhtiar notes that: "Darkness and light are the archetypal symbols of Sufism [...] they denote the stations of annihilation (*fana*) and subsistence (*baqa*). These stations are metaphysical experiences which occur only at a transcendental level of awareness" (90). In the last dream, Kate sees that "the sun [...] was in front of her, not behind [...] a large, light brilliant, buoyant, tumultuous sun that seem[s] to sing"(230). According to the Sufis, symbols manifested in Nature are means of activation of levels of perception. Kate realises the "singing" of the sun and according to Bakhtiar, at such a stage, "one unveils one's ego-oriented attitudes, and each unveiling removes a darkness which allows more light to shine through" (26). This marks the beginning of "transformation" which is "the goal of the Quest" (84).

Moreover, in the penultimate dream, the revived and "restless" seal forces Kate to notice a glimmering cherry tree in full bloom in the midst of falling snow. According to the Sufis another important cosmological symbol is the 'Tree'; they believe that the epitome of knowledge is expressed through the "Tree of Knowledge," which has its roots in the phenomenal world but is also connected with the World of Archetype and therefore figures as the crown of knowledge that combines both levels of cognition. Bakhtiar observes:

The whole of the cosmos is seen as a tree, the Tree of Knowledge [...]. The tree has sent down its roots, sent up its trunk, and spread out its branches, so that this world, the world of Symbols, and the world of Archetypes, are all contained by this Tree. It is the symbol of wisdom which, through roots in meditation, bears fruit of the Spirit. (57)

In the Sufi understanding, the decisive factor is to see beyond the physical level and to see that level in its rightful proportion as part of a whole. That is the first sign of enlightenment. Shah observes, "this getting into tune with the whole plan, the comprehensive action of life, is essential to enlightenment" (*Sufis* 139). At this stage, the perception of the quester which incorporates and transcends the physical level brings in the knowledge of a different dimension: "It comes into your consciousness as a truth different in quality from other things which you have been accustomed to regarding as truths" (*Sufis* 353).

The seal which appears in all fifteen of Kate's dreams becomes a symbol for some aspect of Kate's identity, for critics like Barbara Lefcowitz categorically identifies the seal with Kate's abandoned "private self" (118), whereas to Josephine Hendin, the seal is Kate, "wife and mother" (85). It will be safe to assume that the symbol of the seal is ambiguous--at times referring to Kate's motherliness, sometimes her need to be mothered, and at times her desire to reject the motherly role in taking up a career. One of

these aspects of Kate's nature is embodied in the seal image, and by caring for the seal, Kate attends to some part of her self, her life.

The symbol "seal" has been variously interpreted. Ralph Berets comments that "Lessing is [...] playing with the word 'seal.'" Here it means "both the animal and the stamp used as a proof of authenticity" (119-20). Sydney Janet Kaplan highlights the fact that the seal can be "a sign of ownership and individuality--of different action" (12). In that sense the seal symbolises what is unique in Kate, what is most deeply herself. Additionally the word denotes "to decide irrevocably" the fate of a person or a thing thus suggesting the inevitability of "Kate's aging, death and possible transcendence" (Kaplan 12). In the Sufi context, we may interpret that the "seal" illustrates the vows of secrecy and discretion with regard to real knowledge, practised by the Sufis lest the secret message encoded in the novel should fall in the hands of the unknown and unpredictable readers. From an eastern as well as a Jungian perspective, the individual is a whole as well as an integral part of a larger unit. At birth, this sense of unity is broken and a person spends much of his life attempting to retrieve this sense of unity that appears to be part of everyone's unconscious experiences. In the dream sequences, this sense of loss and separation is captured in the image of the injured seal which represents that part of her self that Kate has disowned to accommodate herself to the pressures of her social milieu. Kate recognises that she has made herself sick by fashioning her life for social approbation. This realisation dawns on her as a result of

her exploration. The serial dream thus becomes the path through which Kate explores her unconscious and it prepares her to take her life into her own hands and to live for her own objectives.

We may accept Ralph Berets' explanation that in the beginning, Kate rejected the seal because her culture would not allow her to accept that part of herself that was identified with the unconscious. By exploring her unconscious through her dreams, Kate made it possible for the seal to grow so that at the end of the novel, it occupies an equivalent position as the more acceptable social self. Contrary to her expectations, the dream journey is a joyous path towards the liberation of her self and her unconscious desires. Thus Kate's dream sequence and her determination to return home need not be interpreted as "a negative freedom" (Lefcowitz 118). For the seal part of herself allies itself with other seals and then is no longer conceptualised as a concisely burdensome entity to be carried around by Kate as an embarrassment. Once she can accept her unconscious urges, then she rejoins the community of man and no longer feels isolated by her wounds and travail. Once the individuation is completed, the individual is ready to return to his former roles, but with greater strength and direction than were formerly possible.

If we carefully analyse the evolution of dream sequences, and examine how Kate responds to them, we may applaud Kate for her decision. The seal dream which begins in uncertainty, proceeds along the

same vein, when Kate seems particularly disoriented and says, "Where was the water, where was the sea? How could she be sure of going in the right direction?" (48). During her affair with Jeffrey, Kate distracted from her objectives does not dream of the seal. The dream when it finally comes, warns her of the urgency with which she needs to attend the seal, (her self); which is about to expire. When she nurses the seal, "the animal's eyes opened and it seemed to revive"(99). Again her crucial affair with the princely lover takes her away from the seal, but she boldly dismisses the young man saying "I am sorry, I want to stay with you, but I must take the seal to the sea first" (100). Kate realises that she will not be able to establish a "perfect" relationship until she has nurtured her own self first. Kate's wilful sacrifice of this culturally sanctioned fulfilment for a more personal reward is a major step that she takes and which corresponds to the Sufi quest which forces the *murid* to undergo intense suffering and self-sacrifice. Consequently the seal appears to be heavier and heavier. Torn between her sexual fling with Jeffrey and intense commitment to her own self which requires equal support, Kate is in a state of transition and she finds herself wandering "in a heavy twilight" (140). The illuminating ritualistic dance dream also reminds Kate that since the time of her marriage, she had lost contact with her own goals, objectives and needs and therefore she seems alienated from herself and her innate desires. Just as she has to return the seal to its natural habitat, she senses that her journey in life will be to return to her self which will be individually satisfying. Greene notes:

Whereas Kate in her life has drawn boundaries and resigned herself to 'the dark,' Kate in her dream as the seal merges with the whole and is left staring at the sun: whereas on the external level Kate draws firmer ego boundaries, on the internal level she merges with the cosmic oversoul. (139)

When Kate decides to make a full commitment to the seal and what it represents, she becomes ill. But when she sticks persistently to her commitment the seal responds and becomes revitalised and similarly Kate comes out of her crisis successfully emerging as a more complete personality. Kate's seal signifies an image of unity as suggested by the merging of the seal with the other seals in the sea in the last dream. This does not mean that Kate will go back to her former way of life, but she will be both inwardly and outwardly directed and not solely influenced by the pressures others place on her. Or in other words, Kate has been able to develop her inner dimension as a counter-potential to solidify her personality and to achieve "a detachment" that enables her to return home showing her streaks of grey. Just as her visit to the zoo to watch the seal enables her to realise that her seal is different from those in the zoo, as they are evolved to a higher stage, and that they can take care of themselves on land or in water, Kate too must learn to accept her unconscious desires, give them free play and then they will lead her to a more free and integrated sense of herself. In the last dream, in place of images traditionally associated with death and dying, Lessing incorporates imagery that is reflective of life and

rebirth; when the seal joins its peers and pursues its own activities, Kate experiences a great sense of liberation. This brings to our mind Jacobi's description:

Once the psyche reaches the midpoint of life, the process of development demands a return to the beginning, a descent into the dark, hot depths of the unconscious. To sojourn into these depths, to withstand their dangers, is a journey to hell and "death." But he who comes through safe and sound, who is "reborn," will return full of knowledge and wisdom, equipped for the outward and inward demands of life. (*Individuation* 86)

Mary, the Subversive Potential

Lessing covertly emulates Mulla Nasruddin's character and behaviour in the character of Mary Finchley in this novel. Mary is Kate's alter ego, as eccentric as Kate is conventional. Mary finds social restrictions quite as preposterous as social language. She refuses to behave, refuses to obey, insisting on her own will. Mary seems to enjoy what appears to be traditionally male prerogatives in attaining her own sexual experience and satisfaction. She is more male than female in her attitude toward parenting. Mary is abnormal; the whole conditioning programme set to separate the sexes breaks down before her. St. Andrews notes that:

In this distorting mirror [ie. Mary], Kate Brown sees her own life pursuit of appearances, of approval, of some feminine

image as perfect wife and mother [...]. Free of guilt, free of the will to please, free of appearances, free of an identity based on self-abnegation, Mary Finchley imperils the romantic illusion precisely because she suffers few ill effects from avoiding it. (148-149)

Kate explains to Maureen how Mary gradually brought about a positive change in her outlook and how finally Kate incorporated Mary's perspective into her own:

If you are with someone who really does think it is a joke, but really [...] then it's odd, it changes your perspective. There are times you know, when there's a sort of switch in the way I look at things--everything, my whole life since I was a girl--and I seem to myself like a raving lunatic. (218)

As Kate, in the course of her Sufi quest, gets educated through her deconditioning, she realises that she is drawn closer to Mary. Commenting on the transformatory nature of Mary's magnetism, Greene observes:

Like other doubles in contemporary women's fiction--Gerda in Gail Godwin's *The Odd Woman*, Jocasta in Margaret Atwood's *Bodily Harm*, Doreen and Joan in Sylvia Plath's *Bell Jar*--Mary represents a subversive potential, outspoken and cynical; but whereas most doubles remain "other" and protect the protagonist from the taint of the unconventional, Mary

represents qualities Kate will incorporate: she changes her.
(136)

Both Mary and Nasruddin, who are victimised and laughed at, rise above their circumstances simply by their strength of spirit. Mary's utter sense of justice and fairness recall Nasruddin's similar traits. When Mary learns about Kate's job as the translator, she exclaims, "Well, thank God for that. And about time too" (38), thus honestly expressing her joy at Kate's forced separation from her family, which according to Mary, will do her only good. Thus Mary's honesty and her insight into the nature of relationship remind us of the Mulla, who is notoriously frank in similar situations. Eventhough Kate does not fully recognise the significance of this half-jovial observation, towards the end of the novel, she sincerely acknowledges that Mary's observations very often have changed her perspective and she now realises: "Love, and duty, and being in love and not being in love, [...] and behaving well and you should and you shouldn't and you ought and oughtn't. It's a disease. Well, sometimes I think *that's all* it is" (emphasis added) (218).

The maturity and detachment with which Kate analyses her life situations has come out of her quest as well as her association with Mary who is at once a teacher, a fool, a joker, a judge, and a trickster like the Mulla. Kate's "cow-sessions" with Mary where they discussed practically every conceivable topic under the sun, usually ended with "roaring sessions

of laughter and old wives' talk" (38). Even though Kate found herself, at times, on the verge of envying, copying Mary for her freedom and non-conformist attitude to life, she immediately stifles her impulsive urge. Lessing humorously makes Kate chide herself like this: "If she was not able to think seriously about her marriage without Mary Finchley coming in at every moment, then she had better stop thinking altogether" (39). Further situations centering on Mary and her imbecile husband provide one form of relief from the sober context of the narrative. Kate thinks of Mary at the most crucial situations in her life: while she takes stock of her married life, before accepting Jeffrey's offer of a holiday, (like Mary's affair with a Greek waiter) and while recounting her life story to Maureen.

To sum up, the novel operates on two principal modes, the outer action and inner action. Sufis believe that "the Complete Man [...] is both a real individuality and also a total part of the essential unity" (Shah, *Sufis* 331). Reconciliation between the individual and the transcendental reality will be achieved only through the full development of the individual's potential after reconciling his inner schisms. The belief that Sufism encompasses both aspects of reality--the spiritual and the material--is of special interest to Lessing. In "In the World, Not of it," she notes:

You cannot approach Sufism until you are able to think that a person quite ordinary in appearance and in life can experience higher states of mind. Sufism believes itself to be the

substance of that current which can develop man to a higher stage in his evolution: it is not contemptuous of the world. "Be in the world and not of it" is the aim. (*Voice* 133)

Narrative Technique

Draine highlights the complex nature of Lessing's new apologue form in *SBD*: "To the apologue proper--a single narrative vehicle for conveying an idea--Lessing has added the techniques of the psychological novel, to form a compelling amalgum" (112). What differentiates *SBD* from *BDH* is that in *SBD*, the emphasis is on the process of deliverance as it is experienced by the individual who suffers it. Lessing's message is that ego is not the anchor in one's life, but the primary obstacle as the *Sufi shaikhs* would advise. The seeker needs to surrender with no promise of any personal gain, as Kate sacrifices her self to gain a higher, more evolved self. Budhos illustrates how Lessing's selection of surnames anticipates the heroine's success or failure at integrating reason and emotion through change. In the case of Kate, "Brown," "the colour is associated with the earth and suggests stability and life-giving qualities" (17).

Kate's quest begins with a prediction of its outcome. The narrator observes, "It was going to turn out for Kate that the summer would be such a shortened, heightened, concentrated time. [...] The summer's events were not going to be shaped through any virtues or capacities of her own" (9-10). This narrator according to Draine "initially acts the role of seer to

Kate's knight and makes prophecies regarding the outcome of her quest" (122). This analytical commentary "serve[s] to retard the narrative motion, giving the reader time and inclination to analyse the import of both action and dream" (Draine 122). The highly assertive commentary of the narrator forms the "third level" of the narrative, and it directly advances the aims of the novel and therefore, must not be dismissed as superfluous ideology. The satiric technique which characterises most Sufi stories, becomes Lessing's tool through which Kate's recognitions are expressed. With a gentle, incisive and informing satire, Lessing shows how Kate during her Spanish holiday with Jeffrey, falls ill, and begins to think of him as *if* he were her son. Lessing manages to satirise with a genuine understanding of the compulsions which drive people into the ridiculous positions they take.

What Kate learns is very little when compared to what Anna and Martha do: she will not forge new forms of life or her writing, nor will she be able to save the entire world. But she has attained a glimmer of understanding, a slight change in her way of seeing and knowing, and the courage to endure which is not trivial after all.

Section (ii)

***Briefing for a Descent into Hell: A Travelogue
of Inner Space and Cosmic Time***

“As an Eastern psychology, [...] Sufi practice sometimes seems unusual and difficult to people trained only in the either-or method of thought.”

Idries Shah, *A Perfumed Scorpion*

A significant change in Lessing's fictive technique in her post-Sufi novels is her use of teaching stories. Lessing structures many of her narratives in the form of Sufi tales, which offer enigmatic lessons that make sense in the Sufi context. According to the Sufis, given the right time, place and people the teaching story may have a series of developmental effects.

In spite of the fact that *BDH*, seems to be an important synthesis of the central aspects of both *GN* and *FGC* and in many ways constitutes Lessing's most mature vision of the ultimate nature of human experience, it has not received the careful critical response it richly deserves. Early reviews of the novel have not been particularly useful or discerning. One reviewer in *Spectator* mindlessly characterises the book as a “wretched venture” its first third “completely unreadable,” consisting of tedious “sub-poetic ramblings” and “egomaniac meanderings” in short, “rubbish.” After

that accursed first third, the book according to this reviewer, "straightens out" and becomes "an unpretentious novelette about a middle-class academic's experience in a lunatic asylum" (Waugh 534). Gillian Tindall in her article "Charles the Mad" considers Lessing as an uncritical disciple of R.D. Laing (535).

Alongside these judgments we have Joan Didion who in *New York Times Book Review*, March 14, 1971, observes that Lessing is seen as writing "exclusively in the service of immediate cosmic reform" and being motivated chiefly by an "impulse to find solutions" (1, 39). According to Roberta Rubenstein, "the novel represents a new shape for Lessing's central vision" (175). Thus critics have failed to notice the most outstanding feature of this novel: how Lessing has structured *BDH* like a Sufi teaching story--a strategy she learned from her master Idries Shah. Like the Sufi masters, Lessing here presents us with a fiction that has multilayered plots each of which can have multiple interpretations. Both *BDH* and *MS* demonstrate how Sufism has worked its way into Lessing's novels and how they claim new grounds for themselves as transplants within modern Western narratives. As early as in 1983, Betsy Draine has identified *BDH* as "a kind of mystical teaching story" (92) and taking cue from her it is possible to recognise Lessing as a Sufi teacher who "prod[s] her students into a state of alertness and receptivity to that truth" (Draine 94) which entails an awakening to the essential harmony of all things.

The Sufi Teaching Story

A brief discussion of the Sufi teaching story will enable us to appreciate *BDH* as a Sufi teaching tale. Highlighting the almost impossible task of defining a Sufi story, the noted Sufi scholar Nancy Shields Hardin observes, "It is easier to say what the Sufi teaching story is not than to say precisely what it is--just as it is impossible to say precisely what Sufism itself is" ("Sufi Teaching Story" 314). While reading a Sufi teaching story one feels that:

[...] he is going into a messy rooming house, where people specialise in forgetting and remembering, snooping and tattling, looking askance and stealing from closets. It is not a realm in which it is wise to seek, still less to pretend to, too much accuracy [...]. They come from everywhere, including man's dimmest and darkest past, now, 'The Past Thousand Years.' They come from word play and proverbs, from fairy tales, tall tales, Greek plays, Hindu epics, Tibetan jokes, infancy gospels, the Desert Fathers, and even common sense [...]. They are full of wonders and strange ideas. (Kritzeck 154-55)

The tales and stories are sometimes like children's or fairy tales; or they may be narratives of interactions between teacher and students, letters and lectures of teachers, poetry, all ranging from the apparently mundane to the apparently fantastic. Innumerable Sufi teaching stories were told orally

and later were written down for the main purpose of transmitting Sufi faith and practice to future generations. In the Middle East where these stories are told and retold, they are not considered for children only, rather they are said to contain several layers of meaning which render them suitable for people of all age groups. Shah compares the Sufi teaching story to a peach: "A person may be emotionally stirred by the exterior 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" (*Sufis* 88). If one does not try to uncover the kernel, one will have accomplished nothing more than looking at the peach or regarding the story as merely amusing and superficial, while others may internalise the hidden meaning. This mode of teaching illustrates the complexity of life, and at least temporarily deflecting the mind's habitual responses from the sequential, the interconnectedness of a, b, c, d, the either/or modes of thought. Muge Galin notes:

The most important purpose of enchanting the audience with this ball of magic thread [stories], in addition to entertaining, is to blur the black-and-white distinctions between right and wrong, good and bad, cause and effect, villain and saint, guilty and innocent. Actions do not necessarily provoke the reaction 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. (102)

One is reminded of the Buddhist's Koans--the obscure and baffling sayings of Zen masters, which are said to stab the spirit awake. The stories are calculated to bring into play, perhaps by their very strangeness and unexpectedness, the forces of hidden life. The meaning of these stories is often highly enigmatic; it does not by any means lie on the surface.

These stories also provide the means of behaviour and thinking so as to accomplish a refinement of the perception and the development of an attitude conducive to learning. Some stories are also designed to communicate with what is conceived to be the innermost part of a human being. The following teaching story of Mulla Nasruddin demonstrates the interconnectedness of life. Once while walking along a deserted street in the night, he sees a troop of horsemen coming toward him. Terribly frightened, he jumps over a wall and finds himself in a graveyard. The horsemen follow him and ask the frightened Nasruddin "What are you doing there?" The Hodja replies, "It is more complicated than you assume! You see, I am here because of you; and you, you are here because of me" (Shah, *Sufis* 81). This story illustrates the interconnectedness of human life that one can do nothing without affecting others and that one's actions open up infinite new possibilities and have unlimited consequences and repercussions. The story can also refer to the inevitable and fundamental understanding between the Sufi master and the disciple; until the disciple appears, the master is not a teacher, and until one recognises the teacher, one does not know what he/she is meant to do to move up on the

evolutionary Sufi ladder. On an extended level, the story would disclose to the novice on the Path who fears rather than loves God, that one cannot escape God's presence on a deserted street or in a graveyard, or in life or even after death.

According to the Sufis, the purpose of human life is outside the perceptual spectrum of the ordinary person. To widen the spectrum, to provide "sight" is the goal of Sufism. In the Sufi understanding, the ordinary man suffers from confusion or "sleep," because of his/her tendency to use his/her customary thought patterns and perception to try to understand the meaning of his/her life and attain fulfilment. Consequently his/her experience of reality is constricted and dangerously so, because he/she remains unaware of it. For Lessing protagonists--Martha, Watkins, Kate and the elderly narrator--this latent perceptual capacity is not only crucial for their happiness but is the principal goal of their current phase of existence.

