

## Pursuit of Truth in Doris Lessing's *Shikasta*: Plato and Nagarjuna in Conversation

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### Abstract

In Doris Lessing's novels, obtaining Truth to transcend the soul has been notably emphasized. Similarly, in *Shikasta*, the necessity to acquire genuine awareness has been focused as the mere way to self-transcendence. The detailed inspection of the novel explicates how human species live in amnesia, unable to remember their authentic reality and trapped in the disease of individuation. While the novel does not reject reason as the mean to "remember" the Truth, it mainly regards mindfulness and intuitive knowledge as a tool to achieve authenticity. The facets of amnesia and illusionary conception of the world make the novel a satisfactory text under both Plato's and Nagarjuna's interpretation of visionary world. However, its tilt towards non-dual patterns to attain Truth makes Nagarjuna's approach a contribution to Plato's rational manner in this regard. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to apply Plato and Nagarjuna's pursuit of Truth to examine Lessing's elucidation of authentic knowledge in *Shikasta*. The methodology appropriated in the paper entails depiction of visible world as an illusion of the Real pointed in Plato's allegory of Cave and Nagarjuna's Mundane Truth. We clarify emotion as the main motivator of such illusionary status stressed in both Plato and Nagarjuna's thoughts. We argue that while the importance of reason and eradicating emotion cannot be ignored, what adjoins people to Truth is mindfulness and intuitive knowledge which is close to Nagarjuna's non-dual patterns. By examining ordinary life as the illusion of Real, and emotion as the main obstacle to achieve the Truth emphasized in both Nagarjuna and Plato's trends, we depart from other critics who undermine the eminence of essentialist trace in Lessing's works and examine her approach towards Truth merely under postmodern lens. This departure is significant since we clarify while essentialism has been abandoned to a large extent and supporters of Plato have become scarce, amalgamation of his thoughts with spiritual trends opens a fresh way to earn authenticity in Lessing's novel.

**Keywords:** mundane truth, ultimate truth, emotion, cave allegory, charioteer allegory

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Setting the Scene

Considering Lessing's challenges in arraying the truth beyond conventional forms and narratives in her works, many critics have probed her works using postmodern lens. Critics such as Claire Sprague (1986), Gayle Green (1991), Magali Cornier Michael (1994), Baysar Tanian (2009), Anca Georgescu (2010), Shahram Kiaiee (2011) and Sue King-Smith (2013) among many others have offered postmodern approach to Lessing's perception of authentic knowledge in her novels. Claire Sprague, in the essay "Doubletalk and Doubles Talk in *The Golden Notebook*," focuses on the merging and separation of characters and the narrative structure and argues that the ending suggest a "continuing process, contradiction, irony, uncertainty- anything, but clear, unambiguous unity" (Sprague, 1982, p. 45). Similarly, Magali Cornier Michael in "Woolf's *Between the Acts* and Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*: From modernism to Postmodern Subjectivity," proposes that *The Golden Notebook* moves from modernism to postmodernism where the female protagonist "occupies a multiplicity of irreconcilable positions or selves," with "no singular, unified, stable subjecthood" (Michael, 1994, p. 50). Likewise, Shahram Kiaiee in his article "A Postmodern Study of Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* in the light of Jean-Francois Lyotard's Ideas" refers to the postmodern theme of chaos in Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*:

Anna expresses that writing four notebooks instead of one notebook is just because of chaos. She senses incoherent in both her life and personality. Given different colors for notebooks shows her fragmented

personality in the society (Kiaee, 2011, p. 1390)

Whereas postmodernists rely heavily on words to transfer the truth, Green reveals Lessing's discontentment with words to convey knowledge:

Before she can know, with a knowledge that is 'part of how [she sees] the world', that truth is in patterning, structuring power of the mind, Anna must first experience the dissolution of language, know that "words mean nothing" (Green, 1997, p. 476)

While postmodern traces are clearly delineated in Lessing's works, her ultimate goal of pursuing unity and coherence goes beyond their chaotic context. Hence, a school of thought that demonstrates postmodern thoughts would reveal more clearly Lessing's intentions.

