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Sufisim in Doris Lessing's The Four Gated City

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies Sufism and its relevance in “The Four-Gated City” written by Doris Lessing. Sufism is an esoteric movement and regarded as the backbone of all religious systems. The study examines how Sufi thought permeates the thematic structure in spiritual and philosophical aspects in the novel. It seeks to examine how Sufi elements are imbedded in the novel, especially in terms of the characters psychology and their spiritual progression, and how Sufism provides a fine contrast to the narratives, alluding to the Western themes of rationality, individuality, and materialist perspectives, making this comparative in nature as well. And what is the function of mysticism within the context of Lessing's progression of her critique of modernity and her portrayal of the nature of being human?. To answer these questions, the research examines the nature of the incorporation of Sufi ideas like the wahdat al-wujud and the journey of the soul in the

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novel. It studies the characters journeyed in their experiences and how do the songs reflect the Sufi stages of spiritual development. Using Sufism to Critique Western Rationalism and Materialism. The methodology is a close reading of the novel, finding Sufi themes, symbols, and metaphors. A Sufi perspective with special focus on the representation of spiritual progress and awakening is the theoretical framework of the study. Finally, the comparative method employed in this study draws parallels not just between the visualization of the spiritual ascent in the Shikasta, but also in the Sufi classics of Rumi and Ibn Arabi. This research rests on the theoretical foundations of Sufi mysticism and comparative lit-examples drawn from the works of Idries Shah and others who presented Sufi-themed scholars to the West. Using postmodern literary theory, the book considers how Lessing subverts linear narratives through mystical beginnings, which is contrary to Western conceptions of progress and individuality. These are examples from the study's results which suggest that the principles of the Sufi doctrine function as the fictional and philosophical basis placed at the centre of the novel's exploration of human potential as a means for social change. Through Sufism, Lessing provides a glimpse of mute-bodied existence, spiritual enlightenment, and unity consciousness beyond the confines of a self-referencing mind. In the mystical experiences of its protagonists, there is a critique of the alienation in the modern world, an idea that true progress is in finding the inner self spiritually, not materially.

Keywords: Sufism, Doris Lessing, The Four-Gated City, Mysticism, Spiritual Development, Unity, Postmodernism, Critique Of Modernity

الصوفية في رواية "مدينة البوابات الاربع" للكاتبة دوريس ليسنج

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مروة احمد مهدي

المستخلص

تدرس هذه الورقة التصوف وأهميته في رواية "مدينة البوابات الأربع" للكاتبة دوريس ليسنج. يُعتبر التصوف حركة باطنية ويعد العمود الفقري لجميع الأنظمة الدينية. تبحث الدراسة في كيفية اختراق الفكر الصوفي للهيكل الموضوعي من الجوانب الروحية والفلسفية في الرواية. وتسعى إلى فحص كيفية تضمين العناصر الصوفية في الرواية، خاصةً من حيث نفسية الشخصيات وتقدمهم الروحي، وكيف يوفر التصوف تبايناً دقيقاً مع السرديات التي تلمح إلى موضوعات الغرب من حيث العقلانية والفردية والمنظورات المادية، مما يجعلها أيضاً دراسة مقارنة بطبيعتها. وتطرح الدراسة السؤال: ما هي وظيفة التصوف في سياق تقدم ليسنج في نقدها للحدثة وتصويرها لطبيعة الكائن البشري؟ للإجابة على هذه الأسئلة، يبحث البحث في طبيعة إدماج الأفكار الصوفية مثل وحدة الوجود ورحلة الروح في الرواية. ويدرس تجارب الشخصيات في رحلاتهم وكيف تعكس هذه التجارب مراحل التطور