As a Sufi teacher, following the long tradition of Sufi writings, Lessing employs the Sufi method of "Scatter," which aims at creating a shift in perspective from the dominant linear mode of thought to a "multi-levelled" one. Sufism is a way of life seeking to lift the veil of appearance that masks true Being. Sufis pursue gnosis, the wordless knowledge not only of God but also of the essential unity of God and all that man calls God's creation. One of the basic assumptions of Sufism is that humanity is in a lamentable state of ignorance of that unity--an ignorance which should be dispelled by

the Sufis. The story of Charles Watkins is designed to lead its audience to the perception of a hidden harmony among elements of life that initially appear to be incongruous. The most glaring oddities and apparent incongruities are actually prods which provoke the reader to look for the essential harmony of all elements. In the Sufi mystic vision, no one fact or interpretation is reliable or significant unless it is viewed as part of the total truth--as one note in the Harmony. So is the case with Lessing's novel, no one level of narration is true or meaningful unless it is correlated with others.

The entire plot of the *BDH*, it appears, has its origin in these lines in "The Sufi Quest" by Ustad Hilmi Mevlevi:

People have been sent from time to time, to try to serve man and save him from the 'blindness' and 'sleep' (which today would be better described as 'amnesia') which is always described in our technical literature as a local disease. These people are always in touch with the Origin, and they bring the 'medicine' which is half the cure. The other half, as in orthodox terrestrial medicine, is the activity of that which is acted upon, to attain its own regeneration with the minimum of aid. These cosmic doctors--a literal translation of a most ancient term--often live in the world almost unnoticed, like the camel in the desert. They have been of all races, and they have belonged to all faiths. (qtd. in Shah, *Thinkers* 197)

Extending this definition to *BDH*, we can identify Charles Watkins, Rose Mary Baines, Frederick Larson and Violet Stoke as cosmic doctors who try to salvage this "foul" planet.

BDH, one of Lessing's comparatively neglected works, is not only a transitional novel but also is dramatically significant for what it tells us of earlier Lessing and for clues it provides to later Lessing. The ultimate question behind *BDH* remains the same as for the other Lessing novels--the question of the survival of the world of human beings. The vision that informs and threatens the contemporary inhabitants of the novel is identical with the prediction that evolves into fact in *FGC*: the spread of pollution and destruction, the extermination of much of the life on earth--plant, animal, and human--and finally the emergence of a new race of mutants with different capacities for perception and survival. The reasons for the collapse of the old type of humanity also remain essentially the same. People who insist on compartmentalising, think in terms of "I, I, I, I, I, I" instead of "We" (103); they talk about "either [...] or" whereas Charles tells one of his doctors in the hospital "and, and, and, and, and, and" (139). Ursula Le Guin also explores this idea of whole vision in her *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1976). She envisions a world, Gethen, where there is no division of humanity into male/female, strong/weak, protected/ protective. Instead one is respected and judged only as a human being. Commenting on the choice of a male as protagonist for *BDH*, Lynn Sukenick hypothesises that:

BDH may feature a man's consciousness simply as a preference of imagination. One suspects, [...] that a man was chosen in order to give madness its fullest due and its deepest persuasion: the fact that women are more often considered irrational would give a conventional taint to a disordered female and rob madness of the novel authority it possesses in *Briefing*. (533)

The story of Charles Watkins, an amnesiac is adumbrated in Ella's (GN) idea of writing a story about "a man whose sense of reality has gone; and because of it, has a deeper sense of reality than normal people" (458). *BDH* thus is the record of the breakdown of a professor of classics, his experience of a visionary, archetypal world of myth and drama, his treatment at the hands of conventional psychiatrists, and his subsequent--and ironic--recovery into the mean, narrow, self-denying world of the "sane." The two epigraphs--one from the fourteenth century Sufi Mahmoud Shabistari's poem *The Secret Garden* and the other from the natural scientist--Rachel Carson's *The Edge of the Sea*--describe the macrocosm encapsulated within a raindrop or a sand grain suspended in water. Writers some times structure their plots according to certain archetypal patterns to ensure universality. There are many types of archetypes resulting from the literary and religious experiences of mankind. Some archetypal structures are customarily stated in terms of action. "The Descent into Hell" of the title of the novel signifies the archetypal journey of Charles Watkins, who is

Everyman, rediscovering (remembering) through the exploration of the microcosm of his own consciousness the experience of the human race. The wholeness of consciousness is again and again presented by Lessing as vital to growth. The two epigraphs echoing Blake's almost proverbial lines about "a grain of sand" actually reinforce Thomas Sterne's cosmic perspective focused on a piece of the familiar world so small that most adults cannot comprehend it except as it represents natural resources for human enterprise.

The Empirical and the Visionary Realms

Much of the novel comes to us through the voice of the protagonist, Charles Watkins, but the words arise from deep within Watkins's psyche and possess an oracular quality, almost childlike in its simplicity, and the world it evokes has a clarity, a translucence, a certain vibration in its tone which makes the world of "sanity" seem opaque and heavy, incapable of reflecting the myriad colours of light playing through it and all resonance reduced to a dull thud, as it were. As we read on, we are overwhelmed by the strangeness, the richness, even the truth of his experience, and when the outer world impinges, it jars. With Watkins's voice as guide we traverse widely over the immensities of the psychic space until almost in the last pages of the novel, we surface with Watkins upon his restoration to normalcy. We "meet" Charles Watkins only through two brief letters to his friends and one to an admirer. Intentionally the "normal" Watkins is made not worth knowing, and unconsciously we ask the question whether the so-

called sane world is not mad, and we try to escape it. The novel ends with the abruptness and finality of the electric shock by means of which Watkins's normal self is restored and the reader is almost sure that Watkins will not recover his rich Sufi self.

BDH signals its ambiguity from the outset by establishing two separate narrative levels: a realistic frame story presented through records and documents and an inner romance presented through lyrical narrative. Although the narrative levels appear at first to represent mutually exclusive realms, they interpenetrate in significant ways and to an increasing degree as the novel progresses with the result that readers are induced to think of both levels inclusively, to seek modes of accommodation between them rather than to validate one kind of truth at the expense of the other. Regarding the two modes of consciousness, Ornstein in his *The Psychology of Consciousness* (1972) observes that the outward oriented realm operates on "the verbal-intellectual and sequential mode" (124) of understanding. Its essence is analytic and is bound within a linear time-frame. In contrast, the inner mode of consciousness operates on a mode of cognition which is "holistic" rather than sequential and is hard to capture verbally (124).

The action of the novel grows out of that dual perspective, the latter mode of consciousness of Watkins is dramatised with further complexity. The "Descent into Hell" of the novel's title appears to refer to the mental condition of Watkins, when admitted to the Central Intake Hospital with

amnesia, but it gradually emerges that the hell in question is in fact the "real" world. When the patient's dream-self sleeps, it is "dismal and alien" like "entering a prison cell" (61); it is at just these moments that the patient wakes in the hospital ward.

The Sufi Paradox

Draine quotes the Sufi pronouncement that "Humanity is asleep, concerned only with what is useless, living in a wrong world," and affirms that this forms the basic assumption of *BDH* (93). Watkins represents humanity asleep to the truth of unity and at the same time striving to seek knowledge of it. Draine notes that throughout the novel, the Sufi emblem of sleep is employed in its dual aspects. On the one hand, "sleep symbolises the state of spiritual unconsciousness [...]. Paradoxically however, it is through sleep that he will awaken to spiritual reality" (93). As Watkins sleeps the days away in the hospital, he realises, "I must wake, I know there is something more awake than this, I know I have to be awake and be, but [...] I never learned to live awake. I was trained for sleep" (126, 129). His life keeps him so isolated from ultimate concerns that he will not be able to remain awake without a mental breakdown and the freedom of consciousness is provided only in sleep. For him, "Awake is asleep" (138) that is, his daily life is spiritual unconsciousness; whereas in the sleep of his mental breakdown he can dream his way towards knowledge and spiritual wakefulness. This section of the novel closely resembles William

Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality Ode," which is a poetic version of the same theory:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting

[.....]

But trailing clouds of glory do we come

From God, who is our home. (59-66)

This is equivalent to the Sufi symbolic saying that "the road to annihilation [the Sufi word for the desirable absorption of the individual into the One] may be travelled sleeping" (Shah, *Way* 252).

Watkins's visionary experiences are intercut with his conversations with the doctors X and Y, and with letters and statements from his family and friends, all laying claim to some knowledge of Charles Watkins. The conflict between his subjective perceptions and their perception of him is the novel's main concern, for it develops the idea presented in *GN* and *FGC* that mental breakdown is a potentially liberating and instructive experience, capable of contributing to the self-awareness and growth not only of the individual subject but of society as a whole. Mental hospitals are described as places where "cracks" in individuals might let "light [...] shine through at last" (130). Not only in her emphasis on madness but also in her very articulation of its value, Lessing shows a striking similarity to the views of the unorthodox psychiatrist and cultural theoretician, R.D. Laing, particularly

in his *The Politics of Experience* (1967). In a talk at the New School for Social Research on 27th September 1973, Lessing refers to Laing as a “peg.” She observed, “All educated look for a key authority figure who will then act as a law giver. Laing became that figure” (qtd. in Hardin, “Doris Lessing” 571-72). Marion Vlastos in her seminal article, “Doris Lessing and R.D. Laing: Psychopolitics and Prophecy” compares them for their approach to madness:

Unlike Dickens, Lessing and Laing believe not in hearts but in psyches; not in Christian ethics but in rhythms of nature and the order of the universe; and above all, not in a saving discrepancy between what human beings are in their innermost selves and how they behave collectively. Because of this commitment to look as deeply as possible into everything and because of this capacity to see *connections*, Lessing and Laing may be seen not only as social analysts but also as social visionaries, prophets of contemporary culture (emphasis added). (246)

Lessing’s Sufi Tale

The first half of the novel reveals Watkins’s attempt to locate his rich Sufi self; the second focuses on his self as defined by contemporary society with its restrictive categorisations. Through this Sufi tale, Lessing demonstrates to the young that one need not be underused as most human

beings are; Sufism helps to tap our potential in diverse ways: through madness, dreams, extra- sensory perception etc.

Eventhough the text of *BDH* has no chapters or other formal divisions, it is possible to identify at least five plot levels in *BDH*; but their relationship to one another is problematic. The admission sheet of the Central Intake Hospital dated August 15, 1969 describes an amnesiac patient, later to be identified as Charles Watkins, classics professor at Cambridge. This is followed by brief reports on Watkins's condition from a nurse and a doctor; and we shift to a timeless ocean scene in which a sailor, "poor Charlie" gives an account of his wanderings after the pirating of his ship by a cosmic force embedded in a kind of spiritual space ship, the Disc or Crystal. By virtue of the names and of the simple juxtaposition of stories, Charles Watkins and poor Charlie would seem to be identified with each other. The doctors diagnose that Watkins is hallucinating the voyage. The reader assumes that poor Charlie's story is merely a metaphorical account of some more primary reality belonging to Charles Watkins, victim of a nervous breakdown. The firm objective stance of the doctors' reports and the dream-like quality of Charlie's story persuade the reader to assume that the real world of the novel is the hospital and the secondary or imaginary world is the ocean of the dreaming self of Charlie.

The internal narrative of Charlie's arrival in a paradisal city that holds a potential landing station for the Crystal, his encounter with the warring rat-

dogs and apes, his struggle to resist the temptation of their blood-lust, his efforts to keep the mandala clean for the landing of the redemptive Crystal are described in such a concrete detail that the reader is likely to conclude that the flat world of the hospital appears inauthentic in comparison to the more vivid and more attractive world of the City of the Crystal. Having subverted the realistic framework of the hospital, Lessing now disorients the reader by introducing a fairy tale fantasy in which a great white bird comes to protect Charlie and takes him over for a flight over the City. Yet another jolt occurs when during the third descent of the Crystal, Charlie is taken up and he takes part in the Crystal Conference preparing him to be born on earth. He is instructed by Mercury (or Merk Ury) that he must remember what he is learning in the Crystal. The entire conference couched in the tone of farce, undermines the reader's confidence in the status of the narration. Lessing makes the reader wonder whether he is listening to the thought processes of a demented Charles Watkins or whether Watkins is a vehicle through which a transcendent reality manifests itself in various guises. We learn about Charles and his family by means of more doctors' reports, letters from various persons who have known Watkins, Watkins's own letters and a recorded lecture. A totally new tale is introduced when Charles Watkins as identifier with all and everyone, describes the story of his World War II mission for the Allies in Yugoslavia. In some omniscient narration, we learn of Watkins's decision to undergo shock therapy after which there is only one Charles Watkins, a very ordinary man who repudiates his extraordinary imagination and memories by apologising to

friends for being “such a bore” while not in “full possession of his faculties” (249). The tales of Charlie as a sailor, explorer, mystic, and potential messenger of the gods fade into the background and appear to be nothing but the useless fantasies of Watkins’s unwell mind. Draine endorses Lessing’s primary intention when she observes that the meaning of the novel

inheres neither in the fate of Charles Watkins at the end of the linear action nor in his evaluation of his situation, but rather in the *inter-connections* of situations, characters, and action among the several versions of his story [...]. Lessing’s manipulation of the narrative has much to do with the reader’s perception of the interconnection (emphasis added). (92)

Sufi teachings about suffering and transcendence plainly motivate the ethos of this novel. The entire novel can be viewed as the quest of the *murid* through consciousness and time towards a heightened vision of man and how he fails to attain enlightenment because he goes about his quest without the guidance of a teacher and without concerted self-“work” which are the imperatives for a Sufi. Lessing seems to illustrate what Shah observed in his *Sufis* about the dangers of self-reliance with which a heedless Sufi experimented on his own and destroyed himself in the process. The reason for his obvious failure to achieve selfhood is:

The inability to make others fulfil one's wishes; and the reverse, the fear of being controlled by others, with the consequent loss of autonomy that is believed to be fundamental to the conception of the self. These opposites are incongruously exaggerated in paranoid thinking, one of the most prevalent mental symptoms of the Western man. (Shah, *Sufis* 434)

Watkins's Dreams

In his dreams in the hospital, Watkins undertakes a mythical journey which presents a continual challenge to the nature and values of the "real" world of the hospital. Watkins's dream begins with a sea journey in which he is at once Jason, in pursuit of his "purpose," a second Odysseus fighting against the lure of Sirens. He is a Sinbad, a Jonah, an Ancient Mariner left alone on a ship; a Judas branded as "guilty" when only his eleven companions ascended in the heavenly Crystal. Because he is unable to remember the principle of Unity which should be his goal, he is fated to journey "round and round." Thus this section of the book takes the form of a sea voyage that seems to represent the beginning of life and hence the oldest layer of the human psyche. This part of the narrative is dominated by poetic rhythms and repetitions quite uncharacteristic of Lessing's usual style:

Oh porpoise, on this delicate soap bubble our Earth, spinning
all blue and green and iridescent, where Northwards air and

water swirl in time's direction left to right, great spirals of breath
and light and water, now, oh porpoise, singing friend, we are on
the other track and I'll hold on, I'll clasp and clutch to the last
breath of your patience, being patient, till you land me on that
beach at last, for oh porpoise, you must be sure and take me
there, you must land me fairly at last, you must not let me cycle
South too far, [...]. (36)

The language of the psyche described in poetic prose, modulates, finally, into an ironic contemporary mode. The formal innovations that make *BDH* more adventurous than any of Lessing's earlier novels give depth and resonance to her depiction of psychological experience. The quester, is however, rendered "purged and salt-scoured and guiltless" (59) by his sea voyage so that on reaching the shore he enters a kind of Eden.

The mystical theoreticians remark that there are a number of "stages"² which mark the progress of the individual's evolution, although they do not specifically label any one stage nor even indicate any clear sequence of stages. But each stage is marked by an unmistakable experience which "activates the organ in question, gives us relief from our climb upward and grants us sufficient strength to continue this climb. The attainment of these stages is permanent" (Shah, *Sufis* 62). Lessing, it appears, has devised four stages in Watkins's Sufi quest.

The first stage corresponds to his reaching the Edenic Paradise, in spite of all the odds. According to the Sufis, physical energy serves as a bridge to that other kind of creative energy which is the differentiated capability common to all the forms of more highly evolved people. Watkins believes himself to be a *uwaysi*, that is a Sufi who claims to be travelling the Path without formal initiation, (it was believed that such a *murid* was "spiritually" initiated by the Prophet despite the distance) embarks upon the quest when his friends have been carried by the Crystal; with hard work and great ingenuity he improvises a raft and manages to reach a rock and from there a friendly porpoise deposits him on the shore. Watkins's unique experiences on the island constitute the second stage of his quest.

With incredible energy, guided by two friendly golden spotted leopards, he reaches the top of a rock-fringed plateau. On reaching there he stumbles upon a paradise for birds and animals with its green meadows and rushing cataracts. All his exhaustion disappears at the sight of the beautiful paradise of magnificent forests "through which the river went in a shining green streak, [...] the circling white rim of sand, and beyond that, a horizon of sea" (43). Laleh Bakhtiar notes that "one of the most beautiful of all symbols which has found unexcelled expression in Islamic architecture, carpet, design and poetry is that of the Gardens of Paradise" (28). According to the Sufis, the physical strain put in by Watkins helps to "reach the inner aspect of a person, and to liberate a certain dynamic" (Seligman 200). With renewed energy and enthusiasm Watkins explores the place

and he realises that he was "suddenly quite remarkably alert and excited" (49) and he found himself looking at the ruins of a great house or a temple, or public building of some sort which he had not seen before. In spite of the strangeness of the place, while he "was wandering among the streets and avenues of stone," he felt "as if [he] were among friends" (52). Symbolically, Lessing refers to the unregenerate mind of Watkins which is blind to true reality at this stage and which is to undergo purification. This episode along with the archaeological discoveries of Frederick Larson later reinforces the truth that a lot of renovating work is necessary to attain illumination. As soon as he comes upon an unpeopled court with a mandala at its centre, he knows that he must attend to the task of "cleaning" it. Here Lessing refers to the technique of meditation which in the Eastern esoteric tradition is called "entering the mandala" (J.E.Cirlot 199). Cirlot argues that in whatever form the mandala is presented, the important feature is its concentric and balancing element. Laleh Bakhtiar observes that the first step in the "Arc of ascent" is "to cleanse the heart of the disciple" before he can be linked with the "sacred center" (23). This task of vigorous cleaning is described tellingly, highlighting the whole-hearted devotion of the Sufi as this task enables him to release the "dynamic" inside. "The forward movement of the adept on the Path as initiated by repentance and renunciation consists of constant struggle against the *nafs*, the 'soul' -- the lower self, the base instincts, what we might render in the biblical sense as the flesh" (Schimmel 112). It is incumbent upon every traveller on the Path to purge the *nafs* of its evil attributes in order to replace these by the

opposite, praiseworthy qualities. With renewed vigour, he works hard, thus successfully overcoming *Laziness or Leisure* which are to be conquered. He contemplates the graver aspects of mortal time and cosmic time with great clarity.

The celestial voyager believes in the Sufi saying: "little food, little sleep and little talk" which helps an adept on his mystical path; he repeatedly refers to the fact that "to go to sleep was like entering a prison cell" (61) as it hampers his progress. Here Watkins tries to emulate the Shah Kirmani who did not sleep for forty years to have the vision of a "Sun" that rises at midnight and thus to enjoy a spiritual enlightenment not comparable to any worldly light.

In the third stage of his quest, Watkins finds he had drawn "evil into my surroundings, into me" (59), when he participated in the bloody banquet with three women and three boys, thus signalling his Fall into the sin of blood lust. It is significant to note that in Sufi terminology *nafs* has often been compared to a disobedient woman who tries to seduce and cheat the poor wayfarer; the noun *nafs* is feminine in Arabic.

For the first time he becomes aware of his nakedness. Filled with repentance or *tawba*, the voyager says, "I fell on my face on the earth and I wept. Oh, I'll never know such sorrow again [...]. I don't wish to live [...]"

(60). The Sufis consider repentance as an important landmark in the mystical life of a seeker of God because "repentance for [his] sins is rewarded with contrition (*nadamat*) which is a source of moral strength on the way to God" (Bhatnagar 159). Eventhough Sufi masters differ in their opinions regarding the number of stages and stations on the Path, all unanimously list the stage of repentance as the first stage. The reputed orientalist Reynold Nicholson notes that "this is the Moslem term for 'conversion' and marks the beginning of a new life" (*Mystics* 30). The genuineness of one's entry into this stage is tested by whether one abandons one's sins in the new life. Though Watkins recognises that all human beings are obliged to earn deliverance into a higher order of being-- by leading a virtuous life, he takes part in the savage banquet.

