CHAPTER-III

OPPOSING MARRIAGE AS A PATRIARCHAL INSTITUTION

“She believed that equality and liberation would be achieved only by destroying the male’s superiority and refusing to succumb to a traditional role. Women were ‘imprisoned’ by the roles of mother, wife, and sweetheart.”

(Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 797)

Sociologists define marriage as a “cultural phenomenon which sanctions a more or less permanent union between partners conferring legitimacy on their offspring” (Hunter 127). Religiously marriage is supposed to be the holy union of two souls and bodies. In marriage, oneness, companionship and mutuality are stressed. It is assumed that the interests of the husband and wife are one and whatever is for the benefit of the one is for the benefit of the other also. Despite these idealized concepts of marriage, woman in reality is essentially a subservient partner. Marriage often does not mean companionship or equality for woman, rather it is a trap which negates her rights to individuality, independence and self-realization. She is subjugated, marginalized and sidelined. The ‘power politics’, to use a phrase from Kate Millett, operates in a subtle manner in the institution of marriage, reducing the status of a woman to merely a ‘utility item’, an object for decoration, for possession and for man’s sexual gratification.

The feminists have different perceptions on the issue whether marriage as an institution should be retailed or scrapped totally. Simone de Beauvoir and Germaine Greer reject it saying that it has been instituted merely to legalize reproduction and it “diminishes man ... but almost always annihilates woman” (Beauvoir 496). J.S. Mill is right in saying that marriage is the worst form of slavery for women. He says, “no slave is a slave to the same lengths, and in so full a sense of words, as a wife is” (207). Engels in his *The Origin of the Family* also points out that the Latin word ‘familia’ means the total number of slaves belonging to one man. Marriage, he says, is not a “reconciliation of man and woman” (149), but the subjugation of the female
in the interest of perpetuation of slavery and the private property. Germaine Greer suggests, “if independence is a necessary concomitant of freedom, woman must not marry”(320). Marilyn French emphasizes resurgence and revalorization of feminine values of nurturing and sharing which she feels can save the world from destruction and totalitarianism. Another feminist of the eighties Lynne Segal insists on combining autonomy and affiance in marriage. She finds the “polarized thinking about women and men”(IX) quite inadequate in the present context. Women, she believes, have greater humanity and hence can save the world from impediments like social, ecological and human disasters.

In a patriarchal society, husband is considered the master of wife who determines and shapes her future for the rest of life. The traditional feminine virtues and graces are expected in a woman so that she can be a successful commodity in the married life. Simone de Beauvoir observes, “Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society” (445). Marriage is considered to be the greatest ambition of a girl. The feminists highly resent these culturally constructed norms which make women subjects of men in various forms. They do not deny the biological differences between a male and a female. But, there is no reason to presume, as men do, that these physical differences make them superior to women. The feminists maintain, “Woman is not born but made by the society” (Beauvoir 449). Throughout history, women have been appropriated as sexual objects. Karl Marx says, “Marriage... is incontestably a form of exclusive private property”(qtd. in Mitchell 110). Marriage turns out to be an institution of oppression for a woman in various forms rather than of her protection for which it is primarily instituted.

The concept of marriage as a sacrament and an indissoluble union has been pervasive in the West for centuries. Woman is seen only in relation to man. She has no life of her own. Gilbert and Gubar comment in The Madwoman in the Attic, “to be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead. But, the woman who refuses to be selfless and acts on her own initiative irritates the society and is unwelcome” (74). In the western societies, there are no grounds for which a woman can divorce her husband until Roman women gained the right to divorce in the days of the Empire.
However, Protestants take a somewhat more liberal stand on the question of divorce. Greene rightly shows the circumstances of getting divorce:

Luther seems to have believed that only adultery and desertion were adequate grounds for divorce. However, in addition to adultery and desertion, cruelty and ‘refusal to conjugal duty’ were also considered grounds for divorce by most Protestant churches. (395)

There has come a revolution on the part of the writers also. John Milton has written a series of pamphlets in favour of divorce in the years between 1643 and 1645 but it is only in 1857 that judicial divorce (divorce granted by a court of law) becomes available in England. And it is only in 1968 that the divorce laws are made more liberal.

Marriage for a man means enlargement and confirmation of his existence. He enjoys both the worlds; of home and of career. It permits him progression and self-advancement. Since the woman is given to a man in marriage, she becomes his half and takes his name, his religion, family and class. She is virtually reduced to the status of a nurse-maid or a nanny of the children. Before marriage, woman is made by her parents and after marriage, “a wife is what her husband makes her” (Beauvoir 484). She eventually finds as Germaine Greer observes that after marriage her life has “changed radically, but not her husband’s”(321). The discrimination brings marriage into the circle of question. Whether it is aimed at bringing legal and human relationship between man and woman or it is aimed at perpetuating the reinforcement of stereotyped image of woman. But, Doris Lessing opposes the stereotyped presentation of women as weak, vulnerable and sexual objects. She presents that the feeling of superiority in man’s mind is the result of social and patriarchal norms which is not pre-ordained but created to retain the power to male sex only.