### 1.2 A New Reading

Similar to Lessing, eschewing ignorance and adjoining the realm of Real is pivotal in both Plato's and the founder of Mahayana Buddhism Nagarjuna's thoughts. Also, analogous to Lessing, both philosophers find eradicating emotions necessary to overcome misconceptions of the world. However, to Plato adjoining the realm of Real requires rational approach while to Nagarjuna, mindfulness transcends the soul to the realm of Real. Before engaging with the novel, we will outline Plato's and Nagarjuna's notions on ignorance and Truth and their similarities and differences. Then we clarify how Lessing's threads of thoughts regarding false conception of the world agree with both Plato and Nagarjuna; though, her manner towards adjoining Real is closer to Nagarjuna.

## 2. Analysis

### 2.1 Ignorance: Allegory of Cave/ Mundane Truth/ Sleepwalkers

In Plato's epistemology, the Truth is buried upon the birth of human beings and due to people's amnesia, they are doomed to experience repeated reincarnation until they rediscover the forgotten knowledge. Whitehead contends:

Plato believes there is a knowledge that is not derived from sense impressions. There are latent in our minds the forms or impressions of the ideas, the realities, which the soul knew before it descent into his body ... The soul enters at birth in oblivion and is covered with a layer of wax there is yet no impression. However, it seems that the wax tablet is not completely wiped clean: there remain imprints of the ideas, so that we retain a latent knowledge of them (Whitehead, 2009, p. 17).

Likewise, William Wordsworth points to Plato's presentation of lost knowledge upon birth:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:

The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,

Hath had elsewhere its setting,

And cometh from afar:

Not in entire forgetfulness,

And not in utter nakedness,

But trailing clouds of glory do we come

From God, who is our home (Wordsworth, *Intimations of Immortality*, 1884, p. 60).

Plato portrays his notions on Truth in several dialogues attended by his character Socrates, emphasizing that human soul was equipped with perfect knowledge of Whole before birth which was forgotten upon joining with body and he needs to "recollect" the lost knowledge in his life journey. In his famous book *Republic* the notions as such are registered through the dialogues of Socrates in *Meno* and allegories of *Cave* and *Charioteer*. In *Meno*, Plato refers to amnesia and delineates that human beings are equipped with knowledge of past incarnations and can rediscover the forgotten knowledge. His teachings in regards to illusionary world are more transparent in his allegory of *Cave*.

Through this analogy, Plato likens human beings to prisoners in a cave who are chained and impotent to turn their heads. They are placed in front of a wall, behind them fire and between them a walkway where puppets move and their shadows are reflected on the walls in front of the prisoners. As Plato says, "such persons would certainly believe that there were no realities except those shadows of handmade things" (Gneiting, 2016, p. 76). The *Cave* is in fact connotation of the visible world where people are trapped in their misconception of empirical knowledge as Truth, ignoring that the experiences gained through senses are merely the shadow of the Real.

Accordingly, Plato differentiates the illusionary and Real world and divides the universe into two realms: the realm of Forms which he considers as Real, where people originally belonged to and the world of earthly life which he interprets as the illusion of the Real. By chance, one of the prisoners is freed and able to see the glorious world of Form where Sun is the true source of life. The freed prisoner is called philosopher by Plato and can refer to anyone who sees this physical world for the illusion and endeavors to transcend this fallacy with his mind. Later in this allegory, Plato indicates that the transcended prisoner (philosopher) returns to the cave to inform other prisoners about the world of light.

Similar to Plato, Nagarjuna regards people's interpretation of the visible world as illusion of the Real. While he does not believe in "pre-given knowledge", he shares with Plato the idea of people's misconception of the visual world as the Real. In fact, Buddhism and Platonic philosophy are not in two opposite directions; rather, they offer similar patterns for individual excellence through rejecting false assumptions and awakening innate capacities within them. They both invite people to practice contemplation and discover their authentic being. Comparable to the Cave allegory, Nagarjuna claims that people mistake the relative for Whole and misconstrue conditioned for unconditioned:

To seize the determinate is really to allow oneself to be misled by names; it is to imagine that different names mean separate essences; this is to turn relative distinctions into absolute divisions (Ramanan, 1975, p. 78).

In a similar vein, a great part of *Shikasta* rests on amnesic human species from pre-history Rohanda to Twenty Century Shikasta. The inhabitants are depicted as sleepwalkers who live in totally oblivious status, away from the world of Real. Lessing reveals that these people with amnesia were connected to Truth of the outer space Canopus but because of misalignment of the stars their bond with it is loosened and they are forced to live in the annihilating world of *Shikasta*. The inhabitants' being trapped in the obliterating world accord with both Plato's and Nagarjuna's presentation of human being's misconception of the Real.