The bloody feast, described tellingly, marks an important phase in the third stage of his quest. All the questers in their perilous journey are beset with temptations; the weak-willed like Watkins succumb to them. In his utter dejection, Watkins wanders restlessly only to come back to the mandala to prepare himself for the Crystal. Just like Martha's incessant walking takes her to an area of herself termed "the lit space," the narrator knew that "I should rather go on walking all night straight on, straight on [...]" (65) to reach his "inner aspect" himself.

Another important Sufi formulation of the relationship between outside and inside, the thinker and the thought becomes evident when the

narrator, after missing the Crystal Disc on its second descent says: "I could not see it [...]. Whatever it was that I could not quite see, but was there, belonged to a level of existence that my eyes were not evolved enough to see [...]. I felt [...] strained out of myself with the effort of seeing what I could not really see, and hearing what I could have heard with different ears" (66-67). This inner -outer problem is manifested in the narrator's thinking about the Crystal Disc. "Thought [...] I was thinking [...] the Crystal was a thought that pulsed and spiralled" (89). The narrator experiences the disintegration of any barrier between perceived and perceiver: he is absorbed into, becomes one with that which he simultaneously sees outside of his mind. Feeling "sick and low and shaken" (67) he strains with great effort, finally he collapses and faints. The consequences of his failure are graphically depicted in the subsequent arrival of rat-dogs, their war with the apes, their self-destruction through violence and sexuality like (Swift's Yahoos) and their pollution of land and sea. The birth-death spasm of a female rat - dog anticipates birth-death merging, as well as many attempts to combine rather than to separate actions. This catastrophe evokes the crisis of modern man: the world wars, the development of weapons of mass destruction, and the competition for scarce resources. A white bird, "watchful" and "severe," a symbolic conscience/soul, comes to protect the voyager as he cleanses the mandala. The intervention of the bird which suggests his further ascent toward enlightenment, enables him to observe the earth's defilement from a safe distance and to prepare himself for the next phase of his evolution. The colour "white" according to Evelyn Underhill is "analogous to the

illumination stage of the mystic way" (145). Also the repeated references made to the fish in the sea, ocean etc. suggest that the self of man is utterly merged in the ocean of Divine Love (Underhill 132). The mystic equation soul = bird is popular all over the world, in Turkey, one still hears the expression, "his soul bird has flown away" (Schimmel 307). Attar, the famous mystic poet, in his "The Conference of the Birds" describes the stages of the spiritual pilgrimage with great metaphysical insight through the bird imagery (Schimmel 307).

Watkins's encounter with a number of hideous dog-rats and monkeys and their antagonism adds to his anxiety. But filled with fear (as even the most pious tremble with fear) and hope, he goes about his "work" of cleaning the court. *Fear* and *Hope* are classified as stations on the mystical path for they belong to the essential and long standing aspects of mystical life in its primary stages and even at later levels. "*Fear and Hope* are the two wings of action without which flying is impossible" (Schimmel 127). Sufis remark: "Fear is a masculine element, hope a feminine one, and the two together engender the deepest realities of faith" (Schimmel 127). During the time he spends on land, the voyager sees as his task the preparation of a landing pad in the centre of the city, in anticipation of the return of the Crystal. Significantly, both the Crystal and the landing area are images of wholeness; in archetypal symbolism crystals and the abstract circle/square configurations often represent "the union of extreme opposites--of matter and spirit" (Jung, *Man* 221). After delays and failures

in his effort to prepare himself for the crucial journey, he finally senses the presence of the Crystal. But he realises: "Beating out from that central point came waves of a finer substance, from a finer level of existence, which assaulted me, because I was not tuned in to them" (67). The equation of extra-sensory perception with the evolving organs of consciousness described by Sufi mystics underlies the formulations of Watkins's experience. This metaphoric language parallels the Sufi chemist Fariduddin Attar's description of inner transformation: "Every fibre has been purified, raised to a higher state, vibrates to a higher tune, gives out a more direct, more penetrating note [...]" (Shah, *Sufis* 122-23). At this stage Watkins's inadequacy makes explicit the difficulty of achieving that elevated level of being.

On the third descent of the Crystal Disc, the narrator is taken up and this marks the fourth stage of his quest. Once he is inside the Crystal, he felt "a delightful lightness took me over" (88). Watkins's inner being becomes congruent with the macrocosm; he understands that the mind of humanity is also a unified consciousness, of which he is an integral part. In this stage of the journey with his "new body" (88) and with "the tentacles of [...] new senses" (90) he realises that: "In that dimension minds lay side by side, fishes in a school, cells in honeycomb, flames in fire, and together we made a whole in such a way that it was not possible to say, Here Charles begins, here John or Miles or Felicity or Constance ends [...]" (91). To him,

the world was spinning like the most delicately tinted of bubbles, all light. It was the mind of humanity that I saw, but this was not at all to be separated from the animal mind which married and fused with it every where. Nor was it a question of higher or lower, [...] because all sympathetic knowledge must be that, in this spin of fusion like a web where every strand is linked and vibrates with every other, the swoop of an eagle on a mouse, the eagle's cold exultation and the mouse's terror make a match in nature, and this harmony runs in a strengthened pulse in the inner chord of which it is a part. (92)

This true knowledge is a higher form of thought than the beliefs of most men which amount to little more than conditioned learning. Watkins realises that with all his rational knowledge, he has been busy with what is useless and has been living in a wrong world. This cosmic perspective is summed in the epigraph to *BDH* by Rachel Carson. Watkins, seeking the essence of his being, glimpses complete reality: "In this great enclosing web of always changing light moves flames and tones and thrills of light that sang and sounded, on deeper and higher notes, so that what I saw or rather part of, was neither light nor sound, but the place or area where these *two identities become one.*"(emphasis added) (92-93). He realises:

all that drama of deep blue oceans that held their still unknown and secret life [...] humanity and animal life and bird life and

reptile life and insect life--all these were variations in a little crust on this globe. Motes, microbes [...] which, viewed from the vantage point of enclosing web of light [...] was not at all a question of individual entities, as those entities saw themselves, but a question of *wholes large and small, wholes functioning as wholes.* (93-94)

The station of "fear" corresponds to what is called *bast*; *bast* from the root "to get wider and enlarge," means "an extension of enthusiastic feeling, a perfect joy and ease that may develop, in some cases, into true cosmic consciousness" (Schimmel 128). It is this state that inspired the Sufis to convey to others the state of happiness in which the whole world is seen in a changed light, transparent and filled with opaline colours of exquisite beauty as we have seen in the case of Watkins. Whereas *bast* is the experience of extension and perhaps intensification of the self, *quabd*, "constraint" means "the compression of the soul--darkness, the oppressing desert of loneliness" in which the mystic spends days and sometimes months of his life. It is out of this "darkness that the light of unitive experience, or of vision, may suddenly appear--like the 'sun at midnight'" (Schimmel 129). It is after such an experience that Watkins bemoans the loss of cosmic harmony among human beings like this:

Some sort of a divorce there has been somewhere along the long path of this race of man between the "I" and the "We," some sort of a terrible falling away and I (who am not I, but part

of a whole composed of other human beings as they are of me) hovering here as if between the wings of a great white bird, feel as if I am spinning back into the vortex of terror, like a birth in reverse, and it is towards a catastrophe, yes, that was when the microbes; the little broth that is humanity, was knocked senseless, hit for six, knocked out of their true understanding, so that ever since most have said I,I,I,I,I,I,I, I and cannot, save for a few, say we. (103)

Even the war and blood-lust he has witnessed here have been essential to his eventual transmutation, providing the “page in my passport for this stage of the journey [...] a door, a key, and an opening” (105, 107). Thus Lessing renders the ineffable and self-transcending experience of spiritual illumination--the event that Underhill calls the “Crystallisation” of consciousness at a higher level (195). Having been brought into the Crystal Disc, the narrator finds himself at a briefing of the gods. At the briefing a god Merk Ury, articulates the essential sin of humanity:

Humans have not yet evolved into an understanding of their individual selves as merely parts of a whole, first of all humanity, their own species, let alone achieving a conscious knowledge of humanity as part of Nature, plants, animals, birds, insects, reptiles, all these together making a small chord in the Cosmic Harmony. (120)

He realises that the human species is mentally defective, human intellect and senses being too crude to apprehend the wisdom of the superior beings, who will gladly enlighten us if they can make themselves understood. Their attempts to reach the numbed inhabitants of the earth have met with little success, since their messengers are corrupted when they enter earth's poisonous atmosphere. These visionary episodes are described with a succession of celestial symbols: the Sun produces the solar wind which drives the voyager's raft around in its watery circuits and is identified as "man's father and creator" (56). The voyager realises that he was in the grip of the influences of the moon, the satellite which governs the darker realms of irrationality, and it presides over his fall from innocence. Interestingly the whole solar system provides the setting and characters for the mythological fantasia before his descent into hell. Commenting on the Platonic structure of the episodes, Betsy Draine notes that the Crystal and the Sun are metaphors for the One, from which all beings emanate and toward which all long to return (101). The great mythopoeic vision unfolded to the narrator within his crystalline vantage point conveys the immensity, indeed the infinite reaches of both outer and inner space. This marks the end of the fourth stage of his quest. Thus in one sense, *BDH* may be interpreted as a Sufi allegory, based on the Sufi tradition of stages and stations of enlightenment.

The Inadequacy of Language

In the Conference, the main area of discussion is the story of Earth's going through a catastrophic period, and that the gods must once more "descend" to Earth with the by-now-hackneyed message: that there is a Harmony and that if they wish to prosper they must keep in step and obey its Laws. The theme of descent pervades the entire novel. The descent of the gods implies the divine element of man, but it is divinity stifled by man himself, and by his institutions. Charles, one of the descended gods, is stifled by society, here represented by the hospital.

The narrator's earlier use of a line from Eliot's "Sweeney Agonistes" "I gotta use words when I talk to you" (105) as a caption for his mythological fantasia emphasises the inability of our corrupt language to express a vision of "the stars in their courses." Lessing wants to write truthfully about the power of language to construct experience and its inadequacy to convey "real" experience. Carol Franko in "Authority, Truth-telling and Parody: Doris Lessing and 'the Book'" comments on the parodic nature of the language used in *BDH*, especially in the section of the conference of gods:

The parodied sources are more apparent here: Science fiction, crudely constructed, with some James Bond elements. Exposition comes awkwardly through a film: The Descent Team is shown one called *Forecast*, which details Earth's catastrophic condition [...]. The humour is strained [...]. (295)

In presenting the gods' briefing, Lessing does not create scenes which suggest a reality beyond ordinary human experience. In contrast to the oracular and heightened tone of the earlier parts of *BDH* the mood is at times jocular and witty. In fact the conference offers a heroic explanation and cure to Watkins's insanity: he is a member of the Descent Team and his amnesia and visions represent this effort to shed his Charles Watkins identity and remember his "true" purpose as the messenger of the gods. Merk's descriptions of what the Descent Team will suffer in the "Poisonous Hell" of Earth echo Watkins's condition: amnesia, feelings of loss and disorientation, experiencing "waking up" as illness. Merk's references to "the *briefing*" of the Descent Team echoes the title of the novel and offers the key to the reader to consider the novel as an intelligible, aesthetic and thematic whole. Carol Franko observes:

"There is to be no Briefing" contradicts Lessing's title in parodic gesture that reminds us of the ubiquitousness of versions and of an intrusive narrator who wants us to participate in the making and unmaking of stories and myths, all the while keeping in mind the inadequacy of language to convey reality. (295)

Lessing allows Charles to play with sound and sense of language: "The Cape Verde Islands were to starboard when ? Last week ? Last when ? That was no week, that was my wife" (10). The intentionally insipid language of the everyday world--"Be a good boy baby; and go to sleep"

(126) is the negative standard against which Charles's visionary responses are measured. "Me half beaten back into dark, me quietened, regulated, time-tabled, a nuisance tamed, me the obediently sleeping" (128)--this is a language that can most effectively create the sense of an experience beyond consciousness and Lessing uses it in short transitional passages such as this. Sufis use words in a special sense, far removed from their accustomed significance.

After Charles emerges from visions, we are no longer given his private thoughts. Instead there is a shift in the form of the novel, which moves from letters to dialogues to short letters from Charles's wife, mistress and colleagues. These are attempts to reconstruct the history of the patient, who is at last discovered to be Charles Watkins; a classics professor at Cambridge. Watkins has a wife, Felicity and two sons. The attempt to reconstruct Watkins's identity and get at the nature of his condition is made by means of more doctors' reports, letters from various persons who have known Watkins, Watkins's own letters and a recorded lecture, and his written narrative of "his" World War II. The inadequacy of such definition and of such language is clear in the light of Charles's previous vision and the evidence of the deeper knowledge that Charles retains from the briefing. The testimonies from his wife, mistress and colleague form a picture that sharply contrasts with what we know in the first part of the novel. The commentaries of his acquaintances emphasise the way in which Watkins, to their perceptions was always somewhat different, abnormal. His wife

Felicity, who is expected to know about him best, seems to know him least and only volunteers the fact that "he always sleeps much less than most people" (144). His disillusioned former mistress, Constance Mayne found him "above every human emotion" (190) and hates him for his callous attitude towards her. Jeremy Thorne, his fellow don, friend since childhood suffers outrage, jealousy, and bewilderment at Watkins's sudden anti-social outbursts, his anarchic theories on the utter pointlessness of teaching the classics, archaeological discoveries and professional ethics. To Jeremy, Watkins is "the original eccentric odd ball" (184) who did not even "pay lip service to ordinary feelings" (187). Jeremy's wife, Nancy, "found herself crazy, because of Charles" (187). "This is reality," Dr. Y. reminds his patient. "The other is a dream" (140). That is to say, the clinical perspective of the hospital ward provides a touchstone to which we must refer all our judgments.

The visionary world presented by Watkins becomes so vivid that the reader tends to increasingly identify with the mythical voyager and to share the patient's antagonism against the doctors who are trying to "cure" him. The reader is introduced to an inclusive state of mind that can incorporate both orders--fact and vision--without giving priority to either. The Sufis can "see in the dark." But he has "an extra dimension of being which operates parallel to the lesser cognition of the ordinary man" (Shah, *Sufis* 85). The series of letters and other testimonies provide insight into Watkins's life prior to his attack of "madness" and also develop themes which are of great

interest to Lessing--such as the deadening influence of modern education upon the child's spontaneity and potential (147-154), the indiscrimination of the media (such as television): "all events are equally important, whether war, a game, the weather, the craft of plant-growing, a fashion show, a police hunt" (157); the highly abstract and dubious nature of certain fashionable scholarly concepts--Greece as the mother of Western civilization; and the dishonesties of some academics like the professor in Wiltshire.

The Sufi Trio

Taking cue from Merk Ury's lecture, Rose Mary Baines, a teacher, and her archaeologist friend Frederick Larson are, it appears gods who attended the conference held on Venus. On earth, these gods try to renew their connection and memory through letters. However, Watkins does not try to ally himself with them. Rose Mary Baines, in her long letters, straining limits of narrative realism, reveals how she is deeply roused by a public lecture the professor delivered on unorthodox individual teaching. The classics professor, very much a functioning member of the cultural Establishment, equally aware of its flaws and hence entirely disowning the arrogance of white European class consciousness was mercilessly attacking the limitations of those institutions which justify the dominant ideology and repress all forms of thought which threaten the security of the prevailing system of education. Watkins's lecture on education makes her

feel "slapped out of a day dream" (146) and even though she finds it difficult to convey Watkins's influence on her, she puts it like this:

It is all intangibles [...] it will still be true that your saying what you did that night began a remarkable *process* in me and this coincides with a similar *process* in a close friend of mine--and as we are beginning to see, in more than one of the people closest to us [...] (emphasis added). (145)

Using alchemical imagery, Baines tries to convey how the Sufi Watkins influenced a fellow Sufi like her. She affirms the Sufi attitude that real learning comes from ordinary sources:

[...] the essence of what happened in the room that night, and of what I've been learning since, is that words spoken casually [...] the familiar music heard with particularly close attention, a passage in a book one would normally class as commonplace--even--the sound of rain on branches, [...] sounds and sights as ordinary as every day, may hold that quality I now understand to be that most valuable to me. And to others. (146)

Watkins's speech is "like the spreading of a yeast or some sort of chemical that has started working in one place, and then moved out, feeding and inviting [...]" (145-146). In that lecture, Watkins spoke movingly of the need to recover and regain human kind's universal conviction that

education ought to sustain the belief that the child can be alive in the adult, that growing up need not mean the loss of imagination, idealism, and the child's intuition--that all is indeed, a vast cosmic harmony. On the one hand, adults pay lip service to the ideal education, on the other, they cater to the dominant ideology which is demanding and pose a great threat to real education which is nothing but keeping "the lively alert fearless curiosity of children" (151) alive; consequently children become "prisoners": in each infant "individuality is covered over by what the parents say he is" (150) constructing their child's identity according to ideological norms. A similar attack on contemporary education and parenting occurs in *MS* where Lessing talks about Emily's youth. Thus Watkins's lecture has the unmistakable Sufi quality of the necessary "wavelength" and listening to his lecture was "like suddenly touching a high-tension wire" (153). Watkins's lecture shows that he has been trying to remember what Merk Ury told him earlier. Baines writes:

I was remembering. It was as if, in any moment of the day that I chose to revive it, there was a bridge across from the heightened moment when you were saying things about the children, about all of us, and the pulse of the time I was in. I began consciously looking about me for that quality in other moments of life. (152-53)

Through this letter of Baines, Lessing bemoans how, blinkered by the assumptions of their own ideology, Western historians and archaeologists

can only estimate other cultures in modern terms: ancient societies (such as the ones in which Sufism flourishes), living in perfect harmony with their surroundings must be “primitive” because they are not developed technologically. Obsessed with facts and figures themselves, the modern analysts can judge other civilisations only on the basis of their surviving artefacts. Larson like Watkins is also a student of ancient civilisations, like the true Sufi, is highly critical of the twentieth century propensity for attaching equal importance to all matters without prioritising them. Both of them, Watkins and Larson painfully realise that the intellectual mastery of the heritage of Western thought has failed to develop in them any insight into the larger relationship between the collective past and their personal history. Thus by introducing two intellectuals and a teacher Lessing seems to project the Sufi dictum that a Sufi “recognises” another Sufi who shares the same awareness of humanity's extra potential and the overall point is the importance of our remembering and preserving an idealist's view of harmony, unity and cosmic betterment. Lessing makes it clear to us that Watkins influenced Baines, who subsequently found that Larson had been operating on the “same wavelength” all the while independently and as an identifier with the whole humanity. Thus the three Sufis separately experience an “awakefulness” that they must remember if something better is to be made available to children.

In his effort to restore Watkins's real identity, the more sensitive and sensible Dr. Y suggests that he recall his wartime experiences. As an

identifier with all and everyone, Watkins alludes to "Charlie's Nancy" (wife of Jeremy Thorne, his superior in college), writes an account of "his" war on the Partisan side in the Yugoslavian mountains (when his war buddy Miles Bovey later confirms that Watkins fought in Africa and Italy) and writes of his soldier-lover named Konstantina who was killed by a doe in trying to protect its new born fawn. While external evidence tells us that Watkins's mistress was Constance and an early testimony has shown how Watkins's mind combines death and birth, we are not surprised by these seeming contradictions for harmony was Watkins's mission and message. Reference to birth and death in that context signifies a realisation of opposites. According to Rumi, it is only through opposites that truth can be perceived. He refers to the "opposition within the fundamental structure of the normal world" where "Everyday experience confirms this truth, for the existence of the myriad things of the world becomes possible through differentiation and opposition" (qtd. in Chittick 183).

Lessing's Nostalgia for Paradise

Watkins even declares, "I think I am my friends" (144). Highlighting the love born out of comradeship, writing of "his" war and of Bovey's war and of the war of everyone fighting for Good against Evil, Watkins expresses wishful thoughts:

When this war was over, we all knew [...] this land that was so rich and so beautiful would flower into a loving harmony that

was as much a memory, as a dream for the future [...]. We were all bound in together by another time, another air. Anything petty and ignoble was an outlaw. We could remember only nobility. (211)

They fought the war with the conviction that they were sure to win, because the stars in their courses were on their side and their victory would be the victory when "the poor and the meek and the humble had inherited the Earth, [...] a loving harmony would prevail over the Earth" (212). Watkins's (and the author's) nostalgia for Paradise surfaces, as he envisions:

Those vast mountains, in which we moved like the first people on earth, [...]. It was as if everyone of us had lived so, once upon a time, at another time, in a country like this, with sharp sweet-smelling air and giant uncut trees, among people descended from a natural royalty, those to whom harmfulness and hate were alien. (210-211)

Highlighting how these three people--Watkins, Baines and Larson experience separately what they must remember if something better is to be accomplished, Joseph Hynes in his article "Doris Lessing's *Briefing* as Structural life and Death" has observed: "Watkins and Larson and Baines have together made the journey ostensibly occurring within the mind of Watkins alone. The whole of *Briefing* is, in fact, "parallel streams" variously

narrated or dramatised, but never [...] limited to an omniscient point of view” (233).