Lessing’s views about marriage in her novels are very controversial and against the norms of society. Her women expect marriage to be something very special part of her life. Lessing shows the mental conflict in the mind of Martha
Quest regarding social responses to marriage. But, it is the social environment of Southern African society that creates conflicts in Martha’s mind. She views, “fact that what she was feeling now might be nothing but what everybody felt filled Martha with exhaustion” (Lessing, PM 32). On the one hand, Martha feels attracted to Douglas, but on the other hand her negative feelings often come out, “his proprietary look half annoyed her; but she could feel the beginning of fatal pleasure” (Lessing, PM 33). Martha sometimes feels that their marriage is a terrible mistake. Her affection is also connected with her sexuality, “Love had brought her here, to lie beside this young man; love was the key to every good; love lay like a mirage through the golden gates of sex. If this was not true, then nothing was true, and the beliefs of a whole generation were illusory” (Lessing, PM 34). She is obviously tempted by her sexual needs and social pressures. Jean Pickering views:

She becomes tied to marriage…through the social and biological demands on her as a woman. Her sexual needs and her longing for love make her submissive and compliant in relation to men: in order not to feel lacking as a woman, she develops a sexually pleasing and maternally understanding attitude which ties her to her functions within marriage.

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The role of woman, both at home and in society, is predefined in terms of her sex life as her sexuality. In fact, Martha’s expectations are considerably different from what is happening in her real life. Some time, after her marriage, she realizes that she does not want to conform either to her husband or to the conventions of society. Surpringly, she does not even know the reason why she got married. When Mr. Maynard asks her about this, she answers, “I got married because there is going to be a war” (Lessing, PM 70). In fact, Martha is preoccupied with “the delight of other people in this marriage” (Lessing, PM 45). It seems so insincere to Martha, “The whole thing was a gigantic social deception,” she explains (Lessing, PM 45). What is more, “she simply could not comprehend that his satisfaction, his pleasure, was fed less by her than by what other people found in their marriage” (Lessing, PM 35). In fact, Martha wants real love, passion and romantic environment but unfortunately she fails to find all this.
Lessing’s women no longer remain bound to the role and social expectations of the masculine world which she cannot fulfil. Martha obviously matures into self-awareness when she muses about her husband, “I don't see how he can complain that I am what I always said I was” (Lessing, PM 71). In *Proper Marriage*, Lessing further explores, “For at this moment, she forgot the years of feminine compliance, of charm, of conformity to what he wanted. They had all been a lie against her real nature and, therefore they had not existed” (84). Martha's reasons for deserting Douglas and Caroline cause Mrs. Knowell, Douglas's mother, to realize suddenly that how her own life has been made to look null and meaningless because Martha will not submit to what women always have submitted to.

Fantasies of women concerning an ideal romantic marriage are dissolved because of the fact that marriage turns out to be the destruction of the self of a woman. Alice bursts out, “The two women looked at each other, acknowledging frankly in this moment that they wished they had never married, wished they were not pregnant, even hated their husbands” (Lessing, PM 152). Both women have to go through a phase of disappointment and despair with regard to their marriage. A woman who has to conform to social norms of a particular society, in which the roles of men and women are precisely defined, is the one who feels the need to express her dissatisfaction, to protest and to rebel against her inferior position. Mrs. Quest stresses that the primary role of a woman is of a wife and a mother. She recommends that women should be submissive in their behaviour. It, however, results in failure of their attempts to free themselves from the stereotypical image of a conventional wife.

Martha is not a woman who compromises with extra marital affairs of her husband. Anton starts going out with a girl called Millicent and Martha is left perturbed. Martha decides not to make any compromise with these type of lies in a marriage and she comes out of her second marriage also:

This was the moment when Martha should go to him, naked as she nearly was, and put her arms around ... him...if she did this, if she played her role properly, as a good wife should, then by midnight or at the very
latest, tomorrow morning, Millicent the red-head would have become one of the little married jokes that act as such a delightful lubricant...How unpleasant the little jokes, the hundred dishonest little lies, the thousand sacrifices like Millicent (or like Solly it had come to that) which marriage demands. (Lessing, LL 236)

Like Martha Quest, Anna and Mary also have the same perception about man-woman relationship. In Grass is Singing, under the influence of her father, Mary’s refusal to have sex, which is part of an adult female identity, is underlined by “her retention of a childlike image into her thirties” (Rubenstein 74). Mary seems to resist the normative sense of female and heterosexual identity imposed by the society. “She still wore her hair little-girl fashion on her shoulders, and wore little-girl frocks in pastel colours, and kept her shy, naive manner” (Lessing, GIS 38), which is an effort “to avert the male gaze from herself” (Rubenstein 74).

