

## **The Plight of the Female Protagonist Depicted in Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing***

**Leena Gautam**

Ph.D. Research Scholar,  
Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar University,  
Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India  
Email: [kvsleenasingh@gmail.com](mailto:kvsleenasingh@gmail.com)  
ORCID ID- 0000-0001-5084-9449

**Dr. Sulekha Jadaun**

Associate Professor of English  
K. R. (P.G.) College,  
Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, India

### **Abstract**

The Woman is a God-given boon to mankind. She is the most lively and endearing personality on the earth because of her never-ending compassion and her care for fellow human beings. She is such a protective shield for humanity that tolerates everything with a smile. But ironically this male-dominated society has been harming, crushing, and suppressing its armor for centuries. The status of a woman in our society is still debatable. A woman sacrifices her desires, aspirations, and ambitions at every phase of her life sometimes by being a daughter, a wife, a sister, or a mother. From time to time woman finds herself in such an odd and precarious situation that later causes her plight. The present paper attempts to explain the plight of the female protagonist, Mary Turner in the novel *The Grass Is Singing* written by Nobel Prize winner Doris Lessing.

**Keywords-** Plight, Predicament, Protagonist, Patriarchal, Alienation

Society plays a vital role in the life of human beings. No society or country can ever progress without the active participation of women in its overall development. But man has always looked down upon women as the weaker ones. The study broadly deals with Doris Lessing's conscious approach to the plight of female protagonist Mary Turner in her tragic novel *The Grass Is Singing*.

Doris May Lessing was born in Persia Iran on October 22, 1919. She was a British novelist, poet, playwright, biographer, and story writer. She was awarded the Nobel Prize for her writing in literature in 2007. She has written on different themes but her novels have a prominent place for women. She wrote with a great zeal for the personal and social development of her female characters. Lessing has written on a variety of themes but the majority of themes are based on women's sufferings and their struggles. In her novels, some of the female protagonists are depicted as submissive and others as free women in the form of daughters, wives, and mothers. Women struggle to overcome the duties assigned to them and consequently undergo the dilemma of the various roles

foisted on them at the various stages of their life. She raises the problematic situation of women and explores the disturbed psyche of modern women. Her all-female protagonists are highly intelligent and sensitive women who end up exhausted and on the verge of mental crisis in their attempt to manage their home and their personal life. In the novel, *The Grass Is Singing*, Lessing portrays the relational problem between man and woman and depicts the pitiable condition of a woman in a suffocating patriarchal society. In the novel, *The Grass Is Singing*, the female protagonist, Mary Turner is not able to cope up with the harsh situation of her life which later leads her to death and destruction.

Lessing's novel *The Grass Is Singing* is tragic. The female protagonist Mary Turner is one of the most hapless and pitiable characters of Lessing's novels. She is simple, sincere but a suffering soul. Doris Lessing has made an attempt to delineate the plight of a daughter and a wife. Mary's childhood was just like a nightmare for her. She had witnessed her mother being a victim of male oppression. Her mother was usually beaten by her drunkard father. Ultimately her whole childhood was spent unhappily. One day luckily she was sent to the boarding school where she grew up. The miseries of her childhood had made her confident, intellectual, and bold. But still, there was a pang of her miserable childhood in her heart. After her mother's death, the apathetic relationship between a daughter and a father was totally lost and after that, she didn't keep any concern for her father. Indirectly she was taking revenge for her mother's miseries. She accepted to live alone in this world instead of living with her father, which inconsiderate her existence.

She hardly saw him: he was proud of her but left her alone. They did not even write; they were not the writing sort. Mary was pleased to be rid of him. Being alone in the world had no terrors for her at all, she liked it. And by dropping her father she seemed in some way to be avenging her mother's sufferings. (*The Grass Is Singing*, 35)

Mary was away from her troublesome childhood. She was enjoying her job and her independent life. But one day again she was trapped by the dominant ideological cultural perception of society which doesn't allow a spinster to enjoy her freedom without any hindrance. Therefore, she is bound to hear sarcastic remarks made by her colleagues.