Patrick Parrinder, commenting on a group of knowers or “illuminati” like Watkins, refers to Kurt Vonnegut Junior’s term *karass*, in his *Cat’s Cradle* (1963). He notes that:

Karass, is a kind of team to which, unknown to themselves, various scattered human individuals belong. The teams are organised by God to do his Will without ever discovering what they are doing. One may [...] come to recognise the fellow members of one’s *karass*. (142)

We may identify members of the Coldridge family in *FGC* as a *karass*; the trio in *BDH* as a portrayal of another *karass*, and the narrator and her team in *MS* as yet another.

In a brief taperecording Watkins tells Dr.Y how two sprays of honeysuckle are swinging in the wind, seeking with their tendrils for some support which they can grip and grow around. Observing them for some time, the narrator realises that though they ride on the wind, the two sprays have a motive force of their own, the one nearer the camellia in the corner swinging further because somehow it knows the proximity of the other plant--swinging in the wind, “but never entirely still. Even on a windless day, the sprays would be in perpetual light movement, the one closer to the

camellia moving more than the other" (242). Watkins, the indefatigable unifier that he is, describes the interaction of honeysuckle, camellia and wind as a system, a continuing process rather than applying the isolating concepts of analysis. Seen from one angle, it appears that the honeysuckle has a will of its own, since it can grow in such a way as to reach camellia. At the same time it appears to depend on the random action of the wind. Lessing spells out that neither randomness nor volition provides an adequate basis for describing reality. Watkins says:

I could feel the process on the wall as a unity [...]
It was not : the honeysuckle spray swings and reaches
the camellia.
It was not : The wind blows the spray on to its host
The two things are the same. (243)

By admitting the temporal or subjective element we can comprehend the unity of the honeysuckle, camellia and wind's action. The voyager says "we are wrong in dividing the mind's machinery from time, they are the same" (48). Commenting on this unity, Herbert Marder notes: "the manifold expressed by this fusion comprehends both free will and determinism, myth and empirical domains" (444). We are advised to reject exclusively spatial or analytic constructs, and observe the following totality: "The surfer on the wave. The plant swinging in the wind. And it's just the same with--well, everything, [...]. Why can't you see that?" (243). Stubbornly refusing to choose a privileged or authorised point of view, Watkins tells Dr.Y, "Your

dreams or your life. But it is not or, that is the point. It is an *and*. Everything is. Your dreams *and* your life" (141).

The Act of Remembering

It is true that after his psychic trip Watkins's self division is intensified; initially he refuses to recognise the other side of his nature, denying his very presence in the hospital as well as his particular human identity. However, he is not to be fully blamed for he is an evolving mystic. Lessing suggests that the fault lies not only with his choice but with the society itself, its endorsement of that very state of separateness and inner division as the norm. Watkins at the end of the book is tenuously balanced midway between the two extremes of his being: the vivid experience of wholeness in its several formulations, and the urgings of his contemporaries to resume his former social identity. He is convinced that he must "remember" something that is crucial to his survival, but what he must remember--the reality of unity--is antithetical to what the doctors urge him to remember--the split identity he has vacated. For sometime, he preserves his suspension between the two, sharing his immediate experience with Violet Stoke, who behaves like a sulking three year old child. To her he describes the discrepancy in his condition as he and the doctors perceive it: "They say I lost my memory because I feel guilty. [...] I think I feel guilty because I lost my memory" (234). Watkins successfully corresponds with the evolving fellow mystic Violet Stoke with her childlike innocence. Violet's status as a girl who does not want to grow up emphasises the ambiguity of Watkins's

condition. The difficulty in making himself understood is revealed when he earnestly tells Dr.Y that "I don't know why I can never make you understand. I can get Violet to understand everything I say" (237). He even suspects that his association with Rose Mary Baines who has invited him to stay with her will be "another trap" (239). He affirms that "It is not a question of alternatives. It's a question of remembering" (239).

Watkins submits to shock treatment in the hope that it may help him to remember the "truth" of his awareness. His final insight before the electroconvulsive therapy is his explanation to Violet of the phenomenon of *timing* at work in the level of human evolution and change:

[...] It's desperately urgent that I should remember, I do know that. It's all timing, you see [...]. There are lots of things in our ordinary life that are--shadows. Like coincidences, or dreaming, the kind of thing that are an angle to ordinary life[...]. The important thing is this--to remember that some things reach out to us from that level of living, to here[...] they have a meaning, they are reflections from that other part of ourselves, and that part of ourselves knows things we don't know. [...] what I have to remember has to do with time running out. (245-46).

Violet, who likes to retain the child's superior capacity for growth, awareness and curiosity for a new life at every level and untainted by the

corrupt experiences of the world, and who refuses to be burdened by rational knowledge, perfectly understands Watkins. He tells her that there are Sufis all over the world (recalling to one's mind the mutants in Martha's island), "[...] who know, [...]. But they keep quiet. They just move about quietly, saving the people who know they are in the trap" (247-48).

The shock treatment does not help him "remember." Watkins leaves the hospital presumably fully recovered, but in fact the split is unresolved. The tragedy of his medical "cure" is that he has recovered his former identity but lost the meaning of his psychic trip. The shock appears to have had the effect of restoring him to either/or rationality, to have "cured" him of his cosmic awareness and its allied mission. According to the Lessing scholar Rubenstein, Watkins's long explanation to Violet reiterating a number of ideas that appear in various forms throughout the novel "comes precariously close to didactic excess, [...]. The 'message' intrudes uncomfortably upon the narrative design and belies the occasional tension in Lessing's work between aesthetic and ideological concerns" (194). In fact didactic element is one of the salient features of a Sufi fable. Risking the aesthetic concern of the book, Lessing tries to put across the fable of a mystic who in spite of his perseverance in Sufi quest towards wholeness fails. Lessing's "Afterword" confirms the ambivalence of Watkins's booklong condition and of his apparent return to "normality."

A closer look at the ending of *BDH* poses several pertinent questions. Robert S. Ryf's argument in "Beyond Ideology" that Watkins might announce himself as "cured" in order to maintain his inner vision free from further assaults by society, and that he might be calling into play "cunning" as one of the defences (201) cannot be accepted in the light of the assertions made above. However, Charles's insistence on both / and mode of thought, rather than the either/or postulations of external reality is more compatible with Eastern rather than Western thoughts and is thoroughly consonant with being in the world but not of it.

Lessing is equipped with the unique gift to stimulate the awareness of other possibilities in her readers. Like Laing, she believes that, "we have to blast our way through the solid wall of the normal ego, that false self" to achieve glimpses of another reality (qtd. in Hardin, "Doris Lessing" 572). According to Laing, once the dissolution of the ego takes place, a "new kind of ego-functioning, [this] ego being the servant of the divine" is established (Hardin 572). In Lessing's novels, there is a breakdown between those who achieve a level of heightened alertness as more knowledgeable protagonists and those who are naive recipients. Some participate on both levels. Energy, as a creative element, plays a significant role in each of these endeavours. Just as Martha attempts to energise herself because such energy is much rarer than any other, Rose Mary Baines in her moments of intensified wakefulness which has been triggered by Watkins's lecture, struggles to hold on to the significance of the experience in which

the "day-by-day selves were held at bay for a moment" (151). She acknowledges that the feeling has once again slipped from her grasp:

The time of being awake, of being receptive, of *being energetic*--had consumed itself. We don't have much energy. Your words--or rather, what you had put into the words--had fed us, woken us, made us recognise parts of ourselves normally well hidden and covered over [...] (emphasis added).
(151-52)

In her pragmatic acceptance of the fleeting quality of the knowledge of this particular energy, Baines requests Charles to join her small band of friends who have acknowledged the existence of this energy. But unfortunately, Watkins, who may be termed the *half Sufi* ("that is a man who is liberated from the need for being himself a disciple, but who has to continue along the Way himself to the final attainment" Shah, *Sufis* 398) refuses to associate himself with Baines and Larson whereas he should have known that the immense power that the completed individual has can only be exercised in association with fellow Sufis.

Charles Watkins, the Sufi Envoy

Taking cue from Lessing's own principle that no one fact or interpretation is reliable unless it is viewed as part of the total Truth, as one note in the Harmony, it is possible to identify the principle of correlation in operation among the sets of characters. Though Charles Watkins calls

himself variously Jonah, Jason, Odeysseus, Sinbad, Ulysses and most often Charlie, but retains a core of identity in all the imaginative episodes, so do the women who surround him. Watkins's wife Felicity provides him with domestic bliss but she seems to block Charles's spiritual progress. In the "City" of his imagination, Charles meets another Felicity who tempts him to eat meat. Draine observes: "Felicity as Cambridge wife and as the bloody woman of the explorer's adventure, is archetypally Circe, the woman who uses sensuality to lure man away from his higher duties to intellect and spirit" (97). Constance Mayne, who shares interests with Charles Watkins, that he cannot share with his wife is the counterpart of Conchita, Charles's mistress; she also appears as Konstantina in Watkins's war time experiences in Yugoslavia. About this correlation, Draine notes: "Like Constance and Conchita, Konstantina is the symbol of an ideal of constancy which Watkins seems to want to love, but which he nonetheless betrays" (98). Highlighting the allegorical significance of the many women in Charles's life, Draine notes: "Felicity, Constance, and Truth are the qualities that Charles Watkins needs if he is to fulfil the 'claim' laid on him by Rosemary Baines--the claim that he must remember the message that he has to deliver to humanity" (99). If Charles had been able to understand how the claims of Felicity, Constance, Vera, (and finally Remembrance--Rosemary) could be reconciled, he might have fulfilled the task of his own spiritual integration, and as a result he might have done better justice to each of the actual women whose unwitting role it has been to call him back to his task.

According to the Platonic doctrine of reminiscence or recollection, all apparent acquisition of knowledge is in fact only remembrance of knowledge pre-existent in the mind. This doctrine is, of course, consistent with the idea "that man emanates from the One; if he derives from the One, he in some sense echoes it--he retains a trace or 'memory' of it and thus can recognise it. Since the One is the Truth, man is thus by his nature equipped to remember the Truth" (qtd. in Draine 101). Remembrance is also a basic concept in Sufism and Shah offers this passage by Shaikh Ismail Hakki: "Everything is dependent upon remembering. One does not begin by learning, one starts by remembrance. The distance of eternal existence and the difficulties of life cause one to forget. It is for this reason God has commanded us: 'Remember !'" (*Way* 244-45). According to Reynold Nicholson, "recollection" consists of concentrating on the idea of God with such intensity that the worshipper is absorbed in the Godhead (*Mystics* 46). The goal of remembrance is reunion with the One, from which daily life tends to separate us.

It is significant to note that Watkins suffers from amnesia; he is in need of recollection. The doctors try their utmost to make him remember his outer existence in the real world but Charles insists, "That's not what I have to remember" (132). A sense of urgency prompts him toward recollection in the Sufi or Platonic sense, but he is only vaguely aware of the object of this process. In frustration, he agrees to undergo shock therapy in

order to “remember”; so as to recall the higher unity and the higher purpose to his life. In fact, Charles’s acquaintance with Rosemary Baines is meant to lead him toward the recollection of spiritual knowledge. She is able to recognise Watkins’s lecture as the beginning, of absorption into the harmony of One. She writes, “But it was another flash of recognition, of joy, of ‘yes, that’s it’, and again, this quality of matching, of singing together, of substances being in tune” (153). The theme of universal harmony is reflected in Watkins’s description of the Partisans’ recognition that they were fighting so that “a loving harmony would prevail over the earth. We knew all this because--it was as if we remembered it” (212). In the conference of Gods, Merk Ury is apprehensive of how inept men are at remembering harmony. He fears that although he sends a whole squad of special envoys “to keep alive, in any way possible, the knowledge that humanity, with its fellow creatures, the animals and plants, make up a whole, are a unity, [and] have a function in the whole system of an organ or organism” (120), he expects that once on earth, even these envoys will have difficulty in placing the “vague feeling of recognition” (124). That, of course, is exactly Watkins’s fate. He frequently experiences the sensation of returning memory but he can’t quite fix on the content of the memory; still he remains convinced that “there’s something else, Yes. There’s something I *have* to remember” (234). Draine notes:

The theme of universal harmony and of correspondences among the levels of being that emanate from the One is joined here with the motif of recollection, so as to demonstrate the

interrelation of the concepts: recollection (recognition) consists in a return to knowledge of harmony (correspondence). (102)

Lessing thus prompts the reader to seek connections which will in turn reveal the interrelation of the plots and the essential unity among them. It is possible to interpret the hospital experiences as the main plot and the other episodes as Charles's fantasies. Similarly, it is also possible to uphold the theory that Watkins is an agent of the gods and that the man who sailed the oceans and the one who found the Crystal on land are one and the same. We may assume that the former Charles is a man who found enlightenment and then was carried away in the Crystal to the place of the gods, where he received his briefing.

Narrative Technique

Lessing's narrative strategy is determined by the need to signal the novel's rhetorical motive; thus the multiple plots, frequently interrupted and interlaced, focus attention on the main theme: "That there is a Harmony and that if they [humans] wish to prosper they must keep in step and obey its Laws" (113). Draine identifies "paratactic structure" in *BDH* and notes:

In paratactic structure thematic repetition takes the place of narrative sequence (fictional "cause and effect") as the principle of coherence. Typically the novelist will present a series of incidents whose chronological sequence is more or less arbitrary and which set up no narrative lines [...]. What

holds the various episodes together is simply a common theme or thesis, or view of the world, and the reader, who by the end of this sequence is willing to grasp at any sort of coherence he can find [...] is forced willy-nilly into the rhetorical mode. (103)

Thus we have seen how *BDH* is a didactic fiction of a special kind, meant to deliver a "Message" that is at once an admonition, a proposition about reality and a way of seeing the world. In writing *BDH*, Lessing exploits the therapeutic value of a Sufi tale. Deikman notes, "By taking advantage of the special science of the Sufis, Western civilisation may be able to extricate itself from its dilemma and contribute to the development of man's full capacities" (par.2).

In *BDH* Lessing departs from both the traditional and modernist versions of realism and uses the technique of rhetorical fiction or the apologue. According to Sheldon Sacks, rhetorical fiction is not organised in order to convey the thick texture of lived experience, whether social or psychic. Everything in the text is,

designed to alter our attitudes toward or opinions of the world we live in. The attitudes themselves are formulable critically as statements about the external world, though the aesthetic response required fully to appreciate the apologue need not go

beyond an altered 'feeling'--a sentiment--about the external world. (276)

In order to concentrate on the production of a "formulable statement" about the external world, Lessing has abandoned the close rendering of individual character, the building of an integral relation between a progressive action and growth in the character's personal consciousness, and the solicitation of the reader's concern for the character's fate. This is explicitly evident in the characterisation of Charles Watkins, who is given a minimal personal identity: a job, a wife, and a few friends who can describe how their lives have intersected with his. He lacks substance in that identity, his work is described only generally, we do not know much about his wife beyond her name, both she and friends describe Watkins as uncommunicative and lacking in feeling. Draine notes: "His rather blank identity parallels that of *Rasselas*, *Candide*, the Red Cross Knight, or *Christian*--and this personal emptiness leaves room for metaphysical meanings to gather wherein another kind of novel individual character traits and feelings would develop" (107).

According to David Richter, in apologues, "even the element of 'thought' on the part of the personages of the fiction which is simply expressive of character will be subordinated to the 'thought' which is the ruling principle of the fiction as a whole" (107). We find Watkins's thought dwells at length on the principle of Harmony or on a parallel of spiritual growth such as the tale of the honeysuckle and the camellia than on his

relationships with his wife, his mistress, or his work. Draine echoes the argument of this study, "If Watkins's characterisation is "thin" with respect to personal traits, it is "thick" with the philosophical substance that the novel is primarily designed to convey" (107). Frederick C. Stern also notes how Watkins and his counterpart in *MS* serve almost no mediating function at all. According to him in both the novels, "the thrust of the fiction is not to permit readers to perceive character communicating and thinking as a result of experience, but rather to perceive ideas mediated rather transparently through conveniently invented character and plot" (464). Citing Lessing as a Sufi emissary, Bazin discusses Lessing's Sufi envoys thus:

The Sufi functions as a kind of emissary of the gods to remind individuals that they must humble themselves and accept the higher truth that all is One. Lessing has fictionalised two such emissaries of the gods in Charles Watkins [...] and Johor/George Sherban [in *Shikasta*]. (159)

Lessing subtly brings out the tension between Watkins's dreams of order and the disorder of his experiences. Her ironic vision of the bewildering plight of mad/wise individuals in the modern situation offers ample scope for the operation of "Deep Irony." Imaginative readers sense the deep irony as they reflect over the feverish struggles of Watkins to convince the oneness of life to his fellow men. In the delineation of Watkins and Lynda Coldridge with subtle Sufic perceptions, Lessing employs the "sophisticated irony" technique formulated by Frye (*Anatomy* 41). Lessing

proves that she is far from being a "naive ironist" as her ironic vision develops into a sophisticated mode. Frye notes that "the difference between sophisticated and naive irony is that the naive ironist calls attention to the fact that he is being ironic, whereas sophisticated irony merely states and lets the reader add the ironic tone himself" (41). Like Shah's Sufi tales, Lessing's Sufi tales lend themselves to ironic interpretations. However the real-life experiences of her characters as Sufi masters or disciples are crucial to our acceptance of some of Lessing's teachings. Therefore it becomes inevitable that we should acknowledge the mimetic dimension of Lessing's characters.

It will be useful to examine Lessing's development of Watkins's characterisation along the lines that James Phelan draws among the three dimensions of character--namely, the mimetic, synthetic, and thematic. For Phelan, the "mimetic dimension" reminds us that characters are images of possible, growing people with traits such as beauty, maleness, or shyness. The way and degree to which these traits coalesce to create a plausible person results in the "mimetic function" (11).

By "Synthetic dimension" Phelan implies the way the characters serve as devices that behave as protagonist, antagonist, or minor character who carry out various roles to further the plot (11). Very often, the more we become aware of the synthetic component, the more the reality of a character as mimetic diminishes, and vice versa. The "thematic dimension"

of characters refers to their ideational component and representativeness of a class, such as bigots, revolutionaries, or individualists (11). Phelan also argues that there is no fixed relationship among the components of character that all narratives share. Phelan's definition of "character" helps us to make a case for acknowledging the "mimetic dimension" and "mimetic function" in Lessing's characters. By admitting these mimetic dimensions, we can move from dismissing Lessing's characters as mere rhetorical devices to consider them as plausible persons as well. When we identify Watkins as a Sufi disciple on the Sufi path, we consider him to be more than a literary tool used by Lessing to translate the rich inner world of a Sufi. Thus Watkins becomes not only a synthetic character designed to communicate Lessing's ideas, nor only a thematic character created to embody those ideas, but also a mimetic model designed to invite us to experience vicariously some of the agonies of an actual Sufi mystic. Thus it is possible to interpret that Watkins is not just a rhetorical device, but also a plausible character whose ways of being are crucial to our understanding of Lessing's ideas. At the same time, as a true Sufi mystic, his mimetic existence and ego do not matter in themselves but are significant only in so far as they contribute to the greater evolution of all human life. Thus though it becomes difficult for us to identify with Lessing's characters for they are only more important because of the ideas that they represent, their mimetic dimensions and functions provide the key to Lessing's message to her readers. In the lives and sufferings of Lessing's characters like Martha

and the narrator in *MS* the reader can find exemplary models worth imitating.

All Lessing's novels upto *BDH* are essentially novels of character. In *BDH*, the theme of the woeful limitation of human consciousness is no longer a question of individual character or even of social consciousness; it is instead a metaphysical question--a matter of the relation of humanity to laws of the universe that simply and radically transcend individual personal existence. Lessing adopts the techniques of the apologue in order to lift her reader's attention from the personal to the metaphysical plane--or at least to that intermediate plane in which the two can coexist in brief moments of connection. By completely recasting her narrative technique, Lessing is able to open up an area in which "a statement of faith in man himself" (Lessing, "Small" 6) is still possible. In her realistic novels, she attempted to mirror and to extrapolate from social conditions and history, but she found little scope for the expression of progressivist faith. History itself disclosed and predicted no public salvation from all the human ills from which Lessing sought collective deliverance. Draine notes: "Only in the coda to *The Four-Gated City*, where she made an exception to her realistic technique and switched the rules of the text from those of realism to those of utopian fantasy, could she rescue herself and her readers from pessimism and despair" (109).