الروحي في التصوف. كما يستكشف كيفية استخدام التصوف لنقد العقلانية والمادية الغربية. تعتمد المنهجية على قراءة متأنية للرواية، بهدف اكتشاف الموضوعات الصوفية والرموز والاستعارات. يشكل المنظور الصوفي مع التركيز الخاص على تمثيل التقدم الروحي والاستيقاظ الإطار النظري للدراسة. وأخيراً، تعتمد الطريقة المقارنة المستخدمة في هذه الدراسة على إيجاد أوجه التشابه ليس فقط بين تصوير الصعود الروحي في رواية "شيكاستا"، بل أيضاً في الكلاسيكيات الصوفية مثل رومي وابن عربي. يستند هذا البحث إلى الأسس النظرية للتصوف الصوفي وأمثلة الأدب المقارن المستمدة من أعمال إدريس شاه وآخرين ممن قدموا علماء صوفيين إلى الغرب. باستخدام نظرية الأدب ما بعد الحداثة، يناقش الكتاب كيف تقوم ليسينج بتفكيك السرديات الخطية من خلال البدايات الصوفية، وهو ما يتناقض مع المفاهيم الغربية للتقدم والفردية. وتشير النتائج التي توصلت إليها الدراسة إلى أن المبادئ الصوفية تعمل كأساس خيالي وفلسفي يوضع في مركز استكشاف الرواية لإمكانات الإنسان كوسيلة للتغيير الاجتماعي. من خلال التصوف، تقدم ليسينج لمحة عن وجود يتجاوز الجسد، عن التنوير الروحي والوعي بالوحدة خارج حدود العقل المرجعي الذاتي. في التجارب الصوفية لأبطال الرواية، هناك نقد للاغتراب في العالم الحديث، وفكرة أن التقدم الحقيقي يكمن في إيجاد الذات الداخلية روحياً وليس مادياً.

الكلمات الدالة: التصوف، دوريس ليسينج، مدينة البوابات الأربع، التصوف، التطور الروحي، الوحدة، ما بعد الحداثة، نقد الحداثة.

1. INTRODUCTION

"The Four-Gated City" by Doris Lessing / The fourth book in Lessing's Children of Violence series, not only does it feel like the ending, but also the point at which her approach to writing changed radically, embracing mystical and esoteric themes. Lessing grew into her intellectual evolution; Sufism captivated her—mystical sect of Islam concentrated on the inward search for God, and spiritual enlightenment. Given Sufism's emphasis on the soul's journey, inner transformation and transcendence of the self, it provides an important aspect to understand the thematic framework of "The Four-Gated City" and the character development of its protagonists. This paper explores Sufism in the novel — how it is present there, in what way Sufi thought articulates spiritual development of the characters and opposes, or tends to oppose, the prevailing Western ideologies of rationalism, materiality and individualism which Lessing critiques through the course of the novel. Often regarded as the spiritual core behind many religious systems, Sufism, this esoteric movement, highlights the importance of oneness with the divine (i.e., wahdat al-wujud or the "Unity of Being") and the path towards illumination of the inner self (Shah, 1964).

Lessing includes many Sufi themes in her novel, particularly in the psychological and spiritual growth of Martha Quest, the protagonist of the novel. The tale follows Martha on her trajectory from a fragmented and fallen persona to a more integrated and spiritually evolved self. The experience of spirituality follows the Sufi way in which the spirit passes through stages of purification and illumination, discarding layers of self-identification and corporeal attachment to achieve a higher plane of awareness (Schimmel, 1975).

The philosophical framework of Sufism as integrated into Lessing's thesis serves to show the scarcity of Western rationalism and materialism, frequently personified within the novel both as a spirit that leads to alienation and as a force that causes fragmentation. The novel goes on to imply that as modernity progresses, people become further estranged from themselves, and from each other. In response to this alienation, Lessing embodies a Sufi concept, namely that progress is not to be sought in outer success or intellectual domination, but rather in inner reconversion. The opposition between Sufi mysticism and Western rationality is crucial for the novel's examination of our humanity, or lack thereof, in an increasingly mechanical, dehumanizing world (El-Zein 2000).