Analogous to Plato's allegory of Cave, the prime focus of the novel is on the forgotten knowledge of the inhabitants which shall be "recollected". Earlier in the novel, Lessing depicts a beautiful, geometrical, harmonious world of Rohanda, parallel to Plato's perfect world beyond the cave. Rohanda is under the protection of the outer space planet Canopus which nourishes it with rigorous, rich air called SOWF that kept every one healthy and safe and above all, such nourishing force made them love each other. This kind, beneficial control was initially successful and the natives learnt to maintain contact at all times with Canopus who is "their Mother, their Maintainer, their Friend, and what they called God, the Divine" (*Shikasta*, 26). But because of misalignment of the stars, this Substance of We Feeling (SOWF) could not reach to Rohandans and the disruption as such led to destructive consequences. After the SOWF was weakened, the relationship between galaxy, geometric cities and the inhabitants of Rohanda was withered. Accordingly, the Giants were appointed to help natives transcend themselves and return the cities back to their harmonious, symmetrical shapes, following galactic alignments. They were to develop the Natives who were in fact their own halves with the same substance; though, their transcendent status was appointed by Canopus. Lessing asserts:

While the Giants were a function of the "mind" of Canopus, they would not know anything that Canopus did not want them to know. Nor were conditions always perfect for exchange of 'thought' (*Shikasta*, 35).

Lessing further depicts Giants as assistants to wake the Natives from their sleepy position:

The Giants' reason for being, their function, their use, was the development of the Natives, who were their other halves, their own substance. But the Natives had nothing ahead of them but degeneration.... The Giants were in the position of the healthy, or healthier twin who will be saved in an operation in which the other one must die (*Shikasta*, 38).

Similar to Giants' savior role, Johor is sent to Rohanda to reserve Rohandans from disaster; though in the form of the Natives: "It had been decided that I should be in the form of a Native and not a Giant, because I was to stay on and help the Natives after the Giants had been taken off" (*Shikasta*, 39). But the problem was that Natives were blocked to understand George's words.

(They) would not be able to take it in, they could not understand events on the level where the Giants thought and acted ... It wasn't that they were not listening, rather they seemed *unable* to listen (*Shikasta*, 43).

Besides, due to the lack of SOWF, the individuating disease called "degenerative disease" spread among inhabitants of Rohanda in a way that they failed to remember their harmonious, authentic past. The implementation of the word "degenerative" is for Lessing to emphasize that the true essence of mind is pure and clear but unwholesome, dual thoughts are able to harm such peaceful state and "degenerate" it. David Waterman in *Identity in Doris Lessing's Space Fiction* contends:

The choice of the word “degenerative” is important, since it signifies an organism which was in good health but is now deteriorating... Like a drug or a poison, the lack of agreement, of a collective identity, clouds the senses (Waterman, 2006, p. 38)

The notion as such accords with Nagarjuna’s presentation of Mundane Truth and his assertion that people regard relative as ultimate and thus consider themselves as individuated, independent entity. The species with disability to remember the pre-given knowledge are similar to Plato’s prisoners in the Cave allegory and their individuating disease is more emphasized in Nagarjuna’s Mundane Truth. They are depicted from prehistory Natives, to the inhabitant of the zone Six, to more recent twentieth century Shikastans as sleep walkers who despite the efforts of the Canopean messengers are unable to hear the Truth.

Similar to the Natives who were unable to hear the words of Truth, Rilla in the zone Six could not understand Johor who was sent from Canopus to make them “remember” their forgotten knowledge. Johor enters Zone Six, the incarnation zone and there he finds Rilla and Ben.

I climbed around so that I stood immediately in front of them. “This is Johor,” I said, “Johor, your friend.” Ben seemed to come slightly to himself, but already he was trying to peer around me, so as to watch the sand. Rilla, it seemed, had not seen me. I took out the Signature and held it up in front of their staring eyes. Both sets of eyes followed the Signature as I stepped downwards, and they followed. They followed! – but like sleepwalkers (*Shikasta*, 148).