Watkins is shown a film which depicts a world wide "emergency" in which most of the human race will perish, giving way to a small group of mutants with "increased powers of perception, a different mental structure" (119) which will allow human beings to see clearly what they have failed to discern. These mutants are similar to the children with extra-sensory perception in the preceding novel. It is in order to express the utopian hope of man's achieving a divine principle that Lessing departs from the realistic mode of her earlier fiction. This genre of rhetorical fiction affords her an opportunity to develop "a vision of a good which may defeat the evil" (Lessing, "Small" 7).

As Watkins makes his inner psychic trip to reach the Crystal, it figuratively recapitulates the cumulative history of life on earth. The protagonist identifies himself with the "limpets" (30), then with "a land creature" (31); he shows affinity for the "porpoise" (35), a "leopard" (39) even for the "dog-rats" (70) and "apes" (75). Once inside the Crystal, he shows genuine compassion for humanity. This psychological and spiritual journey helps in the growth of human consciousness towards enlightenment and wholeness. Lessing uses Watkins's mental journey as an allegory of the evolution of the human condition. In the course of his quest he moves from a state of innocence to a knowledge of evil, and an acceptance of his active involvement in it. After this he is able to transcend his humanity, but is then sent back to earth to act as a teacher, a reminder that mankind is not

a separate entity, but part of a whole cosmic community. The Sufis too describe man's evolutionary course from the simplest form of matter through vegetable, animal, human and suprahuman states of consciousness, to the achievement of the "total perception of the external phenomenal world" (Fatemi 59). Thus there is evolution on two levels, both biological and spiritual. This progress of human evolution is summed up by the thirteenth century Sufi teacher Jalaluddin Rumi as follows:

He came, at first, into the inert world, and from minerality developed into the realm of vegetation. Years he lived thus. Then he passed into an animal state, bereft of memory of his having been vegetable--except for his attraction to spring and flowers. This was like the innate desire of the infant for the mother's breast [...]

From realm to realm man went, reaching his present reasoning, knowledgeable, robust state--forgetting earlier forms of intelligence. So too, shall he pass beyond the current forms of perception [...]. There are a thousand other forms of Mind. (qtd. in Rubenstein 181)

As a realist, Lessing has developed intriguing characters, compelling plots, fullness of situations, and thickness of emotional texture but she never allowed herself to impoverish her novels in favour of the lesson she would like to teach. At the time of writing *BDH*, Lessing's didactic impulse is not

yet so well tempered by a deeply felt commitment to the demands of her new genre of apologue. Eventhough it is possible to justify the novel's narrative and stylistic discontinuity we have to concede that it does not achieve "imaginative integration" (Draine 110) which is a quality necessary for a successful novel. *BDH* is not a "pessimistic" novel as argued by Douglas Bolling (554) in the strict Sufi sense. For in the context of Sufism, not all persons evolve, but all beings at all "levels" are useful for the balance of nature and the cosmos. Martha and Emily (in *MS*) can be seen as the few acorns in the Sufi allegory, that evolve into trees as opposed to Jimmy Wood, Watkins and June (in *MS*) who simply rot. Watkins elucidates: "each individual of this species is locked up inside his own skull," unable to "see things except as facets and one at a time" (120-21). He himself is the classic example of that propensity. Unlike Martha who ultimately fuses the opposites of her personality through diligent "work" on her self, the Watkins of the second part of the novel and the voyager of the first part do not constitute a conscious integrated whole personality.

Just as in Christianity, where God reveals Himself through Christ and the virginity of Mary is required to produce an immaculate vessel for the divine word, so in Islam, where God reveals himself through the word of the Koran, the Prophet had to be a vessel that was unpolluted by "intellectual" knowledge of word and script so that he could carry trust in perfect purity. The Prophet is described in Koran as *Ummi*, "illiterate" (Sura 7: 157-158), a quality that is central to the understanding of Islamic religiosity. It is

therefore, not surprising that Watkins, an academic, who turns experience into statement, fails in his mission.

Watkins fails for according to Shah, an unregenerate man like him resembles “an untrained hawk that thinks that if he is captured, he will be enslaved. He does not think that the hawkmaster will give him a *fuller* life [...]” (*Sufis* 392). Thus in spite of being gifted with high faculties, by refusing to place himself in the hands of “one who knows the way,” Watkins smothers his intuition, and also forgets the supreme truth “Science is learned by words, art by practice, detachment by companionship” (Shah, *Sufis* 392).

BDH is much shorter, more programmatic, more satirical than the preceding novel, *FGC*. Though Lessing has stiffened her ideas and is using her characters in much more clinical way than in *FGC*, she manages nonetheless to make Watkins’s story compelling. He experiences almost nothing offered by ordinary human life, yet his instance is touching and beautiful. “If he is defeated at the end, Doris Lessing is not, we need not be [...]” notes Roger Sale (17).

Through the Sufi tale of a protagonist with extra sensitivity and perception Lessing shows how these capabilities become a handicap in a society with its reductive categorisations. However, it should not prevent us

from a recognition of the primacy of experience itself over attempts to categorise it. There can be no briefing or adequate abstraction for the descent into the complexity of human experience. The epistolary, reportorial, and dramatic points of view, as well as the many first-person internal and external spoken or thought narrations along with the omniscient narrations remind us how illusory is the readability provided by omniscient narrators. In her early novels Lessing nearly confined herself to the conventions of literary realism and later she appears to be romantically inclined and more likely to employ non-realistic or even anti-realistic literary methods. This contrast is to be taken relatively rather than absolutely. For in her *The Good Terrorist* (1985), *Love Again* (1996) etc. we find her switching back to realism.

Since according to the Sufis, it is necessary to activate the levels of consciousness by a process which Shah calls "the transcendence of time and space" (*Sufis* 328), we can see surfacing here Lessing's consistent preoccupation--the attempt to transcend the limits placed on consciousness by culturally limited thought conventions. Since Lessing suggests that for our survival the mystical is just as essential as the scientific, her fiction does not abide by the scientific as an exclusive mode of understanding but rather insists on the interaction between the rational and the transcendental. That interaction has a significant effect on the reader, who feels continually disturbed by the incursion of mystical grounds into essentially secular ground; the resulting effect is a challenge to the reader's expectation, which

is significantly positive because it involves the reader in a constant effort of deconstructing the limited one-dimensional mode and reconstructing a mode that balances more than one level. That is precisely what Lessing achieves through the combination between the two modes in her novel. By retelling the history of humanity in terms that resonate with Christian eschatology, Sufi parables and Darwinian and Laingian theories, her novel compels us to view our existence in the universe from a multiplicity of perspectives. Lessing has repeatedly declared her belief in the importance of the co-existence of the two realms. When Eve Bertelsen asked Lessing whether evolution meant to her the Darwinian theory of evolution or the evolution of the inner faculties as defined by the Sufis, she asserted: "We have to have both. We have to have a higher feeling of responsibility towards other animals, including the animals and others of our species, and the world and so on. And I think, we might develop intuition" ("Interview with Doris Lessing" 111).

The novel moves from deep inside the individual's consciousness, out to society, the solar system and the cosmos. Such is the scale of Lessing's fiction and that is precisely what the Sufis define as the necessary "work": "Start with yourself, end with all." According to the Sufis this is attained by "joining the power of contemplation" (Shah, *Sufis* 273). Lessing, then, here employs a strategy whose intent is to extend our imaginative potentiality to grasp the universe and our place in it from a wider rather than a limited, earth bound perspective. In other words, through her

fiction she offers the reader a practical experience to stretch his faculties and transcend his limitations. Lessing therefore takes us on a mental journey, a strategy experienced earlier by Anna in *GN* as she starts to extend her imagination to reach wider proportions:” [...] slowly, slowly, I would create the world, continent by continent, [...] until the point was reached where I moved out into space, and watched the world, a sunlit ball in the sky, turning and rolling beneath me” (531).

Sufism and Psychology

Lessing endorses Shah’s claim that Sufism is a science whose boundaries extend beyond modern psychology. According to the Sufis, the initial step that needs to be taken by most human beings is to become aware of automatic pattern-thinking, the conditioned associations and indoctrinated values that limit human perception and receptivity. However developing a correct attitude is only the first step in Sufi science, a step called “learning how to learn.” Responsibility, sincerity, humility, patience, generosity--these are not ends in themselves but are tools that must be acquired before a person can proceed further. It is what comes after the first step that sharply distinguishes Sufism from all the psycho-therapeutic and “growth-oriented” disciplines with which we are familiar. The Sufis regard their system as being far in advance of psychiatry because it extends beyond conceptual and technical limits of psychology and embodies a method for assisting man to develop the special perception upon which his welfare, and that of human race, depends. Lessing takes sides with the

reputed psychologist Robert Ornstein who advocates a “new synthesis” in modern psychology wherein “the concerns of the esoteric tradition and the research methods and technology of modern science” blend to successfully solve the “problems of consciousness” (244).

The strategy of stretching the imagination to understand and incorporate different perspectives is also Lessing’s intent in writing the novel, since to her the only hope for a solution is if people learn to extend their understanding to incorporate the other’s point of view. In her article, “Spies I have known,” Lessing writes, “the fact that human beings, given half a chance, start seeing each other’s points of view seems to me the only ray there is for humanity” (55) . During her visit to California in 1984, Lessing remarked “We must become more conscious of ourselves as one race if we are to survive” (Saxton 7). It is a method for curing “compartmentalisation,” which according to Lessing leads to crises. In an interview with Nissa Torrents in 1980, she asserted, “this tendency to fragmentalise, so typical of our society, drives people to crisis, to despair [...]” (*Putting* 64).

Lessing is ultimately concerned with the survival of the spirit, with the hope of living compassionately in the world but not as a victim of its reductive categorisations. Neither is she optimistic about the possibility of radically changing the society, but she is convinced that the only hope for securing our future lies in the individual’s journey “*back and in*” to his/her self. Lessing affirms the possibility of maintaining untrammelled the inner life

while remaining as fallible mortals in a constrictive world with its limiting categorisations. The narrator of *BDH* does not require us to choose between the fantastic and the empirical realms, but rather, to embrace the totality; "Your dreams *and* your life," as Watkins insists. We need both the voyager's mythical thinking and the doctor's critical rationality. More than the sum of these parts, the novel enables us to imagine the growth of a holistic vision.

Section (iii)

The Memoirs of a Survivor: Transcendence through Disorder

“Ask any Sufi what the use of the experience is, and he will say that it is the Sufi organism which enables people to ‘return to the world,’ to relate the holistic experience to their human life and their being.”

Idries Shah, *A Perfumed Scorpion*

Ever since its publication, Doris Lessing's *MS* has evoked innumerable literal interpretations. The dust jacket of the Knopf edition of *MS* describes the novel as a “darkly visionary novel set in the not too distant future when men, women and even young children are fighting for survival in a world that is swiftly falling apart.” In the same vein, Melvin Maddocks reviewing the novel asserted that it was “a ghost story of the future” (79). Roberta Rubenstein observes that the setting of the novel is a “projection into an imagined future” (220). It has been eulogised as a “supreme fiction” (Sullivan 157), whereas to Malcolm Cowley, the ending of the novel is definitely a “cop out” (24). In an interview with Claire Tomalin, Lessing observes: “I was writing an autobiography in terms of metaphor” (“Watching” 174). Lessing's assertion is thus at odds with the futuristic interpretations of the critics. Moreover the very title of the novel impels one to treat the

book as “memoirs” of a “survivor” and not as an extension of the decaying present into a bleak disintegrating future.

Most of the controversies in interpreting the novel disappear if we approach *MS* from a Sufi perspective. As Lessing’s readers know, she has been importing, borrowing and adapting Sufi ideas to enhance her own perception of human beings on earth and on other planets in this life and in afterlife. Our recognition of Sufism can enhance our insight into her works and will help us to bring out the hitherto neglected design in her novels. As a writer influenced by Sufism, Lessing firmly believes that it is only in the fullest development of all available faculties that human beings can free themselves from mere predetermined repetition and so evade catastrophe. In her Stony Brook interview in 1962, Lessing apprehensively envisions the “future of the human race as cataclysmic” if we do not restore the balance of our faculties (*Voice* 65). It is Lessing’s firm conviction that Sufi evolutionary methods are the only means that could help people transcend their limited cognitive capacity and accomplish a fuller understanding of reality. With her persistent concern for the survival of humanity, she shares Shah’s view that the only hope for us is in the new man with new organs of perception and “our future depends on it” (Shah, *Sufis* 54). As in the Appendix to *FGC* the extrapolation from the present realities into an imagined future enables Lessing to frame both a judgment and a prescription for the alternatives of the future. The clearest expression of this theme is to be found in *MS* where the catastrophe is in its later stages and the need for equilibrium is

brought home with great immediacy and urgency. The catastrophe is not caused by nuclear accidents but by the gradual collapse of all social systems.

As she writes this Sufi fable of an elderly woman (not named) who effortlessly commutes between the outer and the inner realms, we see before us Lessing with her Sufi orientation impatiently trying to put across the message of traversing the time-oriented, one-dimensional reality to a gnostic state. By now Lessing's readers are well-versed in her narrative technique and hence in *MS* there are no Sufi quotations or epigraphs to guide the reader. Unlike her counterparts--Martha, Charles or Kate, the narrator does not have to "descend" into the unconscious to attain individuation, she traverses the realms behind the wall effortlessly and spontaneously and her Sufi "work" is described in a realistic language as if they are occurrences in our everyday social world. When faced with the poverty of language to express the irrational, Lessing was forced "to write by analogy" ("Testimony" 67). She notes that *MS* "is the direct result of my meditating about the inadequacy of language. I write as in legends or in fairy tales, by means of metaphors and analogies [...]" ("Testimony" 67). The discerning critic Roberta Rubenstein observes: "Increasingly, beginning with the breakthrough of *The Golden Notebook*, the author's focus evolves away from psychological realism altogether, taking shape in the symbolic, mythopoeic, and mystical dimensions of experience that go beyond language" (109).

Even with these perceptible observations in mind, when we read the novel, we find ourselves asking several questions like: Is the outer world of the catastrophe the real world and the inner world behind the wall a fantasy? What is the relationship of the two realms, spatially, temporally, logically? Whose childhood is the narrator remembering or is she imagining the events behind the wall, or is she mad? Gayle Greene offers an explanation:

By engaging us with them [questions] and thwarting our efforts to answer them, by frustrating our usual modes of explanation, Lessing leads us to question not only the evidence of our senses but the paradigm of Western rationalism we've inherited to deal with experience. (*Doris Lessing* 141)

The novel is set in a city--London--unnamed but identifiable by the Fleet River and the Underground--where most services have ceased and where anarchy prevails. The deliberate refusal to name the city/place of action can be explained by the fact that the spatial coordinates of the novel have no importance whatsoever. The "memoirs" of the narrator records how the institutions of technological and bureaucratic society collapse from inner corruption and how humanity in the midst of cultural rot finds itself faced with two alternatives--death or radical change. Commodities and food are in short supply. People start growing vegetables, keeping hens, cows and dray horses; barter replaces buying and selling. The nomadic life

reappears. Gangs of children, even cannibals wander along the streets in animal-like packs. As groups of people about to migrate from the city, gather on the pavement opposite her flat, the narrator retreats into her room, which she treats as a fortress, a place where the old, orderly decencies of life can be sustained. She even thinks of leaving the increasingly beleaguered city when a young girl called Emily Cartwright, along with her dog-cat Hugo is left to her responsibility. Emily becomes involved with the leader of a gang of children, Gerald; and by the age of fifteen Emily is a mature, wise woman. While looking after the girl and watching her grow up, the narrator explores the rooms behind the wall of her living room. She witnesses scenes from Emily's childhood, which also happen to be from her own childhood. She goes over them in detail reworking the experiences, understanding them and the effect they had produced on her subsequent life. Finally, the transformed Emily, her lover Gerald and the group of children they have looked after, and the dog-cat Hugo, all walk through the wall "into another order of world altogether" (190).

In *MS* Lessing uses an illogical story in order to penetrate the reader's mind which has been prejudicially conditioned to understand only that which is logical. The novel can be read as a realistic novel, at the same time the inner action in the novel reminds one of myth and fable. Any reading of the novel should invoke an interaction between the empirical and visionary worlds, between realistic and romantic modes of narration to get

an all-encompassing vision. The challenging task before the unnamed protagonist of this tale is to establish connections between the rational and the non-rational modes of consciousness and steer Emily and her dependents through the crisis. The self-conscious narrator sets down what she remembers after the events have run their course and tries to recount her personal experiences of the time in which the “bizarre” and the ordinary existed. The ordinary is the chaotic social conditions and the “bizarre” is another dimension which she discovers beyond her living-room walls: a set of rooms which she recognises she has been “waiting for all [her] life” (15). When the social breakdown accelerates beyond a general distrust of authority, the survivor makes a discovery almost like Martha Quest:

the consciousness of that other life, developing there so close to me, hidden from me, was a slow thing, coming precisely into the category of understanding we describe in the word *realise*, with its connotation of a gradual opening into comprehension [...]. Looking back I can say definitely that the growth of that other life or form of being behind that wall had been at the back of my mind for a long time. (10)

Whereas Kate strove to grasp flashes from the seal dream in *SBD*, the narrator learns how to integrate the perceptions of the inner realm by “realising” (11) it in her waking consciousness. She is compelled to discover connections between the rational and non-rational modes and

retain the balance in her memory: "looking back now it is as if two ways of life, two lives, two worlds, lay side by side and closely connected. But then, one excluded the other, and I did not expect the two worlds ever to link up" (26). Whereas Watkins's memory fails as it cannot accommodate experiences in different time scales, the survivor gifted with different levels of perception moves between the two realms and achieves a balanced outlook. Like Martha, the narrator develops extra-sensory powers by opening herself to the experiences of others and negotiates between the two realms "to perform a holding operation for the world" (Greene 145). She experiences her state of readiness for such a state: "The most vivid expectancy, a longing: this place held what I needed, knew what was there, had been waiting for" (15). Sufi scholar Nancy Hardin has identified "maintaining moments of wakeful insight" ("Sufi Teaching Story" 319) as one of the components of a Sufi teaching story. She observes that "Much of the difficulty arises in being unable to acknowledge the darker, less known aspects of self as well as the more openly accepted daylight self" (319). But Lessing incorporates the two, making one whole as is exemplified in the case of the narrator.

As Lessing became an ardent student of Sufism, this shift in focus from the exterior to the interior dimension of experience corresponds to the Sufi view of psychic evolution. Shadia S. Fahim in *Doris Lessing* has commented: "*Memoirs* thus negotiates between 'conscious evolution' which is central to Sufism, and 'return from exile' which is another basic tenet to

that philosophy" (87). As the narrator travels increasingly frequently through the wall of her living room, she actually transcends time and space, the claim made by Idries Shah (*Sufis* 312) and acquires otherwise inaccessible knowledge. Lessing very often depicts the access to the neglected areas of mind through dreams. But her choice of a less easily placed access to the closed areas of the self was probably made because the journeys through the wall could emphasise how the characters gain access to what they need to know rather than simply what is learnt. Like *BDH*, in *MS* we have two contradictory worlds: a fully realised world in which the main characters confront a social dilemma and an alternate world--a mystic or mythic dimension where the laws of time and space are suspended. Throughout the novel, the narrator negotiates frequent shifts between these two universes. However, at the outset itself, Lessing marks out clearly the boundaries between these two worlds. The outer world of catastrophe is fully established as a consistent world before the narrator's inner world is introduced, which exists just beyond her living room wall. The narrator never enters the world without providing a warning clue; she stands before the wall and contemplates flower-like pattern that is her entrance, or she speaks of "being drawn in through the flowers" (59). Fahim notes how in *MS* "the inner action is given more scope and span" and how "Sufi philosophy is basic in understanding the underlying complexity of the inner realm" (87). The interaction between the empirical and visionary realms must underpin any reading of *MS*. Further, "Be in the world and not of it," which Lessing quotes from Shah appears to be the narrator's guiding

principle as she alternates between "detachment and involvement" ("In the World" 133) in the social scene.

