

# A JOURNEY OF KATE BROWN TO HER INNER SELF IN DORIS LESSING'S THE SUMMER BEFORE THE DARK

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**Abstract :** Kate Brown, the heroine of the Lessing's novel-- The Summer Before the Dark is an attractive and intelligent lady aged forty five. She is a continuous care-taker of her husband and a nurturer of her three grown children in a house in the London suburbs. She doesn't expect any change in her course of life until the summer ends. She was abandoned by her husband and children as they were having their own plans for the summer. This novel is Doris Lessing's expedition into the petrifying stretch of time between youth and old age. It is Kate's journey from London to Turkey and then to Spain, from husband to lover to madness, on the road to a startling new independence and a confrontation with self.

Keywords: nurturer, expedition, independence and confrontation with self

## I. INTRODUCTION

The recipient of the 2007 Nobel Prize in Literature, Doris Lessing was described by the award committee as "that epicist of the female experience, who with skepticism, fire and visionary power has subjected a divided civilization to scrutiny." Her 1962 novel *The Golden Notebook* is regarded as one of the twentieth century's critical works of fiction. In *The Golden Notebook*, Mrs. Lessing is concerned with the situation of present-day young women. In *The Summer Before the Dark* her treatment of a forty-five-year-old woman is totally different presenting loneliness, un-usefulness, threats of the old age and death with feelings of sudden independence accompanied with her abandonment by her own loved ones.

At the beginning of the novel, Kate Brown is a skilled woman in a sub-urban city of London. Her children are mature, her husband is a successful neurologist, is going to work for some months in an American hospital. He requests her to take a job. She accepts the job offer that handily comes to her by a friend of her husband. She joins a job as an interpreter for an international conference on food. She visits Turkey for another conference then leaves for Spain too. In this way she starts exploring her inner self in the middle of her life.

## Abbreviations

SBD for The Summer Before the Dark

## I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research work is a qualitative. The methodology for the research work is descriptive analytical and eclectic.

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**Kate Brown as a dependent wife and mother:**

Kate comes to the sad realization that her importance as a mother and wife is nearing to its end. She starts creating "her private stock-taking, her accounts-making," (SBD 9). She comes to the conclusion that for the first time in her life, she has leisure to think because her husband and children have their own plans for the summer; plans that do not include her. For the first time in twenty years Kate is faced with the prospect of being alone.

Jane M. Ussher in 'Women's Madness Misogyny or Mental Illness'; states, "a woman's role is diffuse, unclear, and her work never ending. As a "housewife" she has little structure to her day, and no clear delineation of tasks. She has few rewards. She is often a door-mat for her family, with little or no control" (Ussher 261).

In an interview with Josephine Hendin, 1972, from 'Putting the Questions Differently'. Doris Lessing said "I think a good deal of the depression and the mental breakdown of the middle-aged women are due to the fact they suddenly find they're not able to command attention the way they've always been able to command it... A whole dimension of life suddenly slides away, and you realize that what, in fact, you've been using to get attention, or command attention, has been what you look like, sex appeal or something like that. Once again it's something that belongs to the condition of being a young woman. It's a biological thing, yet for half of your life or more, you've been imagining that this attention has been attracted by yourself. It hasn't."

Kate had been awake of this for long but she had refused to accept it.

**Kate Brown is practicing self-deception:**

Kate has been practicing self-deception in her marriage on the pretext that her husband's occasional extra marital affairs do not make any basic change in their marital life. When she examines it she questions herself, "I'm telling myself the most dreadful lies! Awful! Why do I do it?" (SBD 15). Kate's actual journey towards self-realization starts when she starts questioning the veracity of the values, she had been upholding all her life. She becomes aware of the fact that she has been confined to the domestic enclosure where there is no room for personal development.

Kate finds that she has been restricted by her roles:

Kate finds that she has been restricted by her roles of a mother, wife, and above all a caretaker of the whole family. Her family has also become so used to her roles that they no longer notice her as an individual with her own likes and dislikes. She finds that the ways to lead the family values she has been holding all her life have been falsehoods. She has been illusory about her marriage, children and ideals. "The truth was she was becoming more and more uncomfortably conscious not only that the things she said, and a good many of the things she thought, had been taken down off a rack and put on, but that what she felt was something else again" (SBD 6).

**Kate starts questioning:**

Kate starts questioning the discrepancy she feels between her thoughts and her words. She finds discrepancy between her social roles and private self. When Kate's husband Michael discloses to let their house without being informed and consulted she feels deserted.

"During the summer when she begins questioning her beliefs, she is also forced to relinquish her duties as wife and mother. Her family has various plans and Michael decides to let their house without consulting Kate, which makes her feel "dismissed and belittled" (SBD 21).

**Kate's self confrontation:**

R.W. Wescott present it like, "Striving for release can occur only in one who has achieved awareness of confinement" (Wescott 33).

Kate also has become aware of her state of confinement she has no other choice other than confront herself. Now she comes know after nearly a quarter of a century that she also had been adapting herself to suit the needs of others, "passivity, adaptability to others" (SBD 21) had become the motto of her life.

Kate's adaptability is the hindrance in her own quest: Kate remodels herself physically to suit the atmosphere of Global Food to adapt herself to the situation. She gets successful in her new job also because of her ability to organize things and provide understanding and help. The success brings an offer of a promotion to her for an administrative job at the Global Food. Even when accepting the offer Kate knows that her decision is wrong. What she should have done is "to stay in London, in a room, quietly, by herself. Absolutely alone" (SBD 43).

In continuing to play the role of nurturer to others she is depriving herself of the care it needed. Crossing the boundaries of her country leads Kate to a new stage of her psychic development. When she reaches Istanbul she feels that "subtle approaches were made to her from an unknown world" (SBD 31).

Even before the holiday started Kate has a feeling that it was going to be a failure; "when she looked back, would seem to her all dryness and repetition" (SBD 68). She lacks the single mindedness to go back to London, take a room and "sit quietly and let the cold wind blow as hard as it would" (SBD 68).

As Kate re-examines her past she perceives that she had never been given a chance to choose her way of life. In order to sustain a family she had to acquire the virtues of self-discipline, patience, self-control, self-abnegation, chastity, and above all adaptability. But Kate finds that these virtues have not alone her essential self any good in the long run. "

She concludes that most middle-aged housewives are just, "machines set for one function, to manage and adjust and foresee and order and bother and worry and organise" (SBD 92). She is trained to mask them and behave with composure. Anthea Zeman depicts the predicament of such a woman accurately: "What she cannot ever in her society do is 'be herself' - whatever that may be. She cannot rage, howl, retire from her engagements, be alone, think- or age. As a result, her capacity for finding what it might be to 'be herself' has atrophied, and casting around for the answer she drives herself to a breakdown" (135).

**Conclusion:**

Lessing does not like to be called a feminist but she continuously advocates the feminist awakening to the society through her character portrayals. Elaine Campbell in her article "The Life Passages of Kate Brown: Doris Lessing's Neglected Novel" illustrates the three major phases that distinguish the life journey of an individual as described by Arnold Van Gennep. They are 'separation, transition and incorporation'. The questing heroine separates herself from her earlier surroundings, after a period of transition and integration of the understanding gained, returns to her earlier life, but she returns as an "informed and initiated character." (Campbell 412).

Lessing successfully sensitizes the readers about the silent endurance of middle aged woman and her well explored return to the responsibilities of the household.

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