

Journey in Evolution

by Charu Sharma

Dorris Lessing: Journey in Evolution
by Alka Kumar
New Delhi: Book Plus
2001, pp. 148, Price Rs. 300

Dorris Lessing's first novel, *The Grass is Singing* was published in 1950. Thereafter her reputation as a novelist, a non-fiction and short story writer has flourished. With the publication of *The Golden Notebook* in 1962 she became a "messiah of feminism" and the book became a "gospel for the feminists." Since then she has published a dozen and half novels, memoirs, an autobiography and science-fiction in two volumes.

Alka Kumar's *Dorris Lessing: Journey in Evolution* (2001) is a complete critical book on Lessing. No aspect of Lessing's insight has been left untouched by Kumar. Lessing's evolutionary journey both literal and metaphorical have been systematically and carefully studied. She has categorically divided the book into five chapters and a post script. Before moving into the world of Lessing, Kumar has listed nearly all the critics and their critical works in the chapter titled 'Influences and Confluences.' An indepth study of Lessing's critical works helps the reader to understand the author better. From Lorna Sage to Hardin there is a long list of critics whose ideas and thoughts have been incorporated. This includes Sage, Ruth Whittaker, Patrick Parrinda, Herbert Spencer, Lewontin, Roberta Rubenstein, Margaret Drabble and Lee R. Edwards. Her second chapter which is partially the title of the book as well—"An Evolutionary Journey, Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Sufism" discusses the three important movements as well as genres in relation to Lessing.

Lessing, a post-modernist writer is highly self-reflexive, reflecting herself and her life at each stage of her writing. Kumar highlights the fact that Lessing works through dialectics. She has been a strong Marxist feminist and therefore her women characters are highly intelligent

political human beings. She believes that forces of race, class and colour are far more oppressive than sex. The novels are a subtle critique of political and economic structure and in them her women have connection between their professional work and personal lives. Lessing questions stereotypes. Characters like Anna Wulf of *The Golden Notebook* and Martha of *A Proper Marriage* have been discussed in detail. The language and methodology is of historical and social determinism. While discussing psychoanalysis the critic shows indepth knowledge of Jung and Lang as is evident from her discussion of the connecting link between the individual and the collective. Lessing believed in humanitarian and favourable treatment of insanes which is evidenced by the sympathetic approach in dealing with neurosis and schizophrenia. Watkins in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* and Kate in the *Summer Before the Dark* are characters whose dream sequences and mental sojourns provide a framework to social and psychic reality. Anna of *The Golden Notebook* has once again been discussed in the context of Jungian analysis. Kumar pinpoints that in Lessing's work the "sociological determinism often leads to psychological and mystical realms." Lessing was a devoted disciple of Idries Shah and she holds a holistic view of the world. Her later works deal with realism, symbolism, failure of political solutions and expansion of inner space. The holy trinity of lover, loved and love as per Sufism expounds fully in her Sufi vision. Her novels as well as autobiographical works speak about her journeys from Marxism to feminism to psychoanalysis and finally to Sufism.

Lessing was born of British parents in Persia in 1919 and was taken to Southern

Rhodesia when she was five. She spent her childhood on a large farm there and she first came to England in 1949. Since Lessing's formative years were spent in Africa, the African locale dominates in her works and her parents unobtrusively slip into her oeuvre as character stereotypes. She talks of many Africas and this has been discussed at length in the book under review. Historical and geographical Africa, political Africa and psychological Africa all have been referred to. Lessing's placement of her self is with the marginalised and silenced post-colonial voices, her sympathetic leanings are with the natives and her emotional equation is with the relations and personal attitudes of the locals.