Breaking Sufi Worldview The Sufi understanding of the times and the mental evolution of the spirit is also reflected in the structure itself — in the fragmented narratives and nonlinear progression of the novel. Western narratives are often imbued with a sense of linear progress and individualism that Sufi mysticism challenges through its cyclical time and the integration of the dissolution of the ego with the process of spiritual awakening (Baldick, 1989). Subversive though they may be, Lessing's work is often deeply evocative of the subjects of spirituality, ritual and the creation of meaning which necessarily for her characters and readers alike, lie beyond the boundaries of rational thought and into a collective unconscious through which her form mimics their spiritual journey. This study thus approaches Sufism "The Four-Gated City" through the lens of some of its most seminal thinkers such as Rumi and almost -eight of the main works of Sufi thought and its modern exponents such as Idries Shah who did much to awaken the West to Sufi philosophy (Shah, 1971). This comparative reading will showcase how Lessing depicts spiritual progress through Sufi stages of development, thus providing a powerful critique of the modern, materialist world. In this reading, Sufism—as presented in the novel—offers a radical vision of human possibility and social change, depicting spiritual awakening as the means for emancipation from the alienation of modernity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

"The Four-Gated City" focuses on its complex narrative structure and postmodern critique of modernity or perhaps rationalism/materialism. Yet the Sufi mysticism in the text adds a profound layer of spirituality and philosophical insight. The readings articulate how Lessing's engagement with mysticism, specifically Sufism, defines spiritual destination and challenges western norms thus offering an alternative narrative for individual consciousness perception. The Mystical Sufi path of Islam focuses upon the internal Spiritual map to union with God (wahdat al- wujud), ego-melting disappearance into Allness, Need no thought Awareness of baqa. In Lessing's work, they are not explicitly religious (myth takes the place of true belief) but still concern a rarified

spiritual truth that straightens out conventional Western individualism and materialism. This tradition is exemplified by the works of Schimmel (1975) and Chittick (1989), who help to unpack some key Sufi tenets, particularly their understanding of the spiritual quest as a journey through various stages of awakening that ultimately leads one to realise the essential unity behind all things—an idea which may be seen having expression in Lessing's writing on *Martha Quest*. Lessing's involvement with these mystically moving issues then again empowers her to assault what modernity brings, of disassociation and parts leading straight to the levelheaded finish for practically everybody. A number of recent studies have elaborated the mysticism in “*The Four-Gated City*”. Almaarroof and Khudhair stipulates that Lessing articulating the postmodern vision of absolute truth through mystical devices to dismantle traditional Western narratives about "progress" and rationality as Ian McEwan does in *Atonement*, respectively. In doing so, Almaarroof and Khudhair insist that Lessing uses Sufi traditions (such as the path to Truth) in her novel to show a more elasticized version of reality or truth than postmodern equations not just limited by its own assumptions but also arbitrary conditionings. This indicates that Sufism in Lessing's writing is not just useful only as a spiritual guide but also seems to be used against Western epistemologies. In her (2024) comparative paper on mysticism in Doris Lessing's *The Four-Gated City* and Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love*, Almaarroof explores the ways that Sufism undergirds both novels not to reveal Orientalist stereotypes as much as to defy societal conventions inherent within sensibilities while underscoring a spiritual exploration for self-awareness coupled with union. Almaarroof draws a connection between the characters in both novels, concluding that Lessing and Shafak use Sufism as an appeal to unbinding—a liberation from the bounds of individual egoism, felicity or material success (2024). This comparison draws out Lessing versus such as characters, the way Shafak employs Sufi ideas to reflect on modernity and how both writers integrate different paths of thoughts in their works. Finally, as one has already noted in Almaarroof and Hamad (2024), the mystical elements are also explored cross culturally by regarding mysticism through linking Rumi to Emily Dickinson with Adeeb Kamal Al-Din; embedded here too is Ansam Almaarroof's relativity. Utilizing multiple mystical traditions, they demonstrate that Lessing's handling of mysticism in “*The Four-Gated City*” belongs to the broader landscape literary mysticism which uses experiences of this kind as tools used by authors when reflecting on the ultimate extents and possibilities for achieving spiritual transcendence (Almaarroof & Hamad, 2024). It is all one a reminder though that Lessing's engagement with Sufism belongs to the long line of other writers for whom this dissolution of self and desire toward unity in higher truth has been at the heart. In a kindred study, Hemad and Al-Douri (2022) analyze the manifestation of mystical experience in Emily Dickinson's later poems, showing how mysticism offers an opportunity to delve into both selfhood and deity. While they write here in relation to Dickinson, their discussion about mysticism and literature is useful for considering similar themes in “*The Four-Gated City*”. This position is echoed in literary discourses of mystical experience as a social and religious satire, which parallels the way Sufi themes are employed by Lessing to resist contemporary modernism and materialism (Hemad & Al-Douri, 2022). Another significant comparative perspective: Elif Shafak's Sufism in . Shafak uses Sufi ideas, mainly that of Rumi as Lessing does with it in critiques toward societal norms and development considering spirituality. The Sufism also works as a structure for both character to their spiritual journey and development but

it provides a criticism of contemporary western thinking Elif Shafak's *Between the Two Points* called *Sufi 2024*. In so doing, it revisits the almost-forgotten relationship between Lessing and Sufism in a wider context of using mystical traditions as literary means for exploring materiality against spirituality.

