

## THE INTERTEXTUAL TRACES OF SUFISM IN DORIS LESSING'S *THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK*

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### Abstract

*Human fragmentation has been remained a dominant theme in both literary and academic worlds. Different theories and notions have been presented to highlight its characteristics and cure. Lessing throughout her literary career also explored this theme in her writings. This paper argues that Lessing at the end of her career started to move towards Sufism and Idries Shah's seminal book *The Sufis* played a pivotal role in this regard. One of the tenets of Sufism believes that truth cannot be represented and communicated through words or any sign system. Mere information is not sufficient to find the truth, for that one has to transform oneself. By employing and utilizing the conceptual framework of intertextuality this paper highlights intertextual connections between Sufism and *The Golden Notebook*.*

Keywords: intertextuality, fragmentation, Sufism, discourse

### Introduction

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the unprecedented changes occurred in the western world. The established values and the world views based on the religion of Christianity were questioned and the new ones were coming forward to replace them. Marxism as a social and economic theory was spreading among the intelligentsia and scientific observations and theories were proving religious assertions as dogma (Akhtar et al. 2021). In the late nineteenth century, Mathew Arnold in his essay *Culture and Anarchy* foresaw this situation and suggested that literature should replace the orthodox religion as it could no longer defend itself against the philosophical and scientific observations. The modern literary writers such as T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence and many others, took the mission to provide the cultural and philosophical harmony against this anarchic world pointed out by Mathew Arnold. For instance, in his iconic poem *The Waste Land*, Eliot portrayed the war-ridden bleak situation of Europe and suggested that eternal peace and harmony should be traced out in the spiritual dimensions pointed out by various spiritual traditions.

Doris Lessing, with a span of almost one hundred years of life, has not only seen the 20<sup>th</sup> and first two decades of 21<sup>st</sup> century but also participated in the social and cultural life of these tumultuous times. Like her many other contemporaries, she was influenced and later got disillusioned by Marxist philosophy. At the end of her writing career she, like her modern predecessors, started to take interest in the spiritual traditions. In this regard Idries Shah's personality and writings influenced her outlook a lot.

In fact, her works, even before her introduction to Sufi thoughts, uncover her characteristic tendency towards Sufi doctrine. These works reveal the fact that she, even before coming across to the book *The Sufis* by Idries Shah, was already searching and probing Sufism. Pointing out the holistic personality of the Sufis, she asserts, "Sufis are both political and spiritual. They are by definition anything but one-dimensional. They are neither only this-worldly nor only other-worldly" (Lessing 14). Her change into Sufi studies is an abandonment of her prior psychological, political or social stands and was a development of her interest in the individual as a searcher. As Lessing expressed in a lecture on Sufism, "Man is woefully underused and undervalued, and he does not know his own capacities" (Lessing, n.d., p. 15). This paper explores traces of Sufi thoughts in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* where the methodology and conceptual framework are borrowed from the theories of intertextuality.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The notion of intertextuality informs us that no text is original and pure. Ferdinand de Saussure, the father of modern linguistics, deduces that signs do not exist because they refer to outside objects but rather they exist due to the principle of differentiation; one sign exists because it is not the other one. In other words, meanings are relational and they depend upon the processes of combination and associations in a semiotic system:

In language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences without positive terms. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system (Saussure, 1916, p. 120).

Roland Barthes, the French literary and cultural critics, is famous for highlighting this aspect of language where he observes how cultural and social world is constructed through different discourses: "We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (Barthes, 1997, p. 146). Keeping this view of language and text in focus, this paper explores how doctrine of Sufism on human fragmentation can be traced out in *The Golden Notebook*.