In the beginning, the world of the senses appears as primary to the unnamed narrator. In concrete terms she renders an account of her experience in the dying year of a great city somewhere in England. Indeed, half the novel is not only conventionally realistic but also determinedly materialistic in its assumptions. There is ample evidence of the dialectical materialistic vision which so dominated Lessing's earlier work. In the references to the stages of social breakdown, to the culpability of industrial management in producing the catastrophe, we see examples of Engels's principle that unjust mode of production will eventually bring about its own dissolution. Without directly addressing political issues, Lessing in her depiction of the catastrophe continues to operate on the Marxist assumptions that man's consciousness is determined by the material conditions prevailing in society and that escape from the outmoded, limiting consciousness of the moribund society necessitates a great struggle to remain awake to new conditions and new influences. All the communities depicted in her "memoirs" both take part in as well as promote the catastrophe, because of their one-dimensional mode of existence. The "ordinary" world, as it is portrayed in *MS* operates on one level--the "hand to mouth" (77) level, where the inner experience is sacrificed for the outer; it is "survival at all costs" (171). Taking shelter in the outer reality, mistaking it for the whole, the alienated man, according to Laing, "attempts to suppress

or destroy others who threaten the social phantasy system on which his whole existence is anchored" (*Self* 22). While her young friends Emily and Gerald are able to shake off old assumptions, decadent habits of behaviour, and outmoded social relationships, and help to create a new social system, her older friends have difficulty in acknowledging the totality of the chaos around them. While Emily and Gerald take care of the physical survival of the race, the burden of spiritual salvation falls on the narrator. For this the narrator enters the "inner world" or "realm behind the wall" by concentrating on a submerged design on her "real-life" living room wall. In *MS* Lessing has grounded the novel in the primary framework of material existence from which she tries to extend her readers' parameters to a world of timeless and intangible reality. Thus Lessing employs another Sufi metaphor--that of the two worlds--to embody the wisdom of the mystic in ecstasy, who says at the end of his spiritual journey: "I have put duality away, I have seen that the two worlds are one" (Nicholson, *Mystics* 96).

But the narrator tells us that the quality of life at this time combines the "extraordinary" with the "ordinary" (19), "the bizarre, the hectic, the frightening, the threatening [...] with what was customary, ordinary" (20). Thus the narrator explains the sudden and inexplicable arrival of Emily in her life. "Yes it was extraordinary. Yes, it was all impossible. But after all, I had accepted the 'impossible.' I lived with it" (19). This intermingling of the extraordinary with the ordinary makes the point that the world we think of as real is actually quite fabulous. With statements like "It was not

from official sources that we were getting the facts which were building up into a very different picture from the publicised one"; "we apprehend what was going on in ways that were not official" (8), Lessing posits contradictory possibilities. This situation is not drastically different from what Kate experienced in the beginning of *SBD*: a sense of widening rift between the conventional attitudes allotted to her and "what she was really feeling" and "the space provides the opening for a new kind of understanding and hence for our acceptance and assent to another order of world altogether" (Greene 144).

It is when the narrator moves to the realm beyond the wall that our customary notions of reality are strained. Equally baffling is the narrator's mode of traversing through the wall: "looking and waiting" (133), "mostly I sat and looked at that wall and waited" (24). Commenting on her passivity, Greene notes:

It [the narrator's passivity] becomes potent, since it is her ability to wait out events while being compassionately involved with them, her wise receptivity and attentiveness, that enable her to develop the strengths to lead the characters of her world "into another order of world altogether". (145)

In the course of her waiting, the narrator recognises: "I even found I was putting my ear to the wall, as one would to a fertile egg, listening,

waiting" (15) and she realises the connection between this life and her own. These images of gestation--the egg, "a weight redistribut[ing] itself, as when a child shifts position in the womb" (14)--according to Greene signify "new life; and we like the narrator, like Martha, must submit to a process of gestation that will germinate a wise receptivity in us, that will teach us to see and listen and imagine a way out" (146). Her subsequent visits beyond the wall reveal dilapidated and vaguely familiar furnishings and objects in different degrees of disorder and she is tempted to make a seductive exit from the external chaos when a young girl called Emily Cartwright is left to her responsibility. According to Jung and Kerenyi, "The appearance of the child archetype in individual psychic development is an anticipation of the synthesis of conscious and unconscious elements within the personality, as well as a symbol of healing, wholeness, of opposites mediated" (*Essays* 127-28).

Lessing's Sufi orientation helps her to face the issue of how a person who aims at a sense of personal wholeness should cope with the socio-political dimensions of life. Emily represents the narrator's social conscience. The narrator does not turn her back on the fragmenting outer reality and escape into her inner landscape, but tries to reconcile the complementary dimensions of private and social experience and to find a positive form for them within her consciousness in order to survive. This is strictly in accordance with Idries Shah's observations on the relationship of a Sufi with society:

To the Sufi, the evolution of a Sufi is within himself and also in his relationship with society. The development of the community, and the destiny of all creation--is interwoven with the destiny of the Sufi. He may have to detach himself for a period from society for a moment, a month, or even more--but ultimately he is interlinked with the eternal whole. (*Sufis* 33)

The interaction between the empirical and visionary realms becomes decisive governing both the shape of the novel and its theme. To portray co-existence of motifs from both realms, Lessing seems to employ the Sufi method of "Scatter" which demands a "multi-levelled" perception.

Modern psychologists and Sufi philosophers insist that only a self-developed individual can contribute anything valuable to the collective. Jacobi in *The Psychology of C.G. Jung* (1943) observes that in Jung's study of the relationship between the individual and the collective, "the change in the collective does not begin with propaganda and mass meeting or with violence. It begins with a change in individuals" (150). While Shah agrees that "the gradual building up of inner-consciousness" (*Sufis* 64) is the basis of the relationship between the individual and the collective, he maintains that the role of the Sufi does not stop at this point:

According to the dervish, the conditions which have to be treated are due to the unharmonious state of mind, groping for

balance and evolution. It is impossible from this point of view, to attempt to restore a mere equilibrium without a dynamic forward movement. The psychologist tries to make a warped wheel turn smoothly. The dervish is trying to make the wheel turn in order that it may propel a carriage. (*Sufis* 310)

Occurrences in the Outer Realm

The outer action of the novel poses a series of social problems where individual and collective concerns are still of central interest. In the anarchic society which is facing a crisis, not only the middle class community (to which the narrator belongs) but the younger generation too, is trapped within the same one-dimensional level of existence. Emily, too, is not different; in order to overcome the state of ontological insecurity she develops certain defensive mechanisms as a means of escaping from facing her inner self. She joins Gerald's group to sustain her apparently balanced existence; she falls in love with Gerald, who happens to be a power centre for the amorphous group on the street. Like Mark in *FGC*, we find Gerald in possession of an outwardly directed intelligence. He is torn between need and betrayal; to escape further emotional involvement with her, he betrays her with other girls of the community. In the depiction of Gerald's gang, Lessing reiterates what she has been painstakingly trying to drive home, namely, the responsibility of the individual to develop his inner self by "voluntarily submitting his will to the collective, never finally, and insisting on making his own personal and private judgements before every

act of submission" ("Small" 15). Through this assertion, Lessing echoes the Sufi tenet, "The Complete Man (*insan-i-kamel*) is both a real individuality and also a total part of the essential unity" (Shah, *Sufis* 331). These children of violence, reduced to the most basic level of existence, who are "worse than animals, worse than men" (159) shock Gerald with their perversity but he decides that "it was better to have children than to have nothing" (177). Eventhough Gerald does not try to develop his inner self, he earns his way into the group of survivors by his continual concern for children. Cederstrom in "Innerspace Landscape" observes that:

[Gerald's] tenacity and ability to deal with the elemental levels of existence qualify him for survival beyond the collapse of the old order [...]. He recognises that his activities among the collective will be doomed until he is able to invest those activities with a transpersonal vision. (130)

Sensing Gerald's betrayal, Emily, on her part, tries to suppress her inner rage in order to sustain their relationship on which she anchored her whole existence. Lessing exposes sexuality and family as bondages which the individual must break through to achieve a freedom that is initially social and ultimately psychological and spiritual. Situating her characters in a society with its implications of empirical determinism, Lessing shows how they are powerless to transcend the world that had formed them. They are, however, constrained to put an end to the "merry-go-round escalator" which

carries them "from the dark into the dark" (81). The narrator who wilfully embraced the existing anarchy, with Emily's arrival, tries to integrate other levels of perception to combat this deterministic limitation. She realises that what lies behind the walls has a definite connection with the outer reality. This is what the Sufis call an "experience" where "at every stage of development a new mystery or change in perception and understanding is involved" (Shah, *Sufis* 296). Like Anna in *GN*, the narrator mediates between the outer world and the world behind the wall to transcend cultural and deterministic restraints. Her repeated visits behind the wall play a significant part in the narrative structure similar to that of Kate's seal dreams in *SBD*.

Through her critical appraisal of Emily's potential, the narrator discovered that Emily's taste in reading resembled an adult's and also she had set up around her a guard. She was struck by Emily's maturity, warmth, accuracy in observation, perspicacity and her critical bent of mind. In fact while Emily was measuring, assessing and judging someone in an incredibly rapid way that the narrator finally realised that she was teaching her to recognise the fact that we are in "a prison" where no one escaped "sharp, cold analysis and defensive inspection" (31). Through her accurate observation of others, Emily spells out to the narrator "to acknowledge the limits we all live inside" (31). Emily thus recalls to our mind Martha Quest's "swallowing whole" of her experiences and her much slower digestion of

their meanings. Like Martha, Emily consumes, digests and transforms the experiences of life.

The narrator observes the growth of Emily's personality as she moves from the collectivity, from the shelter of her parents, to the development of her individuality. Under the pressure of disintegrating infrastructure, Emily is trapped by collective patterns (as Martha was) though she moves through them very rapidly as "chrysalis after chrysalis was outgrown" (56) for she was preparing "to be a woman among other women" (52). According to the Sufis, the goal of the spiritual quest is nothing less than the total transformation or transfiguration of the human personality. In other words, the Sufis believe that there is another hidden "you" that inheres in you. This other "you," the real "you," is wonderful, beautiful and adorable, and the objective of the Sufi quest is to bring out into the open, to realise it, to transfer it from the potential to the actual. Anyone in whom this inner "you" is born is called "twice-born." The metamorphosis of a caterpillar--through a chrysalis--into a butterfly is an apt metaphor used by the Sufis. Lessing's use of the chrysalis metaphor to delineate Emily's growth is consequent upon her Sufi affiliation.

Being denied love from her parents, Emily directs the yearning for contact toward Gerald, seeking acceptance from him which she will never find in human relationships. The narrator knows that Emily must live through the inevitable and painful stage in her growth in which she will

discover that the connection she needs can come only from the transpersonal level of the psyche and not through personal relationships. The efficient Emily recalling Martha Quest of the *RS*, establishes a kind of family; she assumes responsibility for a young girl--June. Lessing demonstrates that social structures, no matter how involving, cannot substitute for inner growth. Just like Thomas Stern who believed that one need not go out of one's own house for enlightenment, the narrator is able to plumb deep into the depths of domestic tragedy and comes to the conclusion that bad parenting is the root of the "crisis." She recognises the need for passionate commitment and deep feeling in the larger context of human happiness. She realises how the private permeates the public experience and thus possesses the wholeness of consciousness and responsibility for everything which makes her a true humanist. In the course of Emily's growth, the relationship between the protagonist and Emily undergoes a tremendous change. Having lived through various stages of transformation, Emily has achieved a kind of maturity. This is gratifyingly noted by the narrator when Emily generously gives to Hugo, Gerald and others unconditional love. Moving through stereotyped patterns of life they have outgrown, these two women prepare themselves for the final transcendence. The Sufis believe that a person's essence and hence his real identity is not something automatically known to himself; but self-"work" under the guidance of a teacher may lead a person to illumination into his essence. Emily begins the "work" which leads to illumination under the loving guidance of the narrator.

The Inner Realm

Concurrent with the catastrophic events in the outer realm, the narrator is busy with her prior task of “working” on the rooms beyond her wall. The inner realm is embodied in the world behind the wall and it comprises the “personal” and “impersonal” experiences, neither of which appears to have anything to do with the crisis brewing outside. As the narrator moves between the two realms, she perceives a significant relationship between the two; she realises that the inner realm becomes intrinsic in understanding the outer realm. By the integration of perception achieved in the “personal” rooms, she tries to understand the roots of the “crisis” outside. Further the evolution of the levels of perception gained in the “impersonal” rooms gives the narrator a vantage point outside the crisis and helps her to transcend its limitation. Fahim remarks: “The interaction of these levels of perception in her consciousness and retaining the balance between them in her memory figures as the major task facing the narrator as she writes her *‘memoirs’* and its fulfilment forms the climax of the novel” (97). Though the narrator is conscious of the existence of another dimension in her life, which is “different in quality from what in fact went on around me” (10), she finds it difficult to perceive the link between the two worlds:

I was feeling as if the centre of gravity of my life had moved, balances had shifted somewhere, and I was beginning to believe--uncomfortably still--that what went on behind the wall

might be every bit as important as my ordinary life in that neat and comfortable, if shabby flat. (14)

The distinction between the “personal” and the “impersonal” is important in Lessing’s thought. The “personal” comprises familial and other roles which generally diverts a person from rediscovering his true self. The survivor eventually recognises the little girl in the “personal” scenes as the Emily entrusted to her care. In various interviews Lessing has hinted at the difficult relationship she had with her mother. It appears that Lessing had not fully explored this relationship until she wrote this novel; by reliving the most painful of her early memories, the narrator as well as Lessing is able to see that her mother also inherited a legacy of bad parenting and perhaps inevitably passed it on.

Eventhough the narrator tries hard to remember her visit behind the wall, she finds that she cannot retain the memory of the perceptions achieved in the realm behind the wall; she has to “work” for according to the Sufi to forget is the way of men and Shah remarks, “remembering is an important aspect of development” (*Sufis* 44). The Sufi that she is, the protagonist manages to find a positive balance between her inner preoccupation and her outer responsibilities. Emily’s presence triggers the narrator’s need for further understanding and she perceives the significant connection between the events on the pavement and what went on between

her and Emily. Shah observes, "The human mind tends to generalise from partial evidence. The Sufis believe that they can experience something more complete" (*Sufis* 36). Therefore, the survivor starts "working" by trying to descend into the unconscious at first with great reluctance. Jung in his *The Integration of the Personality* (1940) states that the individual is usually reluctant to undergo that process, that is, to rid the unconscious of its old patterns in order to break out of its confining prison. With a nauseating claustrophobia she felt that "to enter the 'personal' was to enter a prison, [...] where the air was tight and limited, and above all where time was a strict, unalterable law and long, [...] it went on, and on" (40). This is what is called in Sufi parlance "indirect teaching which is the result of the falling into place of a large number of small impacts and perceptions, producing insight when the individual is ready for them" (Shah, *Sufis* 14). As she relives the memories of her individual and collective past, she gradually understands the patterns which determined her life and that of the society at large. This is her first step towards breaking out of the conditions that constrain her. By concentrating on the "half-obliterated patterns" (14) on the wall of her living room which acts as a thin barrier between the two modes of reality she experiences another dimension, the "impersonal" regions. This "work" of concentrating on patterns is an essential experience in the Eastern methods of thought or meditation; further, a "niche" in the wall signifies the initiation into a metaphysical phase. (Bakhtiar 42).

In the "personal" rooms the narrator could recognise little Emily yearning for affection; but being denied that felt "this guilt at ever having been born at all" (65). Further "lowering" down into her consciousness, she realises that not only Emily, but her mother, "her tormentor" (134) are victims of the upbringing which stifles individuality. They are unable to perceive the roots of that determinism in the collective unconscious. They are enclosed in the "strict laws" of a world with its "smallness, extreme smallness, weakness [...] where the puppets jerk to their invisible strings" (135). She painfully recognises the fact that "It was a continuing thing; had gone on, day after day, month after month" (135). The narrator with a broader perspective thus successfully relates the "personal" experience to the collective unconscious, which according to Jung, brings about "a more comprehensive recognition and a matured personality" (*Integration* 174). Thus as she watches Emily in the outer world the reader recognises the narrator growing in this process and this maturity enables her to advise Emily: "It starts when you are born [...]. She is a good girl. She's a bad girl [...]. It's a trap and we are all in it [...]. You don't get a democracy, by passing resolutions or thinking democracy is an attractive idea. And that's what we have always done" (118). With the perception achieved in the "personal" rooms, the narrator makes another discovery:

I've said, I think that when I was in one world--the region behind the flowery wall of my living room--the ordinary logical time-dominated world of every day did not exist; that when in

my 'ordinary' life I forgot, and sometimes for days at a time, that the wall could open, had opened, would open again, [...]. But now began a period when something of the flavour of the place behind the wall did continuously invade my life. (131)

Thus the inner realm and the outer interpenetrate and the narrator comprehends all the dimensions of the "crisis," which was caused not only by the materialistic collapse in the outer realm, but by the deterministic constraints in the inner realm. While others with their "helpless ignorance" or "hopeless awareness" (136) fail to find a solution for the crisis, the narrator through retrospective feedback tries to break out of its (crisis') limitations. Her last visit to the "personal" realm is a movement through fire. Here Emily appears as distorted into a debased sexual object almost like the biblical whore of Babylon in a scarlet dress of "blatant vulgarity" (165) standing before a great baroque mirror, mocking the "conventional garment worn by hundreds of thousands of women [...] to clothe their masochistic fantasies" (165). In the outer world she had watched Emily seeking shelter in such conventional costumes and was appalled by such behaviour. Here the narrator watches Emily pierce the core of these ego patterns as she recognises Emily mocking the very attitudes which she is demonstrating. "The little doll twisted and postured, and then vanished in a flash of red smoke" (165) in her mother's presence. From the suggestively Sufi perspective, we may note that the narrator witnesses the final confrontation between the mother and the daughter and passes through the

purifying flame that consumes passion. Significantly the narrator finds this experience educational.

In the “personal” rooms, the narrator comes to terms with the instinctual levels of the psyche when she witnesses the unfairness of the mother’s attack on Hugo and in Jungian terms she undergoes “a regressive identification with the human and animal ancestors” which leads to “the integration of the unconscious” (*Integration* 146). Rubenstein notes that “No longer suggestive of the distrusted sexual instinct, he [Hugo] is more positive, though still anomalous: a union of ‘opposites’ suggestive of the androgynous figures of mythology” (228). Hugo embodies the precious link with the large continuum of sentient life in a rapidly splintering social order. He ultimately becomes the embodiment of “fidelity, humility, endurance” (58).

It would be illuminating to examine the relationship between the narrator and Emily as Sufi teacher and disciple here. The narrator surrounded by the chaos of the one-dimensional world is forced to assume “teachership” which is functional in Sufi circles. Shah observes:

The visible institution of teachership exists in our dimension not because of the needs of the enlightened. It is there, to the contrary, because of the insensitivity of the ordinary person, who will not perceive what is there until this has been

magnified into an external shape. Its first duty is to disappear from appearance and to appear in action. (*Sufis* 230)

The teacher “discovers the disciple, not the other way about” remarks Shah (*Sufis* 296). The narrator finds Emily a potential disciple but who is not ready as she was not able to hear the “low sobbing of a miserable child” (133) which was driving the narrator frantic. This is in accordance with the Sufi dictum: “The guide must be able to determine the capacity of the disciple. He will have to deal with this disciple in accordance with his potentiality [...]. Unless he has this perception, the Sheikh cannot be a good guide at all” (Shah, *Sufis* 298). The narrator is a plausible Sufi master; Emily is a credible disciple on the Sufi Path. Lessing wants us to accept her characters not as mere constructs that represent or convey her ideas but as plausible characters whose nature is crucial to our understanding of her ideas. The teenager Emily feels “a hunger, a need, a pure thing, which [makes] her face lose its hard brightness, her eyes their defensiveness. She [is] a passion of longing” (33). Though Lessing does not explicitly spell out what Emily longs for, through an allegorical reading of the novel, the reader realises that through “working” on herself and fighting her battles, Emily has a chance to transform herself and thereby satisfy her longing. To Jeanne Murray Walker, *MS* is “an allegory of psychological integration” in addition to being “quite literally a story of two very different, separate human beings painstakingly forming a social bond” (95). After telescoping Emily’s interpersonal relationships, Lessing shows that the only solution for

her failures of bonding is to learn about her past. This frees her to think about new ways of ordering her experience.