The lines above clearly reveals their unintelligence to apprehend Johor and Rilla’s insidipity: “Rilla, it seemed had not seen me”. Even when Johor shows them the “Signature”(Canopus’rules), they cannot remember and just follow him “like sleepwalkers”, quite similar to Plato’s prisoners in the Cave allegory and Nagarjuna’s Mundane Truth.

The fact of the matter is that every character in the second part of the book (inner space) is related to the first part (outer space). Accordingly, Rachel and her brother Benjamin who are presented in the second part are in fact incarnation of Rilla and Ben in the first part. Gayle Greene claims:

We have already encountered Rachel in the first half of *Shikasta*, having been introduced to her soul-self, Rilla, a representation of immortal aspects of her identity, on Zone Six. This “twilight” realm of grief and regret is where Shikastan souls go after death if they have not withstood the temptations of *Shikasta*—the tendency to fall into “self-indulgence and weakness” and “forgetfulness” (Greene, 1994, p. 21)

Similar to the Natives who were unable to understand Johor’s “Signature”, Rachel’s weakness in establishing the bond with the “enlightened” is depicted through her failure to understand her brother George Sherban who was her life companion and incarnated of Canopean Johor in the first part of the book.

Apart from misalignment of the stars, what impede the inhabitants to perceive the Truth and intrigues their ignorance are their irrational emotions, totally corresponding to Plato’s allegory of Charioteer and Nagarjuna’s Mundane Truth.

#### 2.1.1 Irrational Emotions: Allegory of Charioteer/ Mundane Truth/ Descended Beings

In Plato’s allegory of Charioteer, he sheds more light on what he meant by chains in the Cave allegory. In this analogy, he resembles human’s mind to a chariot who is equipped by two winged horses: the first is white, rational and calm and the second is black, irrational, blocked from understanding truth:

The horse that is on the right, or nobler, side is upright in frame and well jointed, with a high neck and a regal nose; . . . he is a lover of honor with modesty and self-control; companion to true glory, he needs no whip, and is guided by verbal commands alone. The other horse is a crooked great jumble of limbs . . . companion to wild boasts and indecency, he is shaggy around the ears—deaf as a post—and just barely yields to horsewhip and goad combined (Warren, 2009, p. 51).

Every human being is supposed to make a balance between these two distinct forces and if overcome by the black horse, they will lose their wings to fly and will be doomed to fall in the world of misery and repeated incarnation. In fact, following the irrational black horse deviates one from the path of enlightenment and leads to descendant to the lower realms. The white horse on the other hand helps to recollect the priori knowledge which was forgotten upon birth.

Equivalent to Plato’s black horse in his allegory of Charioteer which was deaf to reality and emblem of desires and uncontrolled emotions, the inhabitants in *Shikasta* are trapped in effacing emotions which lead to their descendance to a lower realm and repeated reincarnation. Both Rilla and her incarnated Rachel are overcome by the destructive force of the black horse (irrational emotions). Rilla’s obsessive emotions have been revealed

when Johor takes Ben's hand and Rilla is filled with jealousy: "taking Ben by the hand, while of course Rilla complained that I was abandoning her and favoring Ben" (*Shikasta*, 209). Accordingly, Johor trusts none of them to give "Signature" to: "But I could not trust Ben and Rilla yet, to be alone. . . I could not leave them the Signature: they were not reliable" (*Shikasta*, 150). Johor finds Raneer to grant her the "Signature" and ask her to take care of Rilla and Ben: "I found Raneer, and left Rilla in her care, with precise instructions" (*Shikasta*, 209). The defeating force of emotion has been portrayed more in detail in Rachel's life. She cannot follow George and his close companion Hasan due to her excessive emotions:

I could have understood before, that when George is with Hasan and Hasan is talking, George is hearing things in what Hasan is saying that are quite beyond me. That I can't hear at all. I could see from George's face that in quite ordinary things that were said was much much more. I just couldn't grasp it. It was going too fast for me. It was above my head (*Shikasta*, 226).