Considering the fact that colonialism is a gendered process that has “male attributes” (Rigney 726), Mary’s avoiding the colonial realities by living in the town parallels her avoidance of the male gaze of her father. However, the change in location that has taken place with her marriage triggers a series of destructive experiences. When she arrives in the country, steps into marriage, sex and colonialism, “the traumatic Oedipal experiences of her childhood” return to “torment her and make it impossible for her to cope rationally with the vicissitudes of her life” (Rubenstein 76). Douglas escapes from the involvement in bringing up Caroline and does not care much for his wife. He is far away from home on account of the war:

The truth was, he had been relieved to get away from the atmosphere of bottles and napkins, and, more than this, from Martha’s extraordinary tension during those months, when competent gaiety followed irritated exhaustion, and both seemed in some subtle way a criticism of him…. (Lessing, PM 250)

Man’s ignorance on bringing up his own child becomes a matter of dislike for self-conscious wife.
However, when Douglas is supposed to get back home and meet Martha again, his feelings suddenly change: “Tenderness for Martha and his small daughter filled him” (Lessing, PM 258). Undoubtedly, when Martha and Douglas see each other after a long time, they both feel something has changed, “They embraced…For both there was something false and unpleasant in this embrace” (Lessing, PM 262). What is more important is that Martha begins to feel a kind of revulsion to the soldier, her husband. His image has got altered to a great extent:

That sudden vision of the soldier who was her husband had been a shock to her which only now began to make itself felt….It was quite impossible that this man should be her husband. She was married to one of the boys; he would always, all his life, be one of the boys. At sixty he would still be a schoolboy. There was no escape from it. (Lessing, PM 264)

Martha tries to “recreate the coarsened soldier into something masculine and strong and attractive” (Lessing, PM 265) but it is extremely difficult for her. Douglas always imagines Martha as a submissive housewife who takes care of their children, although he makes attempts to deny it, “Ever since we’ve been married you agreed I wasn’t only to housekeep and mind babies,” she reminds him (Lessing, PM 266). As soon as Douglas returns home, it seems to him that Martha “had built up a life of her own, with obligations and responsibilities” (Lessing, PM 270). Both of them are slowly getting farther from each other and in the course of years “the hatred between them was so strong that it frightened them both” (Lessing, PM 267). The situation between them remains the same until their relationship completely and inevitably breaks up. Martha’s feelings towards Douglas are always changeable. Most of the time, she has a very strong feeling of dislike for him and she tries to reassure herself that such feelings are natural for a “newly married woman” (Lessing, PM 31). Lessing presents both the state of mind and physical reactions, “She leaned against the sill, and tried to feel that she was alone and able to think clearly, a condition she had been longing for, it seemed for weeks. But her limbs were seething with irritation; she could not stand still” (Lessing, PM 31). Martha achieves a level of self consciousness which leads her towards maturity on all the injudicious and inhuman conditions.
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The level of self consciousness enables Doris Lessing’s women to see and judge marriage as a cage which prohibits acquiring their individual identity and self realization. Martha’s quest for identity and individuality continues even after her marriage to Douglas Knowell, when she realizes that marriage threatens the identity of a woman and thwarts her pursuit of self-realization and self-actualization. Her wedding to Douglas immediately leads her to reflect on men, marriage and motherhood. Marriage gives her an insight of her limited scope of her liberty where she can develop her identity. Martha murmurs, “Marriage is a lock on woman’s liberty to realize herself as a competent human being…”(Lessing, LL 183). She, even, discovers the incompatibility with her husbands. She articulates her dissatisfaction, “I haven’t anything in common with Douglas, and I’ve been unhappy all the time” (Lessing, PM 353). She fails to understand as to why she marries as “she did not feel at all identified with her husband or his circle” (Lessing, PM 52). They are the gang of boys, who love their own world of sundowners, bars, dances and dinners rather than their homes. Martha finds the “atmosphere of men escaping their wives quite intolerable” (Lessing, PM 151). Martha and her friends Stella and Alice also realize that their “men preferred other company to theirs”, and hence feel lonely and even “wished they had never married, and wished they were not pregnant, even hated their husbands”(Lessing, PM 152). These intelligent, enterprising women do not want to be stuck to home. “They feel encaged and enslaved and are suffering from “boredom, the tedium of living alone, the unsatisfactory nature of marriage, the burden of bringing up children” (Lessing, PM 234). Even during the war time, they encourage their husbands to save their country at the cost of their happiness. Martha “sets no bounds” (Lessing, PM 96) on Douglas and never questions his activities as she has developed a sense of belief with him. In The Golden Notebook, Lessing shows that how Molly becomes aware of the nature of her husband. Lessing narrates her situation:

Richard was Molly's husband; or rather, he had been her husband] Molly was the product of what she referred to as 'one of those 'twenties marriages.' Her childhood had been disastrous, since this marriage only lasted a few months. She had married, at the age of eighteen, the son of
Later, Molly decides to become independent to develop her personal identity and growth. Martha also exposes the male hypocrisy which makes even “intelligent and liberal-minded men lapse bade into the anonymous voice of authority whenever their own personal authority is threatened, saying things of a banality and a pomposity infinitely removed from their own level of thinking” (Lessing, PM 106-7). Douglas’s indifference and selfishness increase Martha’s irritation and the loneliness of Martha’s life and she finds herself “doomed to the continuation of the species and the care of the home” (Beauvoir 449). Marriage, instead of freeing her from loneliness, makes her more lonely, insecure and unhappy. Though, Douglas does his best to keep her satisfied with material comforts, Martha feels “fed-up” and bored (Lessing, PM 295) with her false, pretentious, empty and meaningless existence. The “instinct to comply, to please, seemed to her more and more unpleasant and fake” (Lessing, PM 292). She rejects her mother’s suggestion to uphold the traditional values and remain “properly married” (Lessing, PM 353). Unlike Mary who breaks down in the face of sufferings, Martha refuses to accept marriage as a career and she revolts against the parental authority which initiates oppression of woman and guides her to become submissive in married life.

Doris Lessing delineates, with keen perception and sensitivity, the problems and sufferings of women in marriage. She feels entrapped, oppressed and doomed to the care of husband and home. Her old women accept their fate unhesitatingly. In fact, Lessing has brought both the pictures of women in society where one is submissive and other is explosive, one is a follower of old tradition and other is representative of new women in patriarchal society. In fact, the young and educated women gasp for freedom and gradually reject the stereotype where they have to conform to the expectations of their husbands.

Martha Quest refers to unconventional behaviour of an emancipated young woman who does not want to conform to her husband’s expectations. Her decision to leave both her husband and her child is socially unacceptable and not understood
by most of the people, including her parents. Martha’s desire to liberate herself is so strong that she even abandons her child, without taking into consideration her responsibilities as a mother and a wife:

When a woman left her husband, or threatened to leave him--that is, a woman of her type, who insisted on her rights to behave as a man would-then the husband went through certain actions like an automaton, beginning with confiscating the contraceptives, threatening to make her forcibly pregnant, accusing her of multifarious infidelities, and ending in self-abasing weeping appeals that she should change her mind and stay. (Lessing, PM 368-69)

Martha Quest’s approach is very liberal towards life and her relations with her husband, mother, father, daughter and others. Anna Wulf also sees her life compartmentalized into various roles as woman, lover, writer, and political activist. Her diaries, written in different coloured notebooks correspond to a different part of herself, as the black notebook treats her ideas and problems as a writer, the red notebook is concerned with her life as a politician, the yellow notebook is an autobiographical narrative reflecting her sexual relationships and feelings and the blue notebook tries to be an emotional crutch, recording her everyday personal events. Later, she abandons this rigid compartmentalization and writes in the single golden notebook collecting the social and personal aspects which force women to accept the irresponsible behaviour of man in married life.

Doris Lessing that a man never admires his wife’s services and sacrifices for the family and takes them as guaranteed by the institution of marriage. She is belittled or silenced, and denied love, friendship and togetherness in marriage. Simone de Beauvoir says that for loyalty and friendship to exist between man and woman, the essential condition is that they should be “free in relation to each other and be equal” (Beauvoir 488). However, man thinks that woman is not capable to handle the social responsibility. This blocks the road to communication between the partners in marriage. The communication gap is ruinous for the institution of marriage. Dialogue or discussion is essential for harmonious marital relationship.
Julia Barr and her lover Roger have to face the consequences for the misunderstanding on the part of both. Lessing presents:

It was better, if you handled it differently.
Why me always…
Man is always a ‘man’
You are mistaken about the sense of consciousness of woman. (Lessing, RTI 178)

In *The Golden Notebook too*, Paul is jealous of his mistress Ella and accuses her of having relations with other men. He uses the phrase “your literary lunches” for her infidelities and often accuses her of making advances towards men whom she in fact “has not even noticed” (Lessing, GN 212). While having an affair with Ella, Paul not only has his wife at home but is also having another affair simultaneously with a colleague, Stephanie, and yet he is jealous and suspicious of Ella’s affairs. As far as his wife is concerned, he is totally immune to her emotional needs. She is no more to him than an instrument of delivering and nurturing babies. Not only wives, men want to use their mistresses completely to their requirements and always find fault in them. Paul has almost abandoned his mute, docile and homely wife Muriel to sleep with his “smart gay, sexy mistress” (Lessing, GN 84). When Ella puts on simple clothes, he tells her that she looks like a ‘severe school mistress’ and when she switches over to revealing clothes, low cut blouses etc., he becomes jealous of her smart seductive looks. Man wants his woman to be vigorous, healthy and chaste for him but cold to others.