In a poignant scene, the guardian witnesses Emily amassing fallen leaves into heaps but as she sweeps and makes piles of leaves, they fly about in the wind. In spite of sweeping faster and trying to empty a whole house full of leaves, she is not successful but she finds that “the world was submerged in dead leaves” (122). This symbolic scene shows how Emily futilely tries to bring order into her life behind the wall. This is in keeping with the Sufi principles according to which only conscious efforts without expectation of rewards leads one to true liberation. Moreover, as the guardian literally works in the area behind the wall, self-“work” in the Sufi Way is carried out in the problem areas of Emily’s psyche. The guardian frantically scrubs and cleans the other world so that it will be inhabitable for the “other Emily,” the essence of Emily which lies dormant in the growing Emily. The narrator realises that she wants something new for Emily: “What I was really waiting for [...] was the moment she would step off this merry-go-round, this escalator carrying her from the dark into the dark” (85). As she speculates as to how to transform the dead end of the personal realm into boundlessness, to remake the ruined garden of Gerald’s commune into the paradisaical gardens behind the wall, nature provides example of the generosity and abundance, the rejuvenating processes that are occurring even in the midst of destruction. She notices new growth springing through the cracks in the pavement which is a promise of new life:

The old city, near-empty as it was, held people, animals, and plants which grew and grew, taking over streets, pavements [...] forcing cracks in tarmac, racing up walls [...]. When the spring came, what a burst of green life there would be, and the animals breeding and eating and flourishing. (185)

Laleh Bakhtiar notes how the Sufi quester has to “cleanse the heart” to be linked with the “sacred centre” (23). This is exactly what the narrator does as she enters the “impersonal” realms so that she can be linked with the “One” (91) whose presence dominates the realm. In spite of her repeated cleaning of the rooms, whenever she entered the rooms, all had to be done again because they were wrecked by a “poltergeist” (99) or an “unknown destroyer” (60). This process is analogous to learning at a spiritual level, it is not a straightforward, linear advancement, but a series of understandings, forgettings and relearning. According to the Sufis, the “One” or “the Feminine Principle” referred to by the protagonist “is of great significance not as a separate deity but as the chief mediating function between the levels of perception so that a balance is always preserved” (Bakhtiar 18). The Sufi philosophy identifies the process as one of acquiring the appropriate organs of perception for a fuller understanding of “reality.” This process is achieved through stages of contemplation referred to as “states and stations” in a conscious attempt to actualise and stabilise the perceptions achieved in order to obtain a vantage point outside the

dominant structures of the mind (Bakhtiar 98). Instantly she could experience “a lightness, a freedom, a feeling of possibility [...] the knowledge of the possibility of alternative action” (40). She felt: “the task made sense; there was a continuity to what I did, a future [...] and I was in a continuing relation to the invisible destructive creature or force, just as I was with the other beneficent presence” (61).

According to the Sufis, the human soul “consists of a threefold hierarchical structure: sensory, psychic, and spiritual” and “the way of Sufism is to become aware of the possibilities which exist within the human form, to conceive them and then, through spiritual practices actualise them” (Bakhtiar 18). The narrator’s concentrating on the wall may be interpreted as a conscious technique of contemplation and meditation to achieve communication with “the Presence--the Hadrat” (Bakhtiar 103) and the “Feminine Principle” figures as the chief mediating function between the different levels. This process culminates in the finding of the “Philosopher’s Stone” which is the goal of the Sufi quest and signifies the final transformation. According to the Sufis, the search for the “Philosopher’s Stone” is an encoding of the Sufi quest for integration of inner and outer levels of perception expressed in alchemical terms. (Shah, *Sufis* 219). In the Sufi perspective, the activation of the levels of perception is symbolised by the transmutation of base metals into silver and gold through the Philosopher’s Stone.

With the perceptions gained in the process of working, the narrator during her seventh visit behind the wall, enters a hexagonal shaped room with a carpet with an intricate design spread on the floor. The people in the room are engaged in fitting fragments of material which bring light and colour to it. This activity brought the "carpet to life" (72). Then she also joined "the most loving co-operation" of the people in the "central activity" (73). She is convinced that "the work in it continued, must continue, would go on always" (73), though the room vanishes into darkness. It is noteworthy that Lessing introduces the carpet imagery in *MS*, the weaving of carpets being one of the basic teaching tools in Sufism in which "certain extraordinary perceptions can be developed by means of a certain kind of human association" (Shah, *Learning* 205). The carpet spread in a six-sided room gives the appearance of classic mandala of square within a circle. Cirlot observes that the six-sided room provides the point of circumference of a circle; further the number six is symbolic of "equilibrium, six comprises the union of the two triangles (of fire and water) and hence signifies the human soul" (233). According to Sufi illustrations of the mandala in geometrical forms the two intersecting triangles are referred to as "an active form" and with "the hexagonal form" of the walls become "a complete form" (Bakhtiar 100-1). Bakhtiar in her study of Sufi symbols in numbers and geometric forms illustrates the significance of the triangle in the interaction between the "Intellect" and the "Feminine" element to create a perennial unity. She notes:

The triangle symbolises the action of the Intellect on the Soul [...]. Because the Intellect (as the active, masculine element) and the Soul (as the receptive, feminine element) represent a duality of manifestation from the One, their union and product, the matter, forms the stability of the universe. (104)

Through this marvelously resonant scene, Lessing posits that with some co-operative effort, we can transport ourselves from the materialist realm where all systems--social, economic, political and ecological have collapsed, to the visionary realm. Accordingly, the narrator takes care of Emily, who is given to her by her guardian, Emily and Hugo guard each other and Gerald looks after the children without abandoning "the best part of himself" (187). This band of survivors--Emily, Hugo, Gerald, Gerald's children--fulfil their responsibilities toward one another and because of Gerald's loving care for the children, they also get through the wall. Gayle Greene interprets this symbolic scene in terms of Christianity and notes that the silent figures concentrating on the intricately patterned carpet, and the shine of the star recall scenes associated with the magi, the revelation of divinity and thus offers an "epiphany" though not of an individual messiah but of a communal effort that will save everybody (153). Significantly after the mandala episode, the narrator realises that intellect should be given its proportionate place within the hierarchy of consciousness, and its exclusive dominance has given rise to the "crisis." According to Lessing an individual's real task is to find his or her colour or design or destiny in life on

the large Oriental Carpet or the cosmos and to fill it in. When we interpret the novel in the Sufi context, it becomes obvious that the focus of the novel is on group effort. The very beginning of the novel signals this concept: "We all remember the time." When the narrator looks around her she sees instances of "mutual aid and self-sacrifice" (87) enacted by Emily, Hugo and Gerald and this fills her with hope and assurance and she draws sustenance from the carpet episode though she loses the room with the carpet in it. Only after negotiating several shifts between the two worlds is she able to recognise the existence of the hidden "pattern" (72) in a carpet of intricate design and immense "potential" and experience the potential manifest itself as the design of the carpet is actualised.

Lessing places this episode at the centre of the novel for it is crucial and acts as a particular stage in the narrator's Sufi quest. Eventhough the narrator felt "inside it was all chaos [...] the feeling one is taken over by at the times when everything is in change, movement, destruction,--or reconstruction" (74) she believes that "I did as I was bid and as I must" (91). This is reminiscent of the greater evolutionary cause of the Sufi. That is, if an individual's personal growth can help to raise the level of the whole humanity even a very slight degree, that is considered a success. Watching and waiting she forms a close affinity with Hugo; through this process, realises that animals are endowed with a nobility which is "human" and also the foolishness of attaching too much importance to "intelligence" and she realises, "it will have to find its place. I believe a pretty low place at

that" (74). This Sufi attitude according to Shah is "undoubtedly that of 'being,' but unlike the familiar type of mystic, he will use 'knowing' as well. He distinguishes between the ordinary knowing of fact and the inner knowing of reality. His activity connects and balances all these factors-- understanding, being, knowing" (*Sufis* 338). This stage of the narrator corresponds to that level when the quester recognises that the intellect "must fall into right perspective, find its own level, when the present lack of balance of the personality is restored" (Shah, *Sufis* 315). Just as the cannibal children are less than human so is Hugo more than what is generally considered animal. This "botch of a creature" (81) is a device to remind readers of their relationship with animals and thus humanity's place in nature.

Now the narrator experiences the second mandala episode which occurs in a multi-layered garden with a gardener controlling the flow of water coming from snow-capped mountains. He did not respond to the narrator's query about the "presence" and she reaches the upper vegetable garden bathed in evening sunlight. It will be illuminating to examine Laleh Bakhtiar's description of garden in Sufi philosophy:

The garden is traditionally an enclosure planted with trees surrounding a central pavilion. The whole becomes a mandala, providing both a centrifugal movement inward, through its four porches, to the water, its spiritual centre.

Generating ever expanding ripples, the fountain recommences the cycle of conscious expansion and contraction. (106)

This scene evokes further association with the "Garden of Paradise" which is a stage in the "arc of ascent" (Bakhtiar 28). Bakhtiar expounds how entering the gardens initiates the incorporation of the intuitive faculties:

As the mystic begins the ascent through the Gardens of Paradise, the point of encounter is the Garden of the Soul. This is the feminine principle within, structured by gateways of sense. In order to enter, the mystic must gather together the inner sense of the faculties of intuition. (28)

The culmination of the ascent of the mystic is the union of the masculine and feminine principles to achieve a unity of multiple levels of perception:

Finally, the mystic enters the Garden of Essence. Its form consists of the masculine and feminine principles [...] being reborn in the illuminated knowledge of the Unity of Being [...] the fruit of this Garden is the pomegranate, the symbol of integration of multiplicity in unity, in the station of Union, conscious of Essence. Consumed in this light, [...] the mystic has reached the goal of the Quest, the Truth of Certainty. (Bakhtiar 30)

In the garden, the masculine presence, the gardener and the feminine presence as "pervasive as the rose-scent" (142), and "the exquisite old

rose" (141) together signify the completion of the task of the narrator. For according to Cirlot, "the single rose is, in essence, a symbol of completion or consummate achievement and perfection" (275). According to the Sufis, perfection is accomplished by a balance between the inner and outer levels of perception creating a new relationship between the two worlds so that one nourishes the other. The balance gained is to be retained in memory though not for a long time. This balance helped her to "hold" it (143). This double-layered garden bathed in warm sunlight combines all the four elements: earth (plants, vegetables), air (sky), fire (evening sunlight) and water (stream of clear water). Within these four elements of macrocosm, she discovers the unity of her own microcosm, or the centre of her being. The discovery fills her with elation: "I kept it in my hand. I was able to do this. Yes, towards the end it was so; intimations of that life or lives, became more powerful and frequent in 'ordinary' life as if that place were feeding and sustaining us, wished us to know it" (143).

The knowledge gained in the inner realm enables the narrator to have a heightened communication with Emily. The narrator's presence intensifies Emily's sense of disenchantment as one after another of the roles in which she was sheltering is shattered. Emily on her part, helps Gerald to shake off his delusions, initiating his journey into the inner realm. The impersonal realm which represents "the possibility of alternative action" is thus rendered imagistically, by metaphors and allusions replete with ancient and powerful associations--"the gardens beneath gardens," "the mysterious

presence" etc--and Lessing uses them here to evoke the rich world of the unconscious. The ineffability of this realm is suggested by frequent ellipses and words like "it was, as if, but no, I did not see that." These expressions are Lessing's attempts to express the inexpressible, to reach beyond language because language is another convention bound to the epistemological paradigm which the novel repudiates.

The whole action of the novel now leads to the climactic egg episode. The various references to "egg" make it a sustained metaphor throughout the novel. Right from the beginning, the narrator likens her looking at the wall which holds infinite possibilities to "holding an egg to one's ear that is due to hatch" (14). Again during her fifth visit behind the wall, when she was repainting the rooms in "softly shining enamel white" (61) she felt as if she were standing inside "a cleaned-out egg shell" (61). There she is able to reconcile the opposites: "the destructive creature" and "the other beneficent presence" (61). The same egg shell imagery is used to describe Emily's intense "self-awareness," and her immense potential. Again in a crucial episode where the narrator enters a forest with a small stream bubbling through the grass, she walked on the grass along the slant of an "egg shell" (90) wall with the hope of meeting the "one Presence" (91) the Whole, of which all "are minuscule parts of" (91). After an interminable wait through a winter reminiscent of Kate's dark, cold journey to the sea, deliverance does come. The "giant black egg of pock-marked iron, but polished and glassy" (189) around which the narrator and other characters

stand, breaks open “by the force of” their presence. Reference to iron, which is ‘polished,’ suggests the alchemical process in which the Philosopher’s Stone would transmute base metals into precious ones. (Shah, *Sufis* 219). This, according to the Sufis, is the consummation of the quest for the proper cultivation of the mind so that it is “transmuted” to a sublime plane. The egg’s “glassy” surface which reflects all forms of substance also evokes the “Reflective Mirror” which is an important concept of Sufi philosophy signifying the fulfilment of “multiplicity-in-Unity” (Bakhtiar 10, 15) which is the goal of the Sufi. An iron egg by nature, is difficult to open, and this in itself provides the symbolic meaning of one’s task in the Sufi way. In Sufi terminology, the colour “black” denotes “wisdom” and “leadership” (Shah, *Sufis* 368). Further, the process of the gradual self-conscious development of the characters can be explained using Jalaluddin Rumi’s analogy: “It is not a matter of being compelled to break eggs before an omlet can be made, but of the eggs doing their own breaking in order to be able to aspire to omlethood” (qtd. in Fahim 119). Joseph Campbell highlights that “the shell of the cosmic egg is the world frame of space, while the fertile seed-power within typifies the inexhaustible life dynamism of nature” (277). He cites how Chandogya Upanishad affirms the feeling of boundless potential the narrator feels beyond the wall: “Space is boundless by re-entrant from not by great extension. *That which is* is a shell floating in the infinitude of *that which is not*” (277).

It is therefore significant that as the "walls dissolve," the "she" finally comes to the forefront; the narrator is reconciled to the "she" and the younger generation accepts her leadership. The animating presence leads the way "ahead" as transmuted Emily, Hugo, Gerald and his children follow her "out of this collapsed little world into another order of world altogether" (190). The term "order" is the medium through which the Sufis communicate the "necessities of the work" namely, "the activation of the Subtleties or *lataif*." The objective of the Dervish orders is to achieve "harmony with objective reality, to be able to perceive cosmic unity" (Shah, *Sufis* 286). There is an implied critique in Lessing's use of the word, the term being used literally and metaphorically to evoke a meaning on outer and inner levels. Any reading of the novel without embracing the "multi-levelled" perception of the Sufi is bound to miss the central point of the novel: the initiation of the process of reshuffling of balances for the new generation. The initiation of the younger generation into a new realm further signifies the fulfilment of the narrator's mission towards the younger generation. It is significant to note that the narrator remains on our side of the wall committing herself to delivering her message.

It appears that the identity of the narrator becomes less important than her function as a narrator. Fishburn notes: "In their roles as guide-leaders, Lessing's narrators evolve toward the concept of an ideal author who is a virtueless, an ego-less representative of all humanity" (39). This annotation supports the Sufi mystical notion of a "universal" or non-personal

reality in which individuality is a subordinate or inauthentic factor" (Scott, *More Recent Writings* 182). In *BDH*, for instance, even though the narrator is named and has a personal history, he regards himself as every man and a divine messenger of cosmic wholeness. More of an observer than a participant, the narrator becomes our "window" to the futurist world that Lessing has imagined in this narrative. In *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* characters change their names as their nature and roles on the planet change. For example, any one involved in building is named "Mason" for the stretch of time that he remains a builder. This is because Lessing is not directly interested in the plight of individual human beings but in their roles in the evolution of the whole human race within the expanse of the universe. This is implied by Du Plessis when she recognises Lessing's *MS* as a teaching story in which "elements like character and plot function mainly as the bearers of philosophical propositions or moral arguments, whose function is to persuade" (1-2). Emily ventures into the dangerous world of youth gangs that terrorise the city and provides the narrator with first hand information about the decline of civilisation and the emergence of new social units. The narrator records and interprets this information, trying to give form and meaning to a world being torn apart from within. While Emily provides her with knowledge of the outside world, the narrator provides us with the knowledge of the inner world she finds behind the walls of her flat. Fishburn notes: "In effect, she (the narrator) stands between the phenomenal world of the streets and the ideal or mental (but equally real) world behind the wall, mediating between them as she writes her memoirs"

(43). Unlike Watkins, the narrator does not lose sight of the promised land, instead she earns the right to inhabit it permanently. While Watkins's fate alludes to Lessing's doubt and pessimism, the survivor's fate suggests Lessing's growing conviction that her vision is correct and is capable of being realised.

Through the characterisation of Emily and portraying the one-dimensional mentality of the cannibalistic gang of children Lessing demonstrates the need "to mediate between the extremes of solipsistic individualism and rash, mindless collectivity" (Walker 107). Further, to the narrator "time occurs as her own experience, as the stages which will bring to fruition something for which she waits" (Walker 108). She does not exert her ego because she comprehends time as the maturation of natural things; nothing can be achieved by a deliberate exerting of the will. This mature attitude is quite characteristic of a Sufi seeker who will be rewarded in the end. Lessing shows how the realm behind the wall is full of infinite possibilities, because there is greater scope for making the individual productive through freer exchange among themselves and also through "cultural activity [which] allows them to feel productive and deserving the gifts of others" (Walker 112).

Even an astute critic like Betsy Draine misses Lessing's message because it appears that to form connections between the two realms, she refuses to exercise the imaginative faculty which helps one to rebuild the

world in the last stages of its collapse. Unlike Anna in *GN*, the narrator in *MS*--a novel written twelve years later is taken to a further place beyond the wall in her journey of self-discovery.

Narrative Technique

The novel incorporates two levels of narrative: the discursive sequential level and the symbolical level where the images have greater resonance. One is reminded of Todorov's distinction between the two kinds of narrative, proper to fictional form: the "narrative logic" dominant in the traditional novel, which propels the reader forward in a series of events in which curiosity and suspense are the key words; and "ritual logic" which demands that the reader's interest focuses on the unfolding of the whole action as it generates meaning through connections and associations (qtd. in Greene 132).

Another interesting feature of *MS* is the technical strategy evolved by Lessing to rouse the reader's interest by building suspense in the outer action of the novel around the definition of the crisis--"It" which attains its full meaning only after incorporating levels of the inner action. The reader's interest in the outer action is drawn by subtle means towards the necessity of incorporating the unfamiliar realms of the inner action. Fahim underscores the ironic nature of Lessing's strategy: "The narrative plays ironically on the traditional function of devices in the novel so that the reader is induced to undergo a double movement of deconstruction and

reconstruction--deconstruction of the one-dimensional and reconstruction of a balancing process which incorporates the two levels" (123). As in *BDH*, the time scheme in *MS* tends to subvert the reader's habitual mode of structuring experience. Frequent references to the ordinary logical units of time like days, months and seasons invite the reader to think in terms of temporal sequence, while attempts to follow a linear time-scheme are constantly thwarted by the need to revert to the other dimension of time in order to understand the development of action in the visionary realm.

The survivor has trouble in writing her memoirs because there is no common language available to describe the unprecedented and bizarre events of the time. Lessing's fiction reminds us that our language systems are artificial constructions that give us only an approximation of reality, not a replica of it. In describing the world behind the wall, in inventing a new world, she has taken upon herself the difficult task of devising a new language to describe it. She does not give us a new grammar or a new vocabulary, as many feminist utopian writers have done, but gives us new images and new metaphors, the effect of which is to transform our view of reality. Fishburn notes how the narrator acting as a "guide-leader" is one of the narrative techniques Lessing employs successfully to mediate between the two levels of reality in the text, and also to mediate between the reader and the text itself (43). By accumulating the details of the eerie experience in the world of normality that would repulse us, the narrator gradually shuts

off all avenues of escape except one, that being the world behind the wall. Our own feelings of claustrophobia, which are the cumulative effects of reading about the horrors, finally impel us to seek refuge along with the survivors in the world behind the wall. From the narrator's perspective, the world behind the wall is superior to the outside world because it holds out the promise of open-ended possibilities, of free choice, of change. But as readers we know hardly anything about the other dimension because the narrator does not tell us. It appears that Lessing does not expect us to inhabit the world behind the wall in any literal sense. What becomes important to her "are the visits themselves, those narrative experiences, whereby she hopes to unravel our concepts of reality" (Fishburn 49). In other words, what Lessing establishes as the point of the novel then, is not the question of which reality is of primary importance, but whether or not we can stretch our cognitive capacity to incorporate both. It becomes irrelevant within this context to draw a line between the two realms since each is designed to enrich the other. Just as she did in *BDH*, Lessing incites us to question, always question, the conventions of our current world-view. She does not exhort us to walk through walls, but to break through the walls of our conventional thinking, that is, to dismiss our preconceived ideas about reality. Thus in *MS* Lessing has given us "another quintessential Sufi teaching story, in which what is important is not the content of her book, but what it does, as real experience, to our heads" (Fishburn 51).

Lessing's Symbolism

Lessing's symbols function in both the inner and the outer action, operating in a network that runs throughout the novel demanding from the reader intense critical attention to balance and connect, thus invoking response to the rational level as well. In this way the reader is forced to follow the sequence of linear development and at the same time seek connections within a web of association. The "ordinary" walls of her flat also stand (on the psychological level) for the walls of the ego which the narrator tries to penetrate. While the narrator looks for an outlet to penetrate the walls, Emily seeks shelter within the four walls of her room. Conversely, the walls which serve as shelter to Emily from facing the inner self, also become the bridge which lead into the inner rooms; and the thick walls between the outer and inner realms gradually thin and finally "the last walls dissolve[d]" (189).