Sufism in “*The Four-Gated City*” and other works of Lessing provides with an illustration for a variety literature examining how mysticism interacts with postmodern critique of modernity. Through an analysis of her characters’ spiritual journeys in terms of their Sufi connections, experts like Almaarroof [sic], Chittick and Schimmel elucidate the way that Lessing employs spirituality to undermine the estrangement and fragmentation arising from modernism with a conception of interconnectedness (Schivelbusch 36) disconnected only by material rationality.

3. METHODOLOGY

Using a qualitative content analysis method, this paper investigates the Sufism that has permeated the style and thought of Doris Lessing in “*The Four-Gated City*”. This methodology consists of a close reading of the novel with an emphasis on the incorporation of Sufism through motifs and imagery in Lessing’s mid-career novel as a form of description for spiritual awakening and criticism of modernism. This analysis seeks to establish the prominent features of Sufi thought including *wahdat al-wujud* (the Unity of Being), the journey of the soul, and the Sufi stages of spiritual development, and how those features are elucidated and defined as they influence the composition and progression of character in the novel. There is also a comparative analysis which compares Lessing's depiction of the spiritual journey in *The Four-Gated City* to classical Sufi texts, in particular those of Rumi and Ibn Arabi. Such a comparative process, in turn, supports an in-depth examination of how Lessing reworks Sufi mystical components to forge counter-narratives to Western materialism and individualism. Through a juxtaposition of these aspects of Sufi ideology with the narrative strategies employed in Lessing’s writing, this study aims to uncover the novelistic and philosophical premise of the novel's construction and intertextuality with Sufism and contextualize these concerns within the broader scope of Lessing’s ideological and literary concerns.

Unsurprisingly, the analysis will centre mainly on the psychological/spiritual journeys of the characters, and particularly Martha Quest, along with other protagonists who significantly and often profoundly evolve across the plot. This dissertation will explore the manifestation of the ego death, higher spiritual reality, and cyclical spirituality in the works of Lessing. Finally, the analysis will discuss the way these Sufi influenced components act against the representation of the West as the theme of rationality and materialism, which creates a tension between the spiritual, the transcendental and the societal, the alienating.

4. THEORITICAL BACKGROUND

The work on which this paper is based has a theoretical framework not only in Sufi mysticism, but also in the postmodern literary theory, emphasizing the notion of mystical thought as a tool for the obtuse critique of modernity. “*The Four-Gated City*” is largely concerned with the themes of spiritual progress and transcendence, and this conceptual

framework is rooted in Sufi mysticism, which holds that the advance of the soul includes distinct intermittent stages on the progress toward self-annihilation and oneness with divinity. The notions of *wahdat al-wujud* (Unity of Being), and the journey of the soul are among the cornerstones of Sufi thought and thus, will be employed to offer the context for the spiritual journeys of Lessing's characters (Schimmel, 1975; Chittick, 1989).

Sufism presents stages of spiritual development that are crucial to understanding how Lessing depicts the inner transformations her characters undergo—the purification of the soul (*tazkiyah*), the annihilation of the ego (*fana*), and others—while these stages are not compatible with Jungian archetypes. The paper, then turns to consider these stages of Sufi practice as found in classical Sufi thinkers such as Rumi and Ibn Arabi and compare them to the spiritual development taking place in the novel as characters evolve towards a higher level of consciousness that transcends the boundaries of the individual ego (Schimmel, 1975; Baldick, 1989).