### **Discussion: Human fragmentation and its cure in *The Golden Notebook***

With reference to earlier discussion, psychological theories in the twentieth century were suggesting that human beings are fragmented and irrational. Pierre Janet in his book *L'Automatisme Psychologique* presents the notion of the fragmented self. He points out that a mental weakness significantly diminishes the limit of the individual to integrate the excess of a specific number of feelings and thoughts, and in this way, individual cannot establish self-consciousness. Morton Prince in his book *The Unconscious* recognizes two procedures of separation and blend. He deduces fragmentation of oneself essentially as "an exaggeration of normal mechanism" (p. 226). In psychoanalysis, Freud established that human psyche is divided into conscious and unconscious parts where the unconscious determines the conscious behavior. Doris Lessing is one of those writers who had explored the themes of human fragmentation and irrational behavior through their writings. The novel *The Golden Notebook* becomes archetypal because it deals with these themes.

The state of human fragmentation occurs when a person finds it impossible to perform according to her own will and volition. In spirit, Lessing sees the collective and the individual as

criteria working to some degree like the Yin and Yang criteria of the Chinese way of thinking, for she perceives that the collective cannot exist without the individual, and the individual cannot exist without the collective. She likewise proposes that all together for both the individual and the group to work at their most elevated possibilities, the individual, a solitary unit of the group, must turn into a completely incorporated individual or an entire individual before he has something of significant worth to offer to the system or the collective:

I am convinced that we all stand at an open door and that there is a new man to be born, who has never been twisted by drudgery; a man whose pride as a man will not be measured by his capacity to shoulder work and responsibilities which he detests, which bore him, which are too small for what he could be, a man whose strength would not be gauged by the values of the mystique of suffering (Lessing, 1962, p. 191).

The human being or “new man” referred by Lessing can be compared with the central characters whose expeditions are charted in her major works. She unfolds the vision of her central characters’ expeditions to get the state of wholeness and their assumptions of risks in their quest to attain it. One fundamental impulse ties together Doris Lessing’s major works, from *Martha Quest* to *Briefing for Descent into Hell*. This motivation has its most obvious definition in *The Golden Notebook*. In any case, humanism represents the whole individual endeavoring to become as conscious and responsible about everything known to mankind (Lessing, 1970, p. 307). The primary notion of Doris Lessing’s great works is the wholeness of characters. The protagonist Anna Wolf, in *The Golden Notebook* highlights the significance of the idea of wholeness stressed by Doris Lessing by saying: “I came home thinking that somewhere in the back of my mind when I joined the party was a need for wholeness, for an end to the split, divided, unsatisfactory way we all live” (Lessing, 1962, p. 24).

Alongside Anna Wulf, both Martha Quest, the central figure in *The Children of Violence*, and Charles Watkin, the one of the major characters in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* perceive a comparative need. The heroines of all these three novels experience themselves as fragmented figures. Doris Lessing defines their fight to accomplish self-reconciliation or completeness as they do not just investigate the inner openings of their individual awareness but also oppose outside limitations or patterns of conduct that compromise their accomplishment of an elevated feeling of uniqueness and satisfaction through everyday life. The whole individual of her fiction is the one whose psyche isn’t constrained by outside powers and who subsequently practices self-sufficiency over one’s life as one settles on with open eyes the prompt choices that offer shape to it. In the novel *Martha Quest*, the protagonist is ready to break the bonds of outside constraints when she sets out on a spiritual inward space venture in her endeavors to accomplish self-awareness. Such individual stops to be egocentric in that he perceives the significance and centrality of others as Martha does when she assists raising the child, Frances, and his nephew, Paul. Such individual perceives the presence of alternate extremes known to mankind however he sees the connection between them not from an either/or point of view but rather from the viewpoint which perceives transcendental dimension beyond these binaries. For example, Anna Wulf finds in *The Golden Notebook* the “joy in spite” when she realizes the picture in her dreams as a picture of herself.

Numerous significant scholars have presumed that the West never ought to have relinquished certain lessons about reality which has been imparted to the East. They have gone to

the Oriental customs in the desire for discovering assets which may help to revive what has been lost and right the profound mystic and otherworldly uneven characters of our human progress. One effect of this progressing scan for a lost but insightful legacy has been the rediscovery of the significance of the creative mind. In putting total confidence on reason, the West ignored the spiritual mind having capacity of seeing and comprehension not accessible to the rational mind.