She realizes that the reason why she could not hear Hasan was that she was too full of distracting egotistic emotions, too attached to her own cleverness, too anxious to be praised. She is like a charioteer stuck between the two conflicting forces: her emotion (black horse) and her reason (white horse). The point is that she gains some awareness of how emotions might be barriers blocking her from hearing the Truth, but her feeling of anxiety, fear and jealousy overcome her reason. She is jealous of George's involvement in the youth group since there will be not much of his time left to spend with her. Also, she is deeply covetous of Suzannah, George's girlfriend, whom she regards as vulgar, loud and flashy girl. The point is that Rachel is aware of her excessive emotions, but she does not endeavor to "toughen" herself and eradicate such draining emotions:

I seem to myself more and more a sort of sack full of emotions. Swilling around. I am angry. I don't know what about. I am so angry I could die. Sometimes I watch these emotions go surging past. Hi there anger! Hi there jealousy! Hi every one! This is Rachel saying hello! (*Shikasta*, 255)

Apart from her unwholesome thoughts, her futile emotion is depicted when her sympathy for her poor Moroccan neighbors and attraction to George are undermined by the forces of what Frager calls "the negative ego", (Frager, 1999, p. 107) in this case her "fear", "self-pity", and "adolescent egotism". The highest extent of her devastating emotions is depicted when her Moroccan neighbors passed away and instead of taking care of their children (to be of help for her Moroccan friends), she says, "I wish I was dead with Naseem and Shireen" (*Shikasta*, 335). In answer to her obsessive, self-pity emotions George says: "Rachel, if you can't face all this, then you'll have to come back and do it all over again. Think about it" (*Shikasta*, 270). It is obvious that the emotions as such not only are not functional, but are rooted in egotism, fear and self-pity, related to Nagarjuna's claim on egoistical consequences of Mundane Truth due to the wrong conception of the world.

Even though she is accompanied by an excellent source of motivator –her brother George- who constantly encourages her to "toughen up", she is so unwilling to step out of her egoist emotions. Hence, she sticks to the idea that she is too fragile to deal with the difficulties of the world. George undertakes huge effort to encourage her to "toughen up" and fight against her strong emotions through practicing "mindfulness". He insists that if she guards herself against emotions, "there will be nothing you cannot deal with" (*Shikasta*, 220). In fact, Rachel can be considered even more fragile than the Natives since for them the choice was only to follow "Signature", (which they could hardly understand), but in the case of Rachel, George mainly motivates her to "toughen up" through eradicating irrational emotions to transcend her soul which she failed to do.

To increase the level of her understanding, Hasan (as a philosopher) asks her to write a diary (so that she finds chance to concentrate more and be more mindful of happenings around her), but her self-obsessions and fears constantly interfere with her main duty assigned by George and Hasan and she is willing to come back to her comfort zone of childhood: "I wish we could go back to before George was grown up. I don't want to grow up. I want to stay a little girl" (*Shikasta*, 224). She knows that she "was being made to see", but her egoistic desires and her begging for the attention of others impede her to transcend her soul; it "stood between me and being able to learn from Hasan". She is in need of constant confirmation from others and wants to attract all the attention to her: "I was sitting there all raging and wanting them to look at me, talk to me, like a little child" (*Shikasta*, 68). The pull of her excessive emotions drains her energies and engages her in futile egoistic reoccupations in a way that she is unable to bond with others and is more drowned in the "degenerative disease".

Finally, due to her excessive "emotions", when she is informed of her brother's (George) seizure, rather than staying calm and listening to his words which forbade her to follow him, she fails to manage the crisis and rushes off to save George but gets herself arrested and commits suicide. Since her soul fails to transcend, she has to enter *Shikasta* again and pass the test of detachment from ego one more time. Similar to Plato's defeated charioteer by black horse, Rachel falls from the path to Canopus down to the descended realm and is doomed to

repeated reincarnations; though, Lessing wishes for her fragile, amnesiac Rachel a “better luck next time”.

## 2.2 Truth

### 2.2.1 Rational Truth/ Non-dual Truth/ Intuitive Truth

The point of divergence between Plato and Nagarjuna is their definition of Truth and how to achieve it. The essentialist Plato regards Truth as non-changing, ultimate, belonging to the realm of Form, beyond human existence and thus distances people from their divine, genuine essence. Nagarjuna, however, blurs the boundaries between Mundane and Ultimate Truth and establishes easy accessibility to Real through individual’s mind. Garfield sheds more light on Nagarjuna’s Truth:

The Buddha's teaching of the Dharma is based on two truths: a truth of worldly convention and an ultimate truth. Those who do not understand the distinction drawn between these two truths do not understand the Buddha's profound truth. Without a foundation in the conventional truth the significance of the ultimate cannot be taught. Without understanding the significance of the ultimate, liberation is not achieved (Garfield, 1995, p. 296).