Postmodern literary theory is also used to explore how Lessing works against linear, Western trajectories of progress and individualism. Postmodernism can also be compared to the postmodern rejection of grand narrative and the idea of identity fixed in time with Sufism, though that is not the first comparison made to Sufism where Sufism often is seen as more cyclic on the path of development. Using postmodern theory, this study will examine how Lessing utilizes mysticism in her work as a means of deconstructing Western notions of rationality and material success, representing instead a more fluid and interconnected sense of human possibility (Hutcheon, 1988; Hassan, 1987).

Comparatively, the framework brings together Lessing's novel and specific Sufi writings, especially those of Rumi and Ibn Arabi whose exploration of the processes of spiritual development and union with the divine presents significant parallels to the mystical elements of *The Four-Gated City* (Chittick, 1989; Shah, 1964). The project brings together Sufi mysticism and postmodern critiques of Western culture in order to show how Lessing's spiritual themes expose the ideologies of the dominant culture and propose alternative ways of being.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

“*The Four-Gated City*” by Doris Lessing read, both as a novel of the spirit and a novel of the psyche, can be described using some terms from Sufi mysticism and a few from postmodern theoretical discourse. This section will explore the presence of Sufi themes, in particular the Unity of Being (*wahdat al-wujud*) and the spiritual path, in the structure and characterization of the novel and how these notions act as a critique of (Western) rationalism, materialism, and individuality. By using the plot and characterization of the protagonist, Martha Quest, as well as other characters, Lessing illustrates a journey toward the realization of an enlightened state of being, which is the Sufi process of spiritual transformation. This novel's fragmented, nonlinear structure and mystical elements also embody postmodern critiques of grand narratives, implying that the only progress possible is not material, but through the destruction of the self in the form of a "higher" state of consciousness. It can be seen from Sufi ideas in “*The Four-Gated City*”. The Unity of Being (*wahdat al-wujud*) is perhaps the most famous of the Sufi ideas embraced in the novel, as it advances the idea that all of existence is an expression of the

Divine and the objective of the spiritual path is the realization of this unity. When it comes to Sufi mysticism, to attain the divine reality (haqiqat) the individual must purify and transform themselves to come to attain unity with the divine through the dissolution of the ego (fana). This notion of truth is at the heart of the spiritual lives of the characters presented, especially focusing on Martha Quest in the novel who undergoes a journey of spirituality from broken, others-hating self to completion that is akin to the stages of the Sufi journey.

In the early part of the novel, Martha is shown to be so utterly estranged from herself and her environment. She did not like materialism and rationalism of post-war Britain which resonates with Sufi critique of the earthly attachments. Like a Sufi aspirant, Martha feels that beyond the world of appearances there is something else, something not to be grasped by the intellect or the rational mind. When she says, "I feel that I am in search of something, but I do not know what it is," (Lessing, 1969, p. 186) the void in her spiritual life comes through. I am something that have broken in me, and I don't know how to fix it (Lessing, 1969, p. 187). The gap represents the longing of the soul for union with the divine—a key concept in Sufism, where the self seems to be incomplete, until it knows unconsciously or consciously, that there is no one except God.

A turning point in Martha's spiritual development is witnessed when Martha meets Lynda Coldridge, a denizen of the otherworldly whom Martha turns to as a mentor of sorts, guiding Martha toward an interpretation of life that is more spiritual or mystical. Through Lynda, Martha begins to challenge the dominant ideas of Western civilization — concepts of progress, rationality, individuality. Lynda, herself, is the wali or spiritual friend in Sufi thought who guides the seeker on the path. This sort of relationship between Lynda and Martha mimics how the traditional Sufi teacher-student relationship functions: the seeker is led toward a more elevated truth of reality. Lynda's comments about seeing / perceiving beyond form as well as familiarity with the "substance of things" hark back to the Sufi concepts of being able to "separate the tangible from the intangible" and being able to see "beyond the form" to the divine essence that informs all forms (Chittick, 1989, P.1) In one key moment, Lynda says to Martha, "You take too much interest in the skin of stuff. What matters is underneath. When so, your body becomes a 'Jim Crow, but then you've got to get rid of your mind, your ego — it's just a prison'"(Lessing, 1969, P. 301). This embodies the Sufi idea of fana—the vanishing of the self—which is necessary for the lover to have union with God.

