



PSYCHOSIS AND SOPHISTICATION IN DORIS LESSING'S *BEN IN THE WORLD*

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ABSTRACT

Doris May Lessing, the Nobel Laureate has a great contribution in literature. In her notable work *Ben in the World* she has focused on the abnormal psychology of Ben, the protagonist as well as of other characters in the novel. This paper concentrates on the psychology of the Janus-faced people of modern society and especially of Ben who is abnormal by birth and needs mental support from the family, friends and all other responsible people of society but he is deluded and misguided by most of all. This paper tries to check the psychology of Ben based on Sigmund Freud's theory in which Freud confers that the personality of a person is the outcome of his/her unconscious thoughts and unconsciousness is decided by the upbringing of parents and the behaviour of the friends and colleagues. Thus the paper throws a light on the money minded mentality of the people in the materialistic age.

KEYWORDS : Abnormal, psychology, Janus-faced, unconsciousness, personality, behaviour

INTRODUCTION

Doris May Lessing, the Nobel Laureate, is a British novelist, poet, playwright, librettist, biographer and short story writer. The Nobel Prize in Literature 2007 was awarded to Doris Lessing "that epicist of the female experience, who with scepticism, fire and visionary power has subjected a divided civilization to scrutiny"¹. Lessing was the eleventh woman and the oldest person to ever receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. Born on 22 October 1919, in Kermanshah, Iran, (then known as Persia), was the daughter of Captain Alfred Tayler and Emily Maude Tayler, who were both English and of British nationality. Adorned with 'David Cohen Prize' (2001) for a lifetime's achievement in British Literature, Lessing was ranked fifth by *The Times* (2008) on a list of "The 50 greatest British writers since 1945".²

Lessing, not highly educated, left the school in the age of fourteen and started working as nursemaid and telephone operator but she continued reading due to her self-interest in reading and writing, though being a mother of three kids from two husbands, her conjugal life could not flourish properly. As a writer and as a mother she expresses her experiences: "For a long time I felt I had done a very brave thing. There is nothing more boring for an intelligent woman than to spend endless amounts of time with small children. I felt I wasn't the best person to bring them up. I would have ended up an alcoholic or a frustrated intellectual like my mother."³ It is her matchless effort in writing that has made her reach to the crest of popularity and she has made a deep and permanent place in the hearts of her readers.

AIM OF WRITING THE PAPER

The paper tries to check the psychology of Ben on the basis of Freud Sigmund's Psychoanalytic theory where Ben's character is true outcome of his nourishment by the parents and the treatment given by the neighbours and friends. Moreover the paper endeavours to elucidate the psychology of the people of normal or strong psyche who, instead of nurturing and supporting Ben, never lose any opportunity to deceive or exploit him. In his oral stage Ben, though his physis competence was different from the common child of that age, could not get the proper attention of the parents and his siblings. That's why he could not overcome this stage properly. At this age total pleasure is felt through the mouth of the child and if the child fails to get proper and balanced treatment in this stage, he/she may be victim of any addiction. Improper accomplishment of anal stage leads the child to extreme consciousness or unconsciousness for sanitation. Ben's filthiness and stinky body is the result of improper upbringing in anal stage. In the same way his phallic, latency and genital

stages were not consummated properly. Thus his total abnormal personality is the consequence of his ill treated nourishment.

"Unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later in uglier ways."⁴

The proverb, 'Society moulds the man' fits on the people who are psychologically strong at least they understand every positive and negative remarks, comments and compliments of others. It is the sole responsibility of parents to train their offspring so that he/she may understand and deal the different type of people of the society. Ben, a child of abnormal physis, needs more attention and psychological support to become a normal child. Instead of intensive care he is ignored and sent to an orphanage where he gets a cruel treatment. Getting the bad company of vagabond/ notorious boys he becomes irresponsible, haughty, frenetic, truculent and violent. His violent nature makes him more abnormal and he is totally controlled by id and never thinks about the consequences.