Besides, the way to achieve authentic knowledge to Plato is rational contemplation; that is, intellectual pursuit of Ultimate Truth. While Nagarjuna does not refute reason, he bypasses rational procedures to attain authenticity and emphasizes on mindfulness: the quiet observation of the trends of body, thoughts and feelings and such point of divergence is Lessing’s main concern in *Shikasta*. In this paper, we will show how Lessing’s depiction of Truth and the way to achieve it bypasses Plato’s rational methods and attunes with Nagarjuna’s non-dual patterns.

In the novel, rigidity of Ultimate Truth is debunked and Supreme icons are themselves changing. Unlike Plato’s depiction of Ultimate Truth as fixed and not changing, God or the divine entity is not presented as Almighty, but “renewing, regenerative” one:

There is something else, stronger than anything: the well-being, the always renewing, regenerative, healing force of nature; feeling one with the other creatures of Shikasta and its soil, and its plants (Lessing, p. 250).

Accordingly, Canopus is depicted not as Almighty creator; rather, as a planet that understands the rules and “Purpose” of life better than Shikastans, claiming that “every child has the capacity to be everything” *Shikasta*, 167). Hence, Canopus is not presented as a superior power exploiting the inferior beings; rather, is depicted as more aware planet who invites the other beings to adjoin the territory of enlightenment through strengthening SOWF and interconnectedness. Pickering sheds light on mutual interaction of Canopeans and Shikastans:

in Canopus necessity [which] appears to be a function of Cosmic Harmony...[is a] view extended into space, of the city on the veld, which holds both nature and civilization in a dynamic whole (Pickering, 1990, pp. 142-143).

Hence, to Pickering, both conditioned and unconditioned form a “dynamic whole”. While she does not deny the necessity of obeying Canopean’s rules in Lessing’s novel, she claims that the effort as such will ultimately blur the boundaries between Canopeans and Shikastans and “individuals may escape from Shikasta by their own efforts...” (Pickering, 1990, p. 146). Likewise, Angela Hague (p. 303) in *Fiction, Intuition, & Creativity: Studies in Brontë, James, Woolf, and Lessing* contends that “When Canopean representatives visit their planets and people in order to instruct them, they do so by becoming part of the local culture, not by appearing as more powerful and knowledgeable” (Hague, 2003, p. 303). While “necessity” is determined by Canopus, “both nature and civilization” are provided the possibility to change, even Canopus’ “necessity” changes later in novel. Yuknavitch declares: “Like the global accident reports, Johor’s perceptions are broken and partial, inadequate and inconsistent” (Yuknavitch, 2001, p. 41). The fact is that Johor in his three visits to Shikasta endeavored to expand the rules of Canopus in the “Signature”; though, gradually he finds out that such rules do not suffice to save people from the “degenerative disease” and end their suffering since due to the lack of SOWF, many were not able to understand Canopus’ words. That is why Johor incarnated as George in Shikasta to motivate Shikastans to refer to the world within (mindfulness) and empty their minds from obsessive emotions to be able to be connected to the Canopus forces.

Similar to Canopus and Johor’s dynamic functions, George is depicted as both an enlightened (incarnated of Canopus envoy Johor) and also an ordinary being. That is, while his capacities are beyond those of Shikastans, he like other Shikastans has spatio- temporal limitations, not away from material desires and carries both “ordinary” and “spiritual” features within him. Early in the novel his “ordinary” sexual desire has been depicted through his relationship with Suzannah, about which Rachel is so upset. To answer Rachel’s complain about such relationship, her mother says that “George isn’t a saint, he isn’t some sort of a paragon. But the point is, he is not

yet eighteen years old" (*Shikasta*, 256). Also, George himself answers Rachel: "So who should I sleep with? He asked me. I am a normal male. I shall not be marrying for five years (*Shikasta*, 260). However, he is also tightly connected with the "stars" and the knowledge obtained through "intuition". To this purpose, George alternates between daily activities (Mundane Truth) and his spiritual pursuit (Ultimate Truth) which can be linked with Nagarjuna's non-dual trends.