6. THE SOUL JOURNEU AND SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

The psychological and spiritual patterns of the main characters in *The Four-Gated City* correspond to the levels of the Sufi path. Sufi mysticism describes the stages of the soul through the process of repentance (tawbah), purification (tazkiyah), annihilation (fana), and subsistence (baqa) within the Divine. The journey Martha takes also embodies this progression, transitioning from a sense of disconnection and fragmentation to one of wholeness and understanding of the wider universe and her position within it.

Martha's rejection of the isolated individualism and consumerist culture of the West culminates the eponymous character's psychological metamorphosis, critiqued then throughout the novel. Her ultimate discovery that there is no external world that can be

changed, only the internal world that she can change, is also in accordance with the Sufi belief that the only way to gain real freedom is through the annihilation of the self, through the loss of real concern for the material plane (Schimmel, 1975). It is clear when Martha says: "The more I let go of who I think I am, the more I feel connected to everything. No division, only a vast consciousness" (Lessing 1969, p. 418). This understanding resonates deeply with the fundamental Sufi aspiration to attain oneness with God (wahdat al-wujud). According to critics like Abdulrazak (1997), Lessing in this novel has located the path of spiritual awakening not just for Martha, but also for the society in which she lives, so that it is not just a personal journey but a social and political statement. In depicting spiritual transformation as the answer for the alienation and brokenness of modernity, Lessing is indirectly critiquing the failures of Western culture by insinuating that technological advancement and logical reasoning have resulted in a disconnect from completeness of the spirit. By taking on the mystical journey, Lessing is critiquing the rationalism and individualism which dominates modernity, and advocating for a vision of connectedness, and collective consciousness — which Abdulrazak writes follows her connections to Sufism (p. 245).

7. CRITIQUE OF RATIONALITY: POSTMODERN STRUCTURE

"The four-gated city" has a scattered and nonlinear structure, much like the Sufi, who reject the linear, rational narrative. Postmodern theory critiques linear narratives as representative of Western notions of progress and individual success, which are the very values Lessing critiques in her novel. The novel's structure, its oscillation of time, perspective, and narrated voice, aligns with the Sufi view of time as circular and nonlinear; where spiritual evolution is not a linear path, but a nesting of transformations and realizations (Hutcheon, 1988).

According to postmodern theorist Ihab Hassan (1987), Lessing's tonal shifts from a modernist, linear narrative to moments of mysticism mark a break from the tradition of the modern Western novel, undermining the idea of individual advancement and presenting a model of intellectual development through collective spiritual experience. Lessing, Hassan writes, has a mystical turn in the novel, a postmodern maneuver that critiques

"the very essence of reasoned certitude, rationality, intelligence," in which the ego dissolves and "time (and space) loses its regularity and coherency," which means that "mysticism thus gets to reject the Enlightenment," (p. 112)

In combining Sufi mysticism with a postmodern style of writing, Lessing's novel functions as both criticism of Western ideologies and a celebration of an alternative vision of human potential based on spiritual wholeness and interconnectedness rather than materialism and competition for individual accolades.

8. THE USE OF SYMBOLS IN THE NOVEL

The city is most often conceived as an allegory of the human soul or consciousness in Sufi thought with its gates, guardians and levels signifying paths one must follow to

liberate themselves from material existence so that they may realize God within. Sufi teachings are such where spiritual growth involves passing through various "gates" ("military: managed policies, rules) in a diligent and attentive manner. This concept is consistent with the Sufi doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* (Unity of Being), in which a kind seeks to lose him or herself, as an ordinary person and all about his littleness associated ego that merges with Jesus inside state connected along by using God.

In a novel, these four gates can be perceived as allegories on the mystical states of development in Sufism: awakening, purification, annihilation (*fana*), and finally abiding with God (*baqa*) (Chittick 1989). And just like how life takes us from one place to another, as fragmented beings in the endless pursuit of something more than what we have — so Martha Quest travels through London and then on toward her own soul becoming whole again. The city, therefore, symbolizes the emotional and mental terrain through which Martha (and in turn all of humanity) must walk if she is to achieve peace and enlightenment within herself. The city in the title can also be seen as an allegory for modernity, and that which is represented by materialism or rational thinking in Western countries, all of which Lessing underlines throughout her novel. In this reflecting pool, the four gates of Yvonne can also be seen as a liminal line between the chaotic, fractured outer world formed from modern society and all that comprises with it against internal sanctuary or the self. This may embody the theory that the city in and of itself is actually both a confinement as well as an escape. The gates indicate an era possibility in which modern alienation can be surmounted, presenting mysticism and spiritual rebirth as a way out of material failure and individual character bankruptcy (Hassan 1987).