Id, Ego and Superego are the three basic states that transform the human being to being human. To achieve superego is the main motive of humanity and it is possible only by getting proper mastery over all five psychosexual stages, getting the proper guidelines and teachings of the community and through the personal experiences, the best teacher of life. Id, based on pleasure principle, is the natural urge of pleasure one wishes to get it instantly without thinking anything. Ego, based on reality principle, incites the person to get the pleasure but in proper and acceptable condition and situation. Superego, based on morality principle, controls the urges of a person and teaches the art of living in moral state. Ben could never achieve this state as he could not learn anything positive in the family or the society. At any cost he always tried to gratify his natural urges i.e. sex slumber and hunger. Freud rightly says, "The ego refuses to be distressed by the provocations of reality, to let itself be compelled to suffer. It insists that it cannot be affected by the traumas of the external world; it shows, in fact, that such traumas are no more than occasions for it to gain pleasure."⁵

Psychology of Mentally challenged person

The novelist exposes the real psychology of the people in the society. They who are mentally distorted are generally not harmful for the society, while those who are smart enough always try to take benefits from those who are either innocent or psychologically disturbed. Ben, who is not psychologically normal, becomes the puppet in the hands of most of the

prominent characters of the novel. These types of distorted men need sympathy and support from the normal people but they become the source of entertainment or of business or the marionette in the hands of others. Everyone in the novel exploits Ben for his/her own benefit.

Ben in the World, the sequel of *The Fifth Child* exposes the life of the protagonist Ben from his adulthood to his pathetic death. He is shown in a very pathetic condition, dependent, incapable, trivial and helpless figure in the society. As a wanderer about the street of London Ben is repudiated by his horrified family, cheated by all employers as they employ his brute strength for their own benefits. In this novel Ben is shown in the contacts of several people but most of them use him for their own interest. These Janus-faced people pretend to show mercy on him or support him by their fake sympathy but actually they exploit and deceive him.

Ben, at everywhere, receives rejection and unpleasant comments that's why his unconsciousness is always indulged by negativity. Words and communication, positive or negative and appreciation or disapproval always affect us deeply. Subconscious part of the mind is always filled with the words and actions a person passes through. Freud appropriately addresses-

"Words have a magical power. They can bring either the greatest happiness or deepest despair; they can transfer knowledge from teacher to student; words enable the orator to sway his audience and dictate its decisions. Words are capable of arousing the strongest emotions and prompting all men's actions."⁶

Though Ben knew nothing even about daily routine work yet he followed the instructions of Mrs Biggs. When she says, "I want you to go to bathroom, take off your clothes and wash yourself", Ben obeyed her though "He had not washed himself in this thorough way before but he remembered, what she did and did the same." (BITW 18)

Ben, due to his abnormal and underdeveloped psyche, does not get due attention and care of the family. His birth is the turning point in the novel *The Fifth Child* as not only Ben but the whole family is disturbed and distorted completely. In *Ben in the World* Ben is shown to live out of the family. He is accepted only by Mrs Biggs, an eighty-year old and lonely lady, who brings him at her home, wishes to support him but due to her old age, low income (only pension) and loneliness she fails to provide him basic facilities and the psychological support in the outer society as she does not have any proof of his birth. That's why she suggests him to bring his birth certificate. She feels an inner satisfaction when he executes or learns any work. Ben also finds himself in psychologically strong position with Mrs Biggs.

"He did everything as she would have wanted. Then he went to a little shop and bought bread for her – the pale yeasty smell always made him feel a little nauseous – and some meat for himself, and too, a tin of cat food. All this he did successfully and let himself back in, and put on his clean clothes." (BITW 18)

Psychology of Mentally Sound People

It is the social responsibility of every person in the society that he or she should help or motivate to all of them who are physically or mentally frail but today the scenario has completely changed as the people are very opportunists and have two faces. The face they expose to the society is very innocent, soft, benevolent and sympathetic for others while the other (real) one is very cruel and cunning, usually not accepted by the society; that's why they keep it hidden and apply to take undue benefits.

After the death of Mrs Biggs, Ben, in search of relief and encouragement, goes to Rita whom he had met earlier. Instead of helping him Rita, a prostitute with the help of her producer Johnston, perverts Ben in the smuggling of narcotics. Rita and Johnston send him to France with a large amount of narcotics and earn a lot of money. Finally they quit him in France under the temporary care of Richard, one of Johnston's commission agents. Richard also skips from there by leaving Ben alone in the hotel where he meets Alex who is a film producer.