Doris Lessing exposes the psychology of man who considers “sexual pleasures” (Lessing, GN 86) as a male privilege. The man generally repudiates feminine sensuality. Simone de Beauvoir very effectively brings out the unfortunate state of women in marriage:

It is the duplicity of the husband that dooms the wife to a misfortune of which he complains later that he is himself the victim. Just as he wants her to be at once warm and cool in bed, he requires her to be wholly his and yet no burden; he wishes her to establish him in a fixed place on
earth and to leave him free, to assume the monotonous daily round and not to bore him, to be always at hand and never importunate; he wants to have her all to himself and not to belong to her; to live as one of the couple and to remain alone. Thus she is betrayed from the day he marries her. (497)

In *A Proper Marriage*, Martha's mother shuts the door and would not let her in when Martha, chased by her husband, pleads her mother to give her a shelter for the night. Mrs. Quest has no sympathy with her daughter and says, “go back to him” (Lessing, PM 379). Martha, however, rejects the conventional expectations and sets herself free from the social obligation; she leaves her husband and child behind to live an independent life with self-fulfilment.

Lessing’s women are bolder and quicker to decide and break the stifling bondage of marriage. However, Martha, Anna and Molly decide to look for freedom and self-esteem in a different way. The awareness of her suppression in marriage makes Marion decide to live for others and to do so, she takes up bigger things in life. She tells:

'I thought, My God, for that creature I've ruined my life. I remember the moment exactly. I was sitting at the breakfast-table, wearing a sort of negligee thing I'd bought because he likes me in that sort of thing—you know, frills and flowers, or well, he used to like me in them. I've always hated them. And I thought, for years and years I've even been wearing clothes I hated, just to please this creature.' (Lessing, GN 181)

The submissive, devoted wife Marion remains all wrapped up in him till she gets the revelation that the man she loves is not anything, “He’s not even very good-looking. He’s not even very intelligent, I don’t care if he is ever so important and a captain of industry...My God, for that creature I’ve ruined my life” (Lessing, GN 389). She finally, though quite late, divorces him to fulfill her inner self. In fact, Marion gives regard to the intelligence and decent human behaviour. When, she misses it, she immediately decides to abandon her relationships.
Lessing shows how her women have high level of self sacrifice and dedication in relations with their husbands. When, Julia Barr falls in love with Jan Brod, he pleads with her on the question of her survival, she answers, “I find the best in you…not anywhere else. My world is within you” (Lessing, RTI 141). She stays with him throughout until she is deceived. Mary does it for her husband Charlie. But, she finds herself in a slack position where she does not find any recognition in the relation with her husband. Charlie raises his social standing from rags to riches, starting off as “a grocer’s assistant in London “and ending up a typical rich white farmer”(Rigney 13). He is depicted as an ambitious farmer whose only idea is “to make money” in South Africa (Rigney 14).

Women’s feelings and sense of belonging to men remain good till they withdraw from the relationship. Her devotion remains the same to her lover rather than her socially labeled ‘husband’. It happens in the case of Mary Turner, her husband Dick and lover Moses. In fact, the work ethics are characterized by a profit oriented and strict mindset because “he believed in farming with the heavy leather whip” and because “he farmed as if he were turning the handle of a machine which would produce pound notes at the other end” (Lessing, GIS 14). He is the embodiment of the colonizer culture as he is “a crude, brutal, and ruthless” man whose motto is “you shall not mind killing if necessary” (Lessing, GIS 14). The ambivalence resulting from the questionable concept of civilization, nevertheless, is only revealed by the writer as a criticism of the white society. Although it could have been used to subvert colonialism, especially if combined with Slatter’s uncivilized farming methods which “are tantamount to a rape of Africa, which in colonialist Manichean representations is perceived as female in terms of being conquered land” (Ruddick 730). In fact, man’s psychological conflicts of society and the masculine attitude lead him to the ill tempered colonial evil of religious discourse of subalterns. In fact, Lessing shows that Charlie Slatter “killed a native in a fit of temper” and he got away with it by paying only thirty pounds” (Lessing, GIS 14). By means of this subtle biblical allusion to Judas, who has been offered thirty pieces of silver to betray Jesus, Slatter is implicitly depicted as evil, and so is the colonialism embodied in him. In fact, reference to the Bible is found once again in Lessing’s
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choice of the name Moses for Mary’s houseboy, who kills her. Having received his name and education from the white people in the missionaries, he symbolically leads “his people from bondage to freedom” (Saxton 536) by killing Mary, and thus subverts the “religious discourse of colonialism which plays an important part in subalternization of the colonized Africans” (Rigney 733). Throughout, woman is forced to become ‘other’ and is expected to become submissive to the behaviour of man.