Moreover, the Western World has relied on the economic industry for the fulfillment of man's desire. But credit is only needed when the individual wants to buy things. People don't wish to purchase on the off chance that they don't see a requirement for an item. But a fragmented and incomplete self is always in need of material things. Self-emptiness might be communicated from various perspectives, for example, low confidence, values, dietary problems, misuse of drugs, and incessant commercialization. It might likewise appear as non-attendance of individual importance, and this can display a need for mystic lead, which once in a while appears as a desire to be guided by the soul of God, by spiritual "truth," or the energy and character of a guide or master (Cushman P. , p. Review 124). The desire to be profoundly guided by can make the individual helpless against the misleading practices of religiously prohibitive (Cushman P. , p. 16), captivating political personalities, untrustworthy psychotherapists, or even exceptionally dictator and controlling sentimental partners.

All these theorists define human fragmentation as the product of society, culture, and religion. They also define the cure or heal of fragmentation and isolation in these terms and treat fragmented beings as patients. So far as their research in regard to the causes is concerned, they have reached the point and to some extent, these researchers are right in the diagnosis and treatment. But they all are overlooking the fact to which the Sufis have pointed out is to know the self, to know the being. The cure of human fragmentation is only through heart, through love. In order to know self, one must surrender his self (khudi) first.

Numerous Sufis used the terms intoxication and soberness to show two conditions that mark the two essential modes where the explorers experience the spiritual self-exposures. Discussing intoxication as a standard term of Sufis, Ibn al-Arabi displays it very well which may be used on three fundamental levels. These are the same three levels that he sees in numerous different real factors. These three levels are "natural", the rational or intelligible, and the divine, corresponding to sense perception (including imagination), reason and spirit, and God (Chhittick, p. 198). The Men of Allah are ranked in a blissful state of "natural intoxication". This rank is the station of pleasure, delight, happiness, and joy, originated by spirits through the overflow of desires when those desires stand up before them in their creative mind as structures remaining alive inside it which they administer and regulate. Fundamentally, Lessing sees an immediate association between the being's expedition for completeness and its relations with the system.

Freud's hypothesis of personality recommended that the human mind is made out of three different yet interfacing parts; the id, the ego, and the superego. The three sections create various occasions and perform various parts in personality, cooperating to shape a whole and to add the person's conduct. Freud's personality hypothesis was impacted by earlier thoughts regarding the psyche working at the conscious and unconscious stage. The work of Freud did not depend on

objective research, but on his speculations and contextual investigations of his patients and others, therefore, his conclusions are frequently seen with skepticism (Vinney, 2019, p. 16).

Like Freud, Carl Jung also deals with human fragmentation in terms of psychic disorder. Jung's analytical psychology demonstrates that psyche develops out of reconciliation between its conscious and unconscious parts. The idea of self for many psychologists is undifferentiated from the ego. But Jung contends that it not only relates to the ego but also "includes it" (C.G.Jung, 1933, p. 142). In Jungian theory, the self is highly significant as he considers it the totality of the psyche to the degree that he alludes to self as the goal of the process of "individuation".

The basic idea in the Sufi way is the possibility of the seeker having direct access to God, without any mediator. It means that the inner transformation must be experienced and not merely examined. A similar and significant notion is the development of an individual's hidden capacity (Lessing, 2017). Until just a couple of years ago, as people of literature, analysts, and the expanding number of those occupied with considering human consciousness now so frequently remind us of the way of Sufi teachings.

In *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing raises the issue of today's human being because they are divided and fragmented from within. Lessing looks for the best way to overcome this fragmentation through the teachings of Sufis for which, she says that people need to focus on their interiority and transformation. They need to break the conventional bounds and discover the reality of their own selves. A central component of such a request concerns understandings of the God-human relationship, originations of the idea of God, of human instinct, and of the motivation behind human presence. The Sufi way is an extraordinary answer to the misapprehensions of modern people and it can help them in eradicating greed, pride, idolatry and bringing humility, love, and joy in their lives. The analysis of the characters in *The Golden Notebook* highlights the fact that human fragmentation besets due to human limitations and responsibilities designed by the society where the individuals feel bound to live a confused and perplexing life. Characters are so artistically entangled by this socially constructed frame that they are unable to understand their hidden desires and thus are divided and fragmented.