Lessing's journey does not end in the mystical realms but moves forward into a world of fantasy and science fiction. Science fiction is full of ideas and Lessing's novels—*Canopus in Argos: Archives*, *Shikasta*, *Sirian Experiments*, and *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five* are a metaphor for the world. There are discussions on global destruction due to increasing, enveloping consumerism; language works through impressions as there are no landscapes, no characters, and a destabilizing function of senses seems to be operating. In *Shikasta* (the word is from Sufi philosophy meaning "breaking is a necessary prerequisite for a new beginning"), *Shikasta* is a colony, *Canopus* a good imperialist and *Shammatt* the evil colonizer. *Johar*, alias *Taufiq* who has many names is the narrator-protagonist. As discussed by the critics on Lessing, the narrative is discontinuous, forcing the reader to adjust modes of apprehension. A multi-perspective range emerges as transition

Kumar writes that Lessing's "apocalyptic vision perceives our planet as moving towards destruction," and therefore the individual must transcend personal yearning and selfhood in order to attain the larger goal.

If Lessing's evolutionary journey reflects in her novels which are a public version, it also reflects in her autobiographical works which are a private version of her self. *Under My Skin*, Volume One of *My Autobiography* and *Walking in the Shade*, Volume Two of *My Autobiography* and *The Memories of a Survivor* are not works of art for art's sake; they are the exposition of her times full of political and social happenings. Infact, these events are enmeshed in the entire corpus of her works. Lessing's books are introspective and develop on transitional transformational changes in her life and writings. Alka Kumar has not only discussed Lessing's autobiographical works in detail but has also broadened our horizons on autobiography and its functions.

Alka Kumar sums up Lessing in her postscript, "Lessing's world rests on the contention that reality is forever in flux, life an evanescence. In such a context evolution is key, freeing from dogma the eternal secret, the crux then laying in the affirmatory potential of the moment." Thus the book enlightens us on the multifaceted aspects of Lessing and helps us to identify ourselves with her at some level or the other.

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Nazriya

Usha Bande

Nazriya

by Dr. V.K. Anand. Allahabad: Akashdeep publications, 2001, pp.44. Rs. 75/-

It was a pleasure to go through Dr. V.K. Anand's charming poems contained in the tiny collection *Nazriya* (View-point). Written in Hindi sprinkled with lilting Urdu expressions, the poems can be termed "verses of fleeting mood" but on close reading one finds them deep in philosophical and spiritual thoughts on life, death, time, love and the inescapable drama of existence. Dr. Anand, an Economist by profession and a litterateur by inclination, writes with the precision of an economist and the flair of a poet.

The book under review has blank verses, Rubaiyyats and Muktaks. Each poem has been given an appropriate heading and the Muktaks and Rubaiyyats are assigned running numbers under one heading each. The mood is set with the first poem, which rejects rites and rituals as social ostentations and makes a plea to realize God with the inner eye. This idea is carried forward in the next poem entitled "Manav Dharma" (The Religion of Humanism) wherein Anand sees the love of fellow beings as the path to reach God. In "Prem Ki Shakti," love transcends the earthly dichotomy of attachment and detachment and becomes a great power: Truth itself, the anchor of life. The poet reflects on the immutability of Time and wonders at the backward movement of Time with the forward

movement of days and dates. This backward and forward movement of Time is an existential dilemma, an enigma that leaves man dangling between the irretrievable past and the unborn future.

A couple of Haikus look at human anguish with quick, fast-spaced verses like:

*Dukhon ka bhar,
Lambi katar,
Sab munh baye khade,
Jaise Ravan ka parivar.*

(In this life grief and anguish stand in a queue like Ravana's family gaping wide to swallow the hapless being).

However, Anand is not a poet of despair or defeatism; rather he has lively wit and an optimistic vision. In the poem "Phalsapha" he tells us the truth in simple tone—if you face light, shadows will be behind you. The poet sees woman as an incarnation of nature—enticing, yet innocent, authentic and iridescent like the rainbow. Dr. Anand's love poems reach the heart directly with their disarming simplicity and maturity of thought.

In short, these introspective pieces capture the mood with their existential themes, apt language and evocative imagery as the poet writes with flavor, downright honesty and sensitivity.

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