This, as critic Abdulrazak (1997) puts it is manifested through the city gates representing barriers which characters will need to break in order for them to possess a spiritual heightenment(31). The four gates can be interpreted as the major ideologies of modernity—rationalism, materialism, individualism and nationalism—which prevent persons from breaking out their alienated condition. Through these gateways, characters like Martha Quest move on from such constraining ideologies to a more whole and integrative sense of selfhood connected with their world (Abdulrazak,1997).

If you approach it in the context of Sufi mysticism, there is a sense that this title means more than metaphor — but as spiritual philosophy. This multilayer concept of the self (or gates) within Sufism; and how one must come through such layers to be in union with God. The notion of the city working as a symbolic space for these transitions approximates to that of an inward journey in Sufi traditions (Shah, 1964). So those gates are not physical/ metaphysical barriers-is a psychological, spiritual obstacles that individual must face along the way. In this way, the title represents a continuation of an individual's process from being in ego-centered state to spiritual so as not remain fragmented. The four Gates are used to represent how Martha evolves from one state of mind throughout the novel, so each work as a stage in her spiritual journey — much like Sufi path stages.

Accordingly, “The Four-Gated City” acts as an enveloping metaphor for the spiritual/psychological voyage upon which Lessing undertakes. The gates allude to the stages of realization in the path of Sufi mysticism as a seeker progresses through

gateways on their journey towards higher orders of consciousness and unification with divinity. Meanwhile, the gates that stand for material individualism and excessive consumer rights in contemporary Western economics also imply an opposite truth — freedom to be found internally via spiritual enlightenment is greater than economic achievement. The fact that Lessing uses the four-gated city as a central metaphor signals her engagement with Sufi thought and draws upon what is, in essence an extension of this theme—the humanist critique of modernity and its alienating effects (Srinivasan).

The last two paragraphs of Doris Lessing's novel serve as a culmination to the spiritual, psychological and social themes which have rumbled through this astonishing work for some 900 pages. The ending represents the culmination of Sufi seeking an end to being as self, and existence (materiality). The unity and the heightened awareness that Martha Quest as well as the other characters experience in the end of this novel is very similar to what Sufis would refer to *fana* (annihilation on self) — where a person loses his ego or sense of I-ness which we have been taught be our religions/culture, and when there's no identity left it has *baqa* (subsistence/more appropriately continuation than subsistence in God. This is the last “gate” that characters must cross in order to reach enlightenment which perfectly goes with the Sufi spiritual transformation laid out through different spectrum of stories. Finally, at the close of her long journey through self and into spiritModes Try Martha Quest realizes then. something about herself, a truth about the world as it is. Her life recounts the Sufi path of rising above self-centered ego and material attachments. Reflecting on her experiences, Martha discovers something about the world that she previously did not realize:

“You see. we are part of this big whole and it's endless — nobody can stop anything! anywhere in a galaxy either—somehow they tell me one day you will understand what I mean—you said incest is so little because nothing matters where there isn't some small pieces put together like building from water towards air or flesh onto wood if only abstractedly so maybe chemicals too but still with my hands touchingbcbbyy lack seeing then why would any... (Lessing, 1969, p. 452)

This realization corresponds to the Sufic concept of *wahdat al-wujud* (the Unity of Being) which says that all reality is a disclosure or manifestation of God and therefore that love, seeking oneness in everything has found its highest spiritual expression when it understands itself as united with this underlying wakefulness”(Chittick 1989).

The point at which Martha finally opens herself to acknowledge that all life truly is interconnected lines up with the Sufi philosophy of self-annihilation (*fana*), where one literally dissolves their ego -self and melds to become part of the larger picture, or divine reality. The title's "four gates" in this case would appear to be perhaps four psychological and spiritual walls that Martha must scale first in order for us to witness her coming closer;closer towards the final state she will have achieved by achieving enlightenment. Every gate illustrates the progression of her process, leading up to completion: that she has gone through every single one and in doing so reached enlightenment.