Idries Shah is a thinker and philosopher and his views about human fragmentation are altogether different from the theories proposed by idealists. He contends that philosophy should not only satisfy one's intellectual curiosity but it should also be able to offer tools to change confused states of minds. Shah's main concern is to analyze an individual's fragmentation in relation to his social, cultural and economic conditions. According to him, it is a normal fact that the same language and ideas are used in the higher ranges of physics as in the conventional mysticism are utilized, yet this normal ground reaches out to incorporate the new unique thinking in humanities, psychology, and the religions (Shah, 1964, p. 43).

With the background of Sufism, Idries Shah, like Carl Jung, points out the same mistake committed on the part of western scientific and intellectual tradition. One can read the elucidation about the nature of the self or Insaan-e- Kamil (individuated being) in the writings of Al Ghazzali and Ibn El Arabi. It was Ibn El Arabi who discussed and elaborated the highest



peaks of human development and pointed out the possibility of Insaan -e- Kamil. Jalal ud Din Rumi enumerating the different evolutionary stages of human consciousness says:

First he (man) came into the clime of inorganic things, and from the state of inorganic things he passed into vegetable state.

(Many) years he lived in the vegetable state to the animal state, the vegetable state was not remembered by him at all.

Save only for the inclination which he has towards that (state) especially in the season of spring and sweet herb-

Like the inclination of babes towards their mother; it (the babe) does not know the secret of its desire for being suckled;

Again the Creator, whom thou knowest, was leading him (man) from the animal (state) towards humanity.

Thus did he advance from clime to clime (from one world of being to another), till he has now become intelligent, wise and mighty (Rumi, 1926, p. 472).

As pointed out earlier, at the end of his career Freud discovered an interesting phenomenon of contradictory instincts of life and death but according to Sufi perspective he was still far behind. The western intellectual tradition has been fascinated by the subject of death but it seems that it has not yet come to terms with it (Kochar, 2020). The question of death and dying forms an integral part of Sufi way as the whole emphasis is laid on the art of and suggestion to dying. Rumi joyfully proclaims that our death is our wedding with the eternity and Mian Muhammad Bux says if truth is achieved by sacrificing one's life then one should not hesitate to accept such a fruitful deal. In yogic sciences of India, one can hear a very loud voice which says, "Die, Die, O Yogi Die." Pondering over the question of the possibility of man's liberation from the symbolic order, Lacan pessimistically concludes that it is only possible in the realm of death. As long as man lives, Lacan says, he has to live within the bounds of the empty phallus.

The analysis reveals that the characters' fragmentation occurs due to the debilitating and compromising effects of the social structures on the individual. Human beings are always impressed by the prevalent tendencies found in contemporary society and assume that wholeness can also be achieved through getting entangled with them (Imran et al, 2020). For the purpose, they follow them blindly without any attempt to know their own self, and thus remain divided and perplexed. Sufism or Mysticism composes the conscious and unconscious intellect of its natives, love for the divine is considered as everlasting truth from whom the man is isolated from his commencement. Sufis portray the best approach to God by means of feelings and otherworldliness instead of thorough explanation, and along these lines admire the personal connection of the searcher with God. The old magical lessons and practices of Sufis have extraordinary applicability for searchers today and assist with developing profound practice.

Andrew Harvey, a well-known scholar, mystic, spiritual teacher and translator of Rumi's writings, explaining the paths of Sufis says, "It is the way to the heart of hearts, to the utmost, direct intense experience of one's sacred identity (ReShel, 2020, p. 59). Sufis accept in general that Beloved reflects all the individuals and things in this universe, and the love and quest for wholeness in the universe is basically the quest for the association with the One "Your task is not

to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it” (Rumi, 1926, p. 345).