Interrelated with that web of association is the egg symbol which also appears as an introduction to the narrator's negotiation between the two realms. These two symbols, which operate in a sort of developmental evolution, are connected with a widely ramifying chain of associations, which further link the different levels of the novel. Episodes in the outer action parallel and converge with ones from the inner realm. Thus the walls' dissolving link with the egg hatching and the task of cleaning in the inner realm are paralleled by similar activities in the outer rooms, as well as in the

streets. The symbolic language of *MS* brings to our mind Nicholson's defence of Sufi mystical discourse through symbols:

The Sufis adopt the symbolic style because there is no other way of interpreting mystical experience. So little does knowledge of the infinite revealed in ecstatic vision need an artificial disguise that it cannot be communicated at all except through types and emblems drawn from the sensible world, which imperfect as they are, may suggest and shadow forth a deeper meaning than appears on the surface. (*Mystics* 12)

Even words like "air," "water," "food," "warmth" and "light" start to resonate on more than one level; and they gain more cosmic relevance. This highly symbolic language according to Fahim resembles, "The intricate pattern of Eastern works of art used for meditation, [...]. [It] functions both as a model of kaleidoscopic vision and a strategy designed to prepare the mind for the perception of that multi-levelled vision" (132).

To put in other words, the "wall" the "egg" and the like have not been used as ready pegs to hang a Sufi theme; they are organically and symbolically related to elevate the novel to its metaphysical heights. Thus by resorting to a strategy in which one signifier resonates on more than one level of meaning, Lessing writes a Sufi teaching story "disposed towards multiple meaning depending upon how much or on what level the individual can grasp them" (Shah, *Sufis* 354). Like a Sufi fable, it does not offer

fulfilment of expectations, but initiates a new way of perception. Extrapolating from the present to the future, Lessing proceeds to demonstrate to the reader the grave implications of his present reality. The reader becomes conscious of the fact that the future depicted in the novel could be the logical extension of the trends already prevalent in the present culture--governmental organisation of bureaucracy, adolescent behaviour, the gap in communication between old and young and the growth of violence. The reader is shocked by the picture of the future world in the novel which proves to be a "reverting to the primitive" (90), to "the past of the human race" (95), as if "the technological revolution had never occurred at all" (90). Frank Kermode in his study of apocalyptic fiction in Western literature, points out the significance of such strategies which he refers to as the "peripeteia" in playing on the reader's expectation:

The more daring the peripeteia, the more we may feel that the work respects our sense of reality [...] by upsetting the ordinary balance of our naive expectations in finding something out for us, something real [...] it is a way of finding something out that we should in our more conventional way to the end have closed our eyes to [...]. (18)

Moreover, reading the novel in that context further increases the urgency of Lessing's message, using what Gerard Genette has called "metalepsis"--"inducing in the reader that the fiction reflects real world

conditions for which the reader should take active responsibility after putting aside the book" (4-5).

MS is not an amateurish venture of a novelist fresh in the field, but it is a multi-dimensional expression of Lessing's Sufi experience. It appears to be a more satisfactory novel than either *BDH* or *SBD* because in *MS* the narrator envisions a new society that will incorporate all the enduring impulses of the human psyche, even the destructiveness and anarchy that the Underground kids represent. In describing the interpenetration of the private and public worlds, Lessing uses a style she is most comfortable with --the style of a relatively unheightened, painstaking realism, for she depicts a society where extraordinary is the normality. The technique of memoir writing employed by Lessing thus becomes a successful strategy which enables her "to say things about time, about memory [...] which we choose to remember--about the human personality because a personality is very much what is revealed" (Rubenstein 32). It appears that Lessing has firm faith in the Eastern esoteric assumptions according to which man's essence is spiritual; also he can have access to modes of consciousness essentially "intuitive" which could be cultivated and developed to counter balance the empirical modes of perception. It is through this process that man can break "through the blindness which makes the ordinary man captive to life and being as it ordinarily seems to be" (Shah, *Sufis* 295).

Notes

- 1 Though *BDH* was published prior to *SBD*, to suit the special purpose of this study, *SBD* is treated earlier.
- 2 For a detailed discussion of the various mystic stations, see Bhatnagar 156-58 and Schimmel 109-86.

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Conclusion: In the Rose Garden

Geetha Krishnan S “The quest for deliverance : Sufi elements in the major novels of Doris Lessing ” Thesis. Department of English , University of Calicut, 2002

Chapter V

Conclusion: In the Rose Garden

“He whose heart is alive with love, never dies.”

- Hafiz, Persian Sufi poet

This study has endeavoured to show that there is evidence of various Sufi mystical elements in the novels of Doris Lessing. In her fiction we come across a rare mingling of cross-cultural, inter-disciplinary and inter-religious ideologies and responses. Such an impressive oeuvre definitely deserves a “multi-levelled” interpretation and response. As Lessing’s readers know she has been vehemently and consistently opposed to compartmentalising under any “ism,” she boldly oversteps boundaries, tries new forms and refuses labels. When Lessing writes of a new human species, that rises out of the ashes of the apocalypse at the end of the *FGC*, she seems to envision the Sufi ideal. Her staunch faith in the Sufi evolutionary concept of man is brought out in this interview with Studs Terkel: “It’s possible that we’re changing into people with greater capacities for imagination, and that we are going to be regarded as the ‘missing link,’ the transition people, and we’ll have much better people” (“Learning” 30). Lessing’s brand of Sufism is different from the “Classical” version, *tasawwuf* to be exact, it has a different flavour to it. Eventhough it is not devotional, it is modern and relevant and applicable to contemporary life. It is as an amalgam of

Lessing's experiences with various ideologies ranging from Communism to Eastern religions. It could be seen that Lessing seeks to promote a religion which embraces tradition and modernism, spirituality and science, intuition and logic, fantasy and realism. The purpose of this study has been to foreground the difference that the Sufi ambience creates for understanding some previously unexplored layers of Lessing's fiction. Eventhough there is much more to Lessing's fiction than the Sufi strain, the particular focus of this study has been to explore in detail, the mystical dimension as exemplified in her five novels. By studying the author's dominant concerns, we get a better sense of how far Lessing has taken us in a post-modern East-West dialogue of contemporary thought and expression . The study has been primarily concerned with tracing some of the aesthetic and metaphysical links between the style, language, ideas and imagery in Lessing's novels and Sufism, and showing how these links add a dimension and complexity to her work.

The preceding chapters have made it clear that for Lessing Sufism is a way of looking at the human being's potential and of the world at large. Sufism does not advocate personal withdrawal from society. On the other hand, it is about being inside society, but seeing the "total situation" therein. The Sufis as well as Lessing believe in the dictum, "Be in the world, but not of it." A close analysis of the novels demonstrated the validity of this hypothesis. Lessing who bemoans Europeans' ignorance of Islam, imported some concepts in the Sufi tradition into her novels. The detailed analysis of Sufi tendencies in her fiction reveals that Sufism is a vital and natural force and not some "watered down" mysticism. One could also

perceive the extent to which Lessing remains a rational Western writer despite her tangible mystical inclination that acknowledges Sufism as well as telepathy, ESP, the spiritual potential of all human beings. The difference between Lessing's fiction and the passionate testimonies of the Classical Sufi poets cannot lessen our high esteem for Lessing's boldness and imagination that allow her to experiment with new subject matter and new styles. Lessing's exhortation to societies to "work" to awaken and to save themselves from impending annihilation is not easy to be heard, because it requires *active* participation. One needs to applaud her for being humanity's difficult friend who always nags us to change. Her relentless didacticism and her insistence to stand her ground despite our considerable resistance to her "experiments" as she calls her own novels need to be applauded.

Through a systematic close reading of her five novels, one could discern the development of her perception of the Sufi Way. Her novels afford ample evidence of the illuminative stages of the mystical journey of the quester on his way to the Beloved. Chapter I attempts to define *Tasawwuf* and Sufism and relate the terms so as to have a clear idea of the type of Sufism that we come across in Lessing's novels. In Chapter II an attempt has been made to place Lessing in the galaxy of Western Sufism. As a Sufi, Lessing seriously exploits the therapeutic value of Sufi teaching stories and tries to teach Sufism through her novels. In chapter III, Martha's initiation into Sufism under Thomas's tutelage and her development of extra-sensory perception with which she becomes the saviour of the human race is dwelt upon. It demonstrates how Martha's varied experiences teach her that "the personal is the political." In *L. Martha* comes to understand the

enormity of genocide through her intense physical connection with Thomas Stern; she becomes a communist because of her longing for community and her need to obliterate her desolate sense of isolation and in *FGC* she comprehends the Collective Unconscious through her identification with Lynda's madness and achieves selfhood through the Sufi Way. Just as Sufi *shaikhs* were the radiant beacons that dispelled darkness from a believer's path; and just as their ideal was the spirit of sacrifice and selflessness that characterised their every effort, Lynda and later Martha demonstrate this ideal through their services and lives. The Coldridge household like Sufi guest houses becomes the sole remedy for social ills. Martha under Lynda's tutelage, becomes fully empowered to carry other people's burdens even as she tries to illumine the way of Truth. Through the lives of Lynda and Martha, Lessing demonstrates that Sufi *shaikhs* far from encouraging escapism and quietism that impede social progress, uphold the highest values of social consciousness. Further, *FGC* illustrates Lessing's conviction that human beings must learn to accommodate new ways of seeing, thinking and being if they wish to survive. In Chapter IV Lessing's perennial theme of the oneness of life is examined in detail and we find that humans are condemned for thinking in terms of "I" instead of "We." The need to pay heed to one's dreams and draw lessons from them is another Sufi element explored in Chapter IV. The need to develop a "multi-levelled" perception becomes the predominant message of *MS*.

Lessing presents us with not only a vision of oneness but a necessity for oneness. The alternatives are too horrible to contemplate and yet she makes us confront the inevitability of ecological and nuclear

catastrophe in *FGC*; the inevitability of a breakdown in the effectiveness of government because of bureaucracies, elitism, and pollution in *MS*. All these catastrophes occur because of our failure to think in terms of "We." In *BDH* Lessing speaks of the "Necessity" to which human beings must submit if the species is to survive. Basically they must acknowledge by their behaviour the oneness of life. This novel and *Shikasta* suggest that long ago this sense of oneness did prevail. Life on earth was truly Edenic, but the harmonious way of life was lost in ancient catastrophe. A future catastrophe will, it seems, restore it. From his outer space, Watkins the "mad" protagonist sees humankind as mad. Until the sense of "we" can be restored, envoys are sent to earth to keep alive the sense of unity. This is an interim strategy until the human species evolves into higher consciousness. Lessing thus puts into perspective the "dividing off, compartmenting, pigeonholing" (*BDH* 121), that causes racism, sexism, class consciousness, ecological problems and world wars. Through her fiction, Lessing moves us from individual concerns like (Martha's with racism and sexism) to social, economic and political concerns brought out, for example, as her protagonists in *FGC* and *SBD* change their clothes and roles and move through different classes of society to observe how differently they are treated. When Lessing turns to cosmic fiction, her focus shifts to philosophical and spiritual concerns.

One of the fascinating things about Lessing's writing is the way in which her works interrelate and interrogate one another. It is in one sense foolish to talk about development in any linear sense (although development in another sense is obvious), since the same ground is probed and reprobated, never repetitively, but to focus on some perspective in one book

which was merely glimpsed in another. The love that Martha shares with Thomas Stern, where their total oneness helps each to learn about themselves as individuals, echoes the culminating relationships of Anna and Saul. In *L* there are echoes of *GIS* in the disappointed expectations of Mrs. Quest; at the same time, they also anticipate Emily's childhood in *MS*.

Lessing's later novels are influenced by the Sufi elements in the earlier ones; for Lessing is reluctant to arrive at conclusions. Even when she comes to the end of the *Children of Violence*¹ series, she leaves a "loose end," as situations and characters from this series get picked up and developed in the *Canopus in Argos* series. Similarly, she interrupts the *Canopus* series with *The Diary of a Good Neighbour* (1984), which sprouts a sequel, *If the Old Could* (1984).² This straining against endings is "consistent with her [Lessing's] restlessness, her claustrophobia, her search for a position beyond systems. It is also indicative of the cast of mind she values in her characters, an empathetic receptiveness, an openness to experience, a reluctance to shut down or shut off" (Greene 221). Lorna Irvine commenting on Margaret Drabble's continuous fictions notes that her "insistence on the continuance of the fictional universe," is an affirmation of "the human capacity to survive," of a "generative view of human life" (75,84-85). The same might be said of Lessing.

In the post-modern context when style, to a great extent, is often defined as excellence, Lessing's disinterest in style needs to be mentioned. Although she is interested in structure, she rarely indulges in word-play, tropes, motif, symbol, mythology, in all the playfulness that characterises

much of the most highly regarded literature of the past fifty years. Kaplan and Rose therefore note that Lessing's writing may be usefully described as "feminine--material, solid and concrete" (*Doris Lessing* 7). Lessing is all passionate engagement; she repudiates again and again the highly wrought style. But her stylistic strategy has worked in a different direction. Her novels are often presented as diaries, memoirs, personal archival records, letters, note books, briefings and rough drafts. Even when she treats intellectual notions, political ideology, and cosmic teleology, her tone is passionate, deeply personal, emotional and physical. Lessing's subject matter and style thus demand a new and different kind of criticism because her writing is as original, feminine, immediate and raw as the diaries she frequently imitates. Lessing's style is a traditional one unmarked by hysteria or hurry. Though her great theme is violence, she writes coolly, dispassionately, logically, using the standard novelist techniques of repetition, reinforcement and strict chronology. She is never self-indulgent, except for occasional Lawrentian descriptions when filling in the beauty or bleakness of a landscape, or in describing varieties of sexual tension.

As a novelist, Lessing's evolution is not a descent into hell but an ascent to a new order. While Martha Quest, Charles Watkins and Kate Brown have to undertake strenuous journeys inward to discover their essence, the narrator in *MS* negotiates the journeys through the wall of her living room spontaneously and effortlessly. This shows how Lessing has graduated from being an initiate to a mature Sufi seeker. Again, in the early novels, there are hints and markers--like Sufi quotations and anecdotes to guide the reader, but in *MS*, there are no such aids given for, by now,

Lessing readers would have grown up with her. The study revealed how *MS* is a supreme Sufi tale with an explicit didactic urge that human beings should work hard to preserve themselves, and something concrete is possible only through a life time of harmonious development.

There is evolution in the matter of style also. In *MS* Lessing's tone is one of tired but calm acceptance, in contrast to the fighting exasperation of some of her earlier novels. There is no rhetoric of persuasion. The reader is not left with a sense of frustration, however, because in this novel the confines of "how it is" in this world are finally transcended. Not only that, Lessing acknowledges a similar potential in everybody, however, hidden or unrealised it may be. The novel ends on a note of affirmation, which is not just the culmination of this novel, but of all Lessing's work so far. Communism, feminism, all other causes espoused throughout Lessing's canon have been shown to offer incomplete solutions. And since these causes have failed, Lessing indicates that the only possible path to survival is the gnostic. As her fiction becomes increasingly metaphysical, to convert intuitive knowledge into appropriate verbal equivalents, Lessing extensively makes use of symbols, analogues, images, paradox and fantasy. The mature Martha Quest in *FGC* and the elderly narrator of *MS* illustrate the knowledge that in states of elevated consciousness the personal and the universal become identical. Lessing posits that the individual must still find a satisfactory equilibrium between the inner and outer worlds; though the "work" on self must not be neglected, neither must it overwhelm the essential connection to the outer world, to the macrocosm.

From the foregoing chapters, it becomes obvious that the strongest line of continuity in Lessing's canon is the development of her recognition of the need for an inward movement to counterbalance the predominant outer mode of perception. If her early novels were heavily weighted in favour of the outer realm, the later novels tend to retrieve the balance by developing inner modes of perception. Another point which emerges from the study of *MS* is that Lessing never undervalues the intellect. With her Sufi orientation, Lessing is not looking away from her situation; she is looking deeper into it, from a "multi-levelled" rather than a one-dimensional perspective. According to her, the truth of a situation may reveal itself through modes of awareness of which the intellect is one. Therefore, Sufism forms one pole of a dynamic dialectic with the intellect and psychology providing the other two poles. A novel like *MS* undermines our habitual mode of thinking and challenges the one-dimensional mode of perception by virtue of its form. By perpetually forcing us to incorporate more than one level, her novels open up the possibility of new different forms of experience. Lessing thus attempts through the disjunction of the text to lead the reader to a higher state of awareness. Fahim has remarked that in this sense, "Lessing's novels increasingly operate as the Philosopher's Stone activating the readers' perception" (237). Her novels, like Sufi literature, are important not only for their content, but for what they provide as real experience to the reader's mind in initiating a new order of understanding.

The extraordinary range of Lessing's fictional concerns has encouraged critics to consider her writing in a number of different

contexts--socialist, feminist, psychological, metaphysical and so on. This compartmentalising leaves much of Lessing's overall achievement to be explained. To study just one aspect of her novels is to belittle the accomplishment of a writer who is convinced that "we should not compartmentalise." By incorporating elements from Eastern and Western modes of thought, this study does not confine Lessing to a single angle, but rather explains the reasons for retaining the diversity and complexity of Lessing's novels and to provide a key to her extraordinary moral vision--one that incorporates more than one level and transcends cultural limitations. While tracing the major influences on Lessing's changes of mood--her Marxist faith after the Hungarian revolution and the Prague trials, her Jungian analysis, her reported friendship with R.D. Laing, her study of Sufism under Idries Shah--we notice how a series of formal choices in the structuring of her novels has led her to explore to the limit the implications of attitudes implicit in each form. Lessing's own conception of the stages of consciousness suggests that any one way of thinking and feeling, once taken to the limit, leads almost by dialectical reaction to the necessity of exploring another stage. Thus instead of evaluating Lessing's novels on the basis of her choice of technique--that is, "realistic" novels or "visionary" novels, it appears that the telling factor is not *which* technical choices Lessing made in each work, but *how* bold and distinctive those choices are.

Sufi ideas clearly afford Lessing the seeker the opportunity to investigate the possibilities of tapping other spheres of consciousness that in turn force Lessing, the novelist to experiment with new fictive techniques in order to convey her message better. It is irrelevant whether Charles

Watkins or others are successful in their struggle so long as we witness them striving to become what they are meant to be. Ultimately what matters most is their contribution to the greater plan. Saul Green in *GN* observes: "There are a few of us in the world, we rely on each other even though we don't know each other all the time. We're a team we're the ones who haven't given in, who'll go on fighting" (642). In keeping with the Sufi teachings, Lessing stresses the importance of self-remembering so that one may live by the guidance of one's mind, body and heart, and make discoveries about one's own self. Like a Sufi teacher, Lessing impresses upon us our responsibility for the small part we are privileged to play in the greater evolution of humanity and the universe, by fulfilling our individual destinies. Thus Lessing proposes a religion in which there is only one God: Life itself. The religious notion of a complete surrender to God manifests as the relentless search for discovering one's Sufi self. The major commandments of this religion are relentless self-study and perpetual growth. At the same time, Lessing is not interested in converting us to Sufism for she is not a religious reformer. Her Sufi disposition gradually develops into a noble vision of life. This evolution becomes all the more evident on comparing Martha's recognition of wakeful insights in *L* to the elderly narrator's "multi-levelled" perception which enables her to enlighten Emily and her band of companions and make them recognise the common core of reality that underlies all existential illusions and earthly appearances.

In her work, Lessing offers us her views on Communism, feminism, mysticism, human relationships, politics and life in general and therefore appears to remain enigmatic and diverse. However, the concept of a

synthesising vision of wholeness which underscores Lessing's works is consequent of her Sufi orientation. Galin observes: "Yet her work is of a piece, when evaluated from a Sufi point of view, and not so radically different over the years" (62). In other words, Lessing's position is that there is a redeeming quality about man as he is placed in the universe and the uneasy confrontation of the apparent opposites will turn into a confluence and harmony before long. This is the crux of her message. Her primary concern, like that of the Sufis, seems to be social, not religious education. Ann Scott endorses this view: Lessing's is "a critique of contemporary society rather than a call to piety or withdrawal from the world" (175). Undeniably Lessing views the western culture through the lens of the Eastern tradition of Sufism. Ultimately reading the five novels becomes a journey of discovery and exploration, which finally ends in a special type of enlightenment. A thorough search and detailed analysis of the five novels carried out in the light of valid canons of critical evaluation and scholarly comments of eminent critics show that Lessing has evolved her own vision of life by skilful organisation of diverse Sufi elements into meaningful patterns. As we turn to cross cultural studies to solve the problems of our times, Lessing's Sufi proclivity brings about an affiliation between the East and the West as noted by Perrakis: "In the very act of marrying Eastern and Western thought [Lessing] is offering a model for co-operation and interchange between nations" (119).

Notes

- ¹ The *Children of Violence* series consists of five novels. For more extensive information about the novels, see the Primary Sources section in Selected Bibliography.
- ² *The Diary of a Good Neighbour* and *If the Old Could* (Michael Joseph, 1983-84; Knopf, 1983) originally published under the pseudonym Jane Somers were later published as *The Diaries of Jane Somers* (New York: Random House, 1984).

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