Alex gets an idea to make a film on Ben due to his abnormal personality. Here arises a very interesting question- whose psychology is abnormal? Ben's, who is an abnormal and helpless person, needs help and mental assistance but he is misguided for the business of the shrewd people of the world or Alex's who is normal and well prosperous person can facilitate him in all respect but he employs and misguides Ben for his business (film) and throws him away even he never cares his emotions. He takes Ben to Brazil to shoot his film and introduces with Teresa who is an actress and becomes Alex's girlfriend during his stay in Rio. Teresa has sympathy for Alex and she is attached to him and introduces Ben to Inez, her friend and a scientist as well. Now Alex quits the idea of making the movie and Ben is introduced with Alfredo who claims that he has seen such people earlier but never discloses the place and time where and when he has met such people. It is a perfect planning to kidnap Ben for some experiments.

The book climaxes with the scientific institute Inez works for kidnapping Ben to experiment on, Teresa saving him with the help of Alfredo, and a trek into the mountains of Brazil to see the people who are 'like Ben'. After reaching there they find out that those people are only rock paintings. Ben is the only person of his species still alive- he is a step backwards in evolution. The crushing despair, Ben feels, leads him to throw himself off the edge of a cliff, killing him instantly. This is where the novel ends.

Ben always wanted sympathy and appreciation like others though he was not capable to express his feelings well through the words properly. When Mrs Biggs appreciates Ben for small works, he becomes emotional to express gratitude. "You're a good boy, Ben' she said, and tears came into his eyes and she heard him give a sort of bark, which meant he wanted to say thank you to her, expressing his love and gratitude for those words, but he had never heard them, except from her." (BITW 18)

Ben, with very little efforts of Mrs Biggs, was able to handle trivial household duties. "The neighbor came in, saw Ben there, carrying cups and plates into the kitchen and was pleased for she had defended Ben to the other people of the landing, or who had seen him on the stairs. Now she could say that Ben was looking after Mrs Biggs." (BITW 19) It proves that he could be cured up to a limit if he were treated well and positively by all the members of the family and society also.

In *Ben in the World* Ben falls under the effect of id while most of the characters are under the influence of ego and they try to satisfy their id based on suitable situations. Nobody, except Mrs Biggs, seems to achieve superego. It shows that in this materialistic age everyone tries to achieve success in the form of money by hook or by crook. Freud writes-

"I have found little that is 'good' about human beings on the whole. In my experience most of them are trash, no matter whether they publicly subscribe to this or that ethical doctrine or to none at all. That is something that you cannot say aloud, or perhaps even think."⁷

Freud advocates the importance of unconscious thoughts more than the conscious ones as it is unconscious thoughts that shape the real personality of a person. In case of Ben he always got the ill treatment by all whether they were his parents, neighbours or friends. So there was an endless and uninterrupted chain of unconscious thoughts in his mind and he was always surrounded with these vengeful thoughts and he joined the company of notorious boys. Later on he became the victim or puppet in the hands of cruel inhuman beings.

"Properly speaking, the unconscious is the real psychic; its inner nature is just as unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is just as imperfectly reported to us through the data of consciousness as is the external world through the indications of our sensory organs."⁸

It is quite intricate to understand the psychology of human being as Freud writes, "Men are more moral than they think and far more immoral than they can imagine."⁹ He describes the basic needs of human beings in his theory how they are eager to satisfy the same instantly or according to situation but in this novel as well as in the modern society we find the people focusing on money only and they always try to get it in all situations. Ben, unknown with the astute people of the society, fails to achieve anything or to carry out any of his desires. The people who are smart enough or of normal psyche, can explain or manage the problems properly but the person of undeveloped or underdeveloped psyche like Ben are completely unable to manage the situation even they cannot express their problems well. Thus their thoughts are suppressed and become more problematic and their personality becomes more abnormal. Freud writes-

"He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore."¹⁰

CONCLUSION

Thus, through this paper I have tried to conclude that Ben, though abnormal by birth, could be normalized by proper treatment of the parents as well as of his colleagues, employers and all other sound and responsible people of the society but nobody paid attention to this side as they, shrewd people, were busy in growing their business by hook or by crook especially by taking undue benefit of such challenged person like Ben. Consequently Freud's theory is completely applicable on Ben's psychology as due to misbehavior of all he became introvert and his unconsciousness was always lingered to suppressed thoughts. His personality was the result of his ill nourishment by his parents and mal treatment by the society and overall he could not get mastery over any of his psychosexual stages. Thus Freud, proving his theory of unconsciousness genuine and scientific, says-

"The poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious; what I discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied."¹¹

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