Love is found at the center of the Sufi conviction. The reason and explanation of our existence here is love and we are all on this planet to find out about devotion and love. Experiencing higher love and figure out how to open ourselves to giving and accepting affection, it is narrated that we see the essence of God. We see the numerous essences of the Divine in all we meet in the world including ourselves. At last, we arrive at a phase where we do not observe “many” any longer, but rather, just observe the “One”. Sufis say that the reason of the whole creation is that the perfect being wished to know his own self, and did so by awakening the love of His nature and creating out of it His object of love, which is beauty. Dervishes, with this meaning, salute each other by saying, ‘Ishq Allah Ma’bud Allah’- ‘God is love and God is the beloved’ (Living from the Heart).

The basic purpose of the philosophy of mystic Sufis is to raise humanity to a higher level. And the characters of Anna, Molly in *The Golden Notebook* are the best examples depicted as influenced by the same philosophy. Anna’s four notebooks consist of her life experiences where her Black Notebook narrates her experiences of second world war, Red Notebook Communist Party, Yellow Notebook the painful ending of her love affair with Michael, and Blue Notebook narrates her personal dreams, emotions, and memories. Anna realizes that composition of four notebooks instead of one happens as a result of chaos. She finds confusion in both her life and her character which is symbolized by her giving various colors to the notebooks and again it shows her fragmented personality.

The use of four notebooks by Anna, at first intended to assist her with keeping various parts of her life isolated and sorted out. In any case, as Anna’s wellbeing decays, it becomes progressively hard for her to consider herself to be a responsible individual since she sees pressures between her characters of the author, lover, mother, and political coordinator she starts to feel increasingly divided and fragmented. The feeling of fragmentation in Anna mirrors a more extensive feeling of fragmentation during the wartime. Moreover, Anna’s four isolated books show that she has been trying to get herself unified through words, characters or relations, through events and all other happenings and experiences she came across. In the attempt to unify all these things together she becomes the victim of confusion and bewilderment. Rumi pointing out the absurdity of finding the truth through intellect says, “to wash away blood with blood is absurd, absurd” (Rumi, 1926, p. 219). The Golden Notebook that appears at the end of the novel and unifies all the previous four notebooks is symbolically very important. As there are no words, characters and events found in it, so The Golden Notebook is free from the boundaries of words, characters and relations. It signifies that Anna is free from all the set standards of the society and is in no need of anything to individualize or identify her anymore. But this individuality can’t be achieved without the previous four imperfect books as these imperfect notebooks are the part of perfect book: The Golden Notebook.

Tommy’s character in the novel is very significant where he personifies as a wise man. He observes the behaviors and problems of people around him and keeps a practice of contemplation parallel to Sufi practice of ‘Muraqba’. His attempt of suicide indicates that he is

fed up of the trivialities and is ready to give up his life for the sake of truth. His wish to die is not to give up his life but rather to live life, a whole life. In mystic terminology, death before death is essential to find truth and wholeness. After the suicide attempt, Tommy appears as a totally transformed person who has attained the truth and now is able to point out to Anna to identify her fragmentation. He becomes the spiritual guide of Anna, where he teaches her to follow the path of her heart and not of the mind: the way of Sufi teachings. Sufis perceive the things in spiritual terms away from human limitations and explanations. To access the fundamental truth is the main aim of Sufi teachings where a Sufi teacher always remains in a struggle to provide all the equipment that will ultimately lead you towards the Omni-present God. Sufi teachers stress that one who realizes his own being realizes God (Ajay Kumar Gosh, 2016).

### Conclusion

The paper has highlighted the intertextual links between Sufism and Doris Lessing's writings focusing on her novel *The Golden Notebook*. Due to the decline of orthodox religions and disillusionment from scientific and philosophical theories, Doris Lessing started to move towards Sufism which do not believe on the validity and reliability of so called rationally oriented philosophical approaches and matter based researches of science. It emphasizes that mere information is not sufficient to transform human beings. twentieth century mystic Krishnamurti's statement very aptly points out the limitations of established philosophical and scientific research methods: "The observer is the observed". There is a need to transcend not the limitations of the observer but the very limited observer herself and Lessing like her modern literary predecessors, feels that such kind of pointing can be found in Sufism.

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