Doris Lessing exposes the disgusting behaviour of men towards their wives. Martha Quest after marriage, is dragged from one party to another, where Douglas is repeatedly reminded for his good luck and “congratulated on his acquisition” (Lessing, PM 34) by his friends. Douglas tells Martha about the opinion of people towards her:

They think I’m a helluva lucky...’ he announced; and at the thought of the scenes in the bar with -the boys, a reflection of his proud and embarrassed grin appeared on his face. He swooped over to her, ground her tightly to him, and announced, ‘And so–so I am.’ (Lessing, PM 34)

Martha, however, does not believe in becoming an object of amusement or decoration for her husband. She does not subscribe to the views held by her friend Stella that “…It’s your duty to your husband to look nice” (Lessing, PM 16) and disdains “female ruses” (Lessing, PM 96) played by women to keep their husbands under their thumb. But, Martha does not want to be known as a “paragon of beauty” (Singleton 68) and craves for no conventional praises like, “Her cheeks lyke apples which the sun hath ruddered, Her lips lyke cherryes charming men to byte, Her breast like to bowl of creame uncrudded” (Singleton 68).

Martha, first, develops love with Douglas Knowell, a young civil servant, because he seems to be different from the men Martha has met before. She speaks about him, “He is a man, at least, and not a silly little boy. And so intelligent too!”(Lessing, MQ 218). When she discovers that he does not fully understand her and he is not worthy of her love, she thinks to break her claim by divorcing him otherwise, socially, she is “bound to love him that claim had been laid on her”
First, she does not want to marry him but social regulations imposed by the society and followed by her family force her to accept the proposal. Doris Lessing presents the woeful moments of Martha, “she did not want to marry Douglas; she did not want to marry at all” (Lessing, MQ 224). When, she finds that Douglas is somehow a bar in her freedom of life, she deserts him even when they have a baby named Caroline. Martha’s marriage with Douglas takes place when she is nineteen and this marriage lasts for four years only.

Doris Lessing frequently points out that her writing does not predominantly deal with the “battle of the sexes only” (Pratt and Dembo 84). Ellen Morgan strongly emphasizes the significance with respect to its illustration of the heterosexual relationship and the female identity in the middle of the twentieth century. Morgan undoubtedly observes “Lessing portrays a tension between the Man versus Woman debate and the simultaneous denial of discomfort with the sexual status quo” (16). Lessing shows all the perceptions necessary to create a radical transforming and ordering vision of the relationship between woman and man. She through The Golden Notebook shows that “how women writers can be, and have been, alienated from their own authentic, sensitive, and accurate perceptions of sexual politics” (Pratt and Dembo 54-55). The cultural institutions, to which these writers belong, do not sustain such perceptions and are rather ridiculed and part of antifeminist criticism and derision. She reveals “the peculiar problem of the woman writer working in a climate of assumptions and sympathies about women and sex roles which do not support female authenticity” (Pratt and Dembo 62-63). Importantly, she does not forget to analyze the cultural and sexual contradictions that a woman has to face right from her birth to her entire life.

However, as far as the notion of freedom is concerned, Martha always has to face the “feeling of being caged and trapped” (Lessing, PM 37). She thinks:

Until two weeks ago, her body had been free and her own, something to be taken for granted…And now this precious privacy, this independence, so lately won from her mother’s furtive questioning, was being threatened by an impertinent stranger. (Lessing, PM 37)
Martha’s notion of freedom keeps changing. Her marital relationship is far from what she has been longing for, “…it seemed as if not only they but her marriage did not exist--so strong was her feeling of being free. She was regarding her marriage, the life she was committed to, with a final, horrified dislike. Everything about it seemed false and ridiculous…” (Lessing, PM 45). Compared to Alice, Martha actually feels “free” (Lessing, PM 105). Therefore, she is not prepared to have a baby, for it might destroy her freedom. She imagines Alice with a baby, she feels pity for her, “Alice, loose and misshapen, with an ugly wet mouthed infant, feeding bottles, napkins, smells” (Lessing, PM 106). However, as soon as they buy a house with Douglas, Martha’s notion of freedom changes again:

She was uneasy because she has adapted herself so well to this life; some instinct to conform and comply had dictated that she must quell her loathing, as at entering a trap, which she had felt at the idea of being bound by a house and insurance policies until the gates of freedom opened at fifty. (Lessing, PM 277)

In fact, she does not want to confine her individuality. Julia also wants freedom. When she finds herself confined with Roger, she makes her way towards Jan, a Jew, hoping that it would be a new beginning of life. But, her dreams are shattered by the hypocrisy of Jan.