Furthermore, unlike Plato's reliance on reason to obtain the Truth, George, similar to Buddhists, strives to earn knowledge through mindful observation. Lessing depicts how George's knowledge which is attained through experience and "intuition" is much more trustworthy than rational knowledge achieved through education. Rachel is extremely proud of her education and considers the only reliable knowledge the one attained by words; though, George puts the benefit of her education under question:

He says I've got to start thinking more. He says what is the use of all my education, the kind of education I've had. You've got to be useful, he said. You surely are not saying I should be an administrator and run things, I said. Really appalled. George said, Why not? Look at Olga and Simon, they do it and do it well. I said, Running things, what's the point? He said, If you can't beat them join them! Oh, very funny. George says, Rachel, you are too soft, and you have to toughen yourself up (*Shikasta*, 267).

Unlike Rachel, George's "spiritual" entity is revealed mostly through his interest in his knowledge of the stars and his connection with his friend Hasan. From his very early years of life, he spent time at night to watch the stars: "He often didn't sleep at night when he was four or five, let alone seven" (*Shikasta*, 224). He preferred to stay outside room to be in touch with stars: "George slept outside on the verandah of the house. The climate was different from Nigeria, healthy. He liked to be under the stars" (*Shikasta*, 226). Rachel in her diary repeatedly mentions George's interest in stars:

But there were a lot of times I woke and George was awake. He was usually at the window. I did not pretend to be asleep. I knew he would not be angry. I once asked him, Who are you talking to? He said he did not know. A friend, he said. He seemed troubled. Not unhappy (*Shikasta*, 139).

Accordingly, the knowledge he gains differs from that of Rachel's and others. Rachel contends:

I work for exams. Benjamin works for exams. George doesn't work for exams. What he does is this. Wherever we go he attends college or university or something. Or tutors come. Or he goes off on trips with Father and Mother to places, though hardly ever now, that was when he was younger. Now it is trips with someone like Hasan. But he doesn't take exams. He knows as much as we do, though. More, by far (*Shikasta*, 251).

George would not take exams "because what he had learned would never be contained in the exam questions. He is being educated for something different" (*Shikasta*, 254). His interest includes various religions as well:

During the term when George was doing the History of the Religions of the Middle East at the Madrasa, he also took classes from a Christian and from a Jew. In other words, while he was learning the curriculum, he was simultaneously learning the partisan points of view that wouldn't be in the curriculum (*Shikasta*, 254).

The point is that "Hasan talks to George a great deal. Hasan spends more time with George than any of the other "special contacts" have done (*Shikasta*, 223). When he talks, George yields all his soul to him and embraces fully his words. While his sayings looks "ordinary", but they carry special meaning which George would take all in. "he is riveted by it. He is so absorbed that you could throw water over him and I believe he wouldn't notice it (*Shikasta*, 227). Regarding the value of such non-dual configurations, Roberta Rubenstein asserts:

Her [Lessing's] efforts to break through not only the intellectual blinders to perception and knowledge, and conventional assumptions concerning the nature of reality itself, but also the limitations of verbal expression, should assure her stature as one of the major, unique and visionary writers of our time (Rubenstein, 1979, p. 256).

Similarly, Nancy Hardin praises Lessing's fantastic realms in her mystical novel *Shikasta* which carries a saving vision, suggesting breaking out from contemporary conditioning in order to "awaken from the roles to which we have been so skillfully programmed" (Hardin, 2003, p. 324). Thus, the total accomplishment of Truth has been depicted through mindfulness and non-dual practices close to Nagarjuna's mystical thoughts whose non-dual patterns would be a contribution to Plato's rational approach towards attainment of Truth.

### 3. Concluding Remarks

Lessing relates people's ignorance to the "misalignment of the star" which causes them to be disconnected from the harmonious status they were enjoying when connected with outer space planet Canopus. Her depiction of

trapped inhabitants can easily be acknowledged in Plato's allegory of Cave where people are imprisoned from birth, misconceiving the shadows for the Real. It is also compatible to Nagarjuna's presentation of illusionary world in his Mundane Truth. Lessing further reveals what aggravates people's ignorance is their irrational emotions which parallels Plato's Charioteer allegory and Nagarjuna's Mundane Truth. In pursuit of Truth, Lessing's bypasses Plato's rational calculations of the world and bespeaks Nagarjuna's assertion on mutual dialogue between the Mundane and Ultimate Truth, concluding that "we are part of a dance from which we by no means and not ever may consider ourselves separate" (*Shikasta*, 58).

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