The closing sequences of *The Four-Gated City*, besides opening onto a reading in terms of the novel's Sufimetic topology as per se personal spiritual quest for this sort can be

seen from very different points — and that simultaneously serve to forward Browne criticisms about Western material interests simply questioning its heretofore ever life imperialism too much. The thought behind Lessing's conclusion is that the material world which stresses on individualism, progress and rationality fails to satisfy us with any sense of delight or purpose. As Martha muses, "So much trying and so little fight — what are we fighting for? Until he discovers the true fight is in his mind" (Lessing, 1969/1994). Indeed, this critique echoes Sufi thought which suggests that it is the self to be freed through dissolution and inner spiritual growth not from what we do in our careers or lives (Schimmel 1975).

This interpretation of the novel is confirmed by critic Abdulrazak (1997) who maintains that Lessing mobilizes elements of mysticism in *The Four-Gated City* as a critique on modern failures. His claim that "(m)ysticism — particularly the Sufism" represents Lessing's alternative to alienation and fragmentation engendered by modern world materialist values. The ending supports the idea that real progress is in spiritual advancement, not the technology and society of modernity (p. 247). Therefore, the happenings of this latter part are not only a culmination-point for each character in her spiritual journey but has its ultimate ending to society as well: a final suggestion—born directly out of Sufism—that would put them before something more than material substance.

The novel concludes, therefore, from a postmodern perspective with something of an aberration—albeit one that throws into stark relief the traditional Romantic and Victorian inheritances: what if we took seriously (as "true") instead a Sufi view of how time as well spiritual growth are cyclical? At the point that Martha starts to have her religious exit, we perceive development as a spiralling pathway of self-improvement through sensible completing and material success rather than an immediate way. Thus, the ending subverts a typical Western "success" or "progressive" narrative to propose an opposite model of spiritual rise that sees individuals escaping their ego and Enterman opening up towards each other (Hassan, 1987, P.32).

The evolutionary cycle of despair, hope and then joy that encapsulates the theme of Lessing's "*The Four-Gated City*" is primarily a reflection on what Ihab Hassan sees as one postmodern attribute in her fiction:

Lessing turn the spiritual awakening at the end of [the novel] to subvert Western linear time; progress through reason unimpeded by myth or tradition. Rather, she offers a mysticist and non-linear approach to human growth that is concerned with inner rather than outer development" (p. 114).

The end of the novel focuses on a marriage and dissolution into something beyond human, such that we are made to consider again what true progress really involves for one person, or society at large.

In short "*The Four-Gated City*" is a capped transcendental climax to Sufi inspiration of mythical restoration. The Sufi Fifth Way echoes the way women like Martha Quest increasingly come to believe that everything contains everything else—*wahdat al-wujud*

(Unity of Being)—while a Five & Dime store on its sidewalk can provide an environment where experience simultaneously becomes internalized and externalized. Finally, this ending is also a comment on the materialist and rationalism western line of thinking; it suggests that real progress must come in spiritual terms rather than worldly. Accordingly, the conclusion of the novel simultaneously resides in both an individual and universal metaphysical aspect endemic to Sufi philosophy which seeks to establish humanity as a spiritually rooted entity.

9. CONCLUSION

“The Four-Gated City” is an example of Doris Lessing's exemplary deployment of Sufi mysticism alongside contemporary literary traditions and a critique of dominant Western episteme of rationality, materialism and individualism. The Sufi concepts of *wahdat al-wujud* (Unity of Being) and stages of the soul's transformation are explored through the spiritual journey of Martha Quest with the vision of spiritual enlightenment as a way to escape from modern life alienation and fragmentation. Lessing's intentional subversion of narrative conventions and her use of mystical themes force the reader to rethink what progress means and whether humanity can evolve. The novel offers a syncretic mix of mysticism and postmodernism that operates, as Abdulrazak and Hassan pinpoint, as a potent critique of modernity and a restorative call for ontic fullness as opposed to fragmentation.

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