She's not fifteen any longer: it is ridiculous! Someone should tell her about her clothes...why doesn't she marry? She must have had plenty of chances...she should marry someone years older than herself. A man of fifty would suit her... you'll see, she will marry someone old enough to be her father one of these days. (*The Grass Is Singing*, 40)

Mary is stunned by hearing these unexpected remarks from her friends. All these unendurable comments compel Mary to ponder over the husband-hunting campaign. She ultimately decides to get married not because of her needs but the need of society. Now she wants to get married out of social pressure. And from here her real plight starts.

Mary is proposed by Dick Turner, who is a poor struggling farmer. Mary marries Dick Turner in hastiness without any deep consideration and without knowing each other which later causes her plight. After marriage when she reaches Dick's farmhouse. She is deeply shocked by watching the infrastructure of Dick's house. She finds herself annihilated in childhood memories where she witnessed the extreme poverty and pitiable condition of her mother.

She began to feel, slowly, that it was not in his house she was sitting, with her husband, but back with her mother, watching her endlessly contrive and patch and mend...possessed with the thought that her father, from his grave, had sent out his will and forced her back into the kind of life he had made her mother lead. (*The Grass Is Singing*, 54-55)

Even after being a love married couple Mary and Dick doesn't start their new life with conjugal relation which every newly married couple have after marriage. It shows their dissatisfaction regarding their marriage. Mary is a compromising woman. She accepts everything and starts paying her responsibility as everyone does. She has settled herself early in a new rhythm, in new life. But gradually Mary's long bearing pain of poverty burst into marital discord between Dick and her, on small issues.

Mary's circumstances continued to worsen after her marriage to Dick. It deepens Mary's plight. She has to suffer mentally as well as physically. Dick's farmhouse was not habitable at all and actually, it was just a make-shift cottage to provide shelter from the hot Sun. In the daytime, it was like a burning house because of the extremely hot summer weather of Africa. It was unbearable for Mary to live there.

It was so hot! She had never imagined it could be so hot. The sweat poured off her all day; she could feel it running down her ribs and thighs under her dress as if ants were crawling over her. She used to sit quite, quite still, her eyes closed. (*The Grass Is Singing*, 66)

It is pressure from society that pushes Mary into the chain of marriage. She is completely cut off from her friends, city, and luxury she had. Now she is completely isolated and alienated. Eventually, she runs back to the city but starting again is impossible. The difficult circumstances of life had made Mary mentally ill. Her falling condition had filled her with profound hatred. Mary hesitated to have physical intimacy with her husband because of her disturbed psyche. She disliked the farm as she felt that farm was restraining her from leading life in the town. They cannot even desire to have a child because of their poverty. The reluctance of the idea of having a child is one more reason for Mary's unhappy marriage life. Mary was leading towards the utter emptiness, desolation, and the feeling of alienation. Mary's lack of satisfaction in her life and the faded relationship leads her to involve in the extramarital affair with Moses, one of her black servants, who later caused her death. Mary is infatuated with Moses because of her unsuccessful marriage, who himself is a victim of racisms.

Doris Lessing depicted through her novel; that how this male-dominated society is responsible for the plight of a woman. How the stereotype ideology of this society leads a woman towards dissatisfaction and self-destruction. These so-called social norms origin the concept of gender inequality where a man can unquestionably live unmarried but a woman cannot. If she dares to do so it becomes a matter of town talk even her near and dear ones started gossiping behind her. In the novel, Mary hastily decided to marry Dick to avoid town talks and pushed herself into a chasm from where it was difficult to get out even after death.

#### **Works Cited**

- Lessing, Doris. *The Grass Is Singing*. Flamingo, 1993.
- Maslen, Elizabeth. *Doris Lessing*. Northcote House Publishers, 1994.
- Daiches, David. *The Novel and the Modern World*. University of Chicago Press, 1960.
- Forster, E. M. *Aspects of the Novel*. Penguin Books Ltd, 1962.