It appears that Martha’s controversial ideas about her life might be ascribed to her attempts to connect her personal experience with the collective one. On the one hand, she sometimes repents on her marriage, “I shouldn’t have got married, anyway” (Lessing, PM 48). On the other hand, she accepts the fact that she is formally bound to a man and takes it as an inevitable social convention, “…everyone feels like this, it’s like measles, one just has to go through with it” (Lessing, PM 48). Martha even wants to live in a community at one point of the novel, as she feels “the atmosphere of dedicated freedom there” (Lessing, PM 51). However, Solly explains to her that women are excluded from their community and that they do not want married couples to interfere. For this reason, Martha’s proposal to live there is refused.
It is evident that Martha’s alienation, both from her parents and her husband, is a starting point for her quest for the individual self. Her dream of a city is actually her first expression of dissatisfaction with the current situation of her life and with the social aspects associated with it. As far as Martha’s relationship with Douglas is concerned, she considers it a “possibility of realizing the dream” (Pickering 56). She believes that love, as a dream, has the power to bring about changes in her life and provide her with the sense of belonging, as contrasted to her feeling of alienation. Love is, however, most of the time also associated with marriage, family and child rearing. In other words, “marriage provides Martha with a social identity” (Holmquist 56). And this statement holds true for Mary also.

Unfortunately, Martha believes that her life will follow the stories from the books she reads, in which young girls marry, have a child and are happy in the end. Nevertheless, she does not feel like that at all. Her contemplation about marriage, love and life is based on the facts that appear in the books she likes to read. At one point in the novel Martha expresses her disillusionment concerning marriage:

If you read novels and diaries, women didn’t seem to have these problems. Is it really conceivable that we should have turned into something quite different in the space of about fifty years? Or do you suppose they didn’t tell the truth, the novelists? (Lessing, PM 229)

Her approach towards relations is truly a matter of attitude of conscious woman towards her responsibility towards family and ideal human relationship between man and woman.

Doris Lessing shows that a woman loves to be calm and tries to bear with the opposite circumstances as long as she can. In fact, she boldly reveals the inner world of the contemporary female intellectuals through the complicated relationships between the heroine Anna and her lovers. It further reveals the predicament people faced with in the modern society thus drawing the attention to the seriously imbalanced relationship between men and women. Among so many men, Anna has engaged with, the only one who is meaningful to Anna is her lover Michael. Anna has lived together with him for five years. She is so deeply committed to Michael
that she is willing to do anything for him. But this affection is well self-contradictory. Anna says, “We are happy together most of the time, then suddenly I have feelings of hatred and resentment for him” (Lessing, GN 407), because he always “makes some crack about the fact I have written a book, he resents it, makes fun of my being ‘authoress’” (Lessing, GN 407). He is ironical about Janet, Anna’s daughter and warns her that “he does not intend to marry her” (Lessing, GN 407). His words and behaviours make Anna feel a kind of coldness and displeasure. Anna knows that sooner or later Michael may leave her but she tries to ignore this fact. She enjoys transient happiness but suffers deeper misery and helplessness. Actually, what Anna desires is not that excessive. She does not ask for marriage. What she wants is only a kind of steadiness and true love. Julia also goes to Jan for love and when she is disappointed of her relationship with him, she goes back to Roger.

Lessing presents that the extra-marital relations are no solution to the marital problems. Though, sometimes, these give some stability to a disjoined life. It is only love, candour, consent, companionship and tenderness within marriage which can save marriage from disintegration and dissolution. However, Lessing’s women develop extra-marital relationships not out of sexual greed but to fulfil their longing for companionship, togetherness, tenderness and affection which they often miss in their conjugal relationship. Eric Berne feels, “companionship is a twosome and may or may not involve in sex. Companions usually have a certain amount of respect and affection for each other” (qtd. in Brewster 123). Love, in fact, is the essential need of Lessing’s women. The meaning of love for them is not the physical love but the metaphysical love which is carrying a great sense of respect and devotion for each other.

Most of Lessing’ women marry and remarry not because they want to gratify their sexual urges but because they strive for love in the form of understanding, sharing and participation. But in a male-dominated society, as Friedan observes, “Love has customarily been defined, at least for women, as a complete merging of egos and a loss of separateness - ‘togetherness,’ a giving up of individuality rather than a strengthening of it” (TFM 280). Woman is supposed to completely give up her individuality in love as well as in marriage. For man, marriage is a source of
self-gratification only. When Mary develops relations with Moses, she does not know nor want to know her own “volition” (Lessing, GIS 195). This disposition of hers proves to be one of the critical reasons why she succumbs to her collapse, which leads ineluctably to the murder. Mary’s father is an employee in a railway company, always remains drunk and often quarrels over money with his wife – Mary’s mother. Mary gets fed up with her parents’ strife. She decides to depart for the city where she can lead an independent life. She works as an excellent secretary. She enjoys her individual growth as human being.

However, sex is ‘essentially emotional’ for women. The men portrayed by Lessing are largely incurable womanizers. They want to have a number of mistresses or ‘keeps’. Despite their marriage, they are involved in a number of affairs. In *The Golden Notebook* Paul Tanner, bored with his wife, spends his nights with Ella at her place and it continues for several years. When Ella becomes highly serious about her relationship with him, he asks her to go to other boyfriends”(Lessing 208). He gets a job in Nigeria, just to get rid of her, and leaves her very callously. Ella lives in constant agony because she has started depending completely on Paul for her happiness. Similarly, Anna and Michael have a long affair stretched over four years. But finally Michael breaks it off and deserts her for other woman when Anna has started loving him deeply and cannot bear the idea of staying alone.

For a woman, love means complete emotional involvement with man. She wants stable and permanent relationship. But, man looks upon woman as sex and a means of self-gratification and sensual pleasures only. Ella’s colleague Patricia, in spite of her different humane qualities, is abandoned by her husband. Lessing narrates:

Patricia had been married for eleven years; and her husband had left her for a younger woman. Her attitude towards men was a gallant, good-natured, wisecracking cynicism. This jarred on Ella; I was something foreign to her. Patricia was in her fifties, lived alone, and had a grown-up daughter. She was, Ella knew, a courageous woman. (GN 208)
Men carefully keep their wives and children in their country homes and have “sex-adventures” (Lessing, GN 481) at their bachelor flats. Editor friend of Ella does the same with her. Men do not want to give anything in “return” (Lessing, GN 481). The plots of several stories of Anna, the writer, revolve round man’s treachery. She writes that “infidelity is a trait common to all men and they are utterly indifferent to the emotions of the woman they live with, be it wife or mistress” (Lessing, GN 515-525). These sketches for short stories, which are based on Anna’s own experience and observation of men, repeatedly reveal that the attitude of man towards love is highly selfish and detached.

For a man, love is a matter of casual affair and a temporary refuge from boredom and loneliness. George, is a sensualist, and when he “looked at a woman he was imagining her as she would be when he had fucked her into insensibility” (Lessing, GN 137). George always needs a woman for his physical pleasure. Even though, he is married and has children, he is carrying on an affair with a Black woman Marie and has a child from this union. His sex-adventure never ends. Man regards the act of love as a service rendered to him and for all the comfort and pleasures he gets from the wife, he thinks he owes her only food and shelter.

In most cases, Lessing’s works, after the birth of children, man ceases to love his wife and flirts around. He needs his wife when he is weak or sick or in old age to “fulfill the function of kindly nannies or nursemaids” (Rigney 61). He is not obliged to marry his mistress and carries on his overtures as long as he needs sex. When the woman expresses her desire for security and lasting relationship, he leaves her in the lurch. Man is always demanding, and does not want to give anything in return. He is eager to take, not to exchange. For woman, love means only giving and bestowing herself emotionally and physically, suppressing her own needs wholly; for man it is fulfillment of his sexual desires only.

Doris Lessing shows that woman always tries to bolster-up man, encourage him by covering up his weakness but he treats her as the other. He constantly blames her and projects his own infirmities on woman. Whereas she gives him confidence, he criticizes her for faults which are not even hers. Anna and Ella find that Jack and
Americans like Maitland and Nelson and many others who come to them for more sex leaving behind their beautiful, attractive wives are themselves sexually crippled, but they instead accuse their wives of being frigid and cold. While the women give them support, “build” and create them, they criticize them for being castrating. Lessing shows:

‘In the morning, he said could he come over again that night. He said, it was the least I could do, to give him a chance to redeem himself. He’s got a sense of humour at least. And so this man spent a second night with Julia. With no better results. Naturally he left at four, so that the little woman could believe he had been working late. Just as he left he turned on me and said, ‘You’re a castrating woman, I thought you were from the moment I saw you.’ (GN 470)

Men are polygamous by nature, women are monogamous. Lessing presents the relationship between Martha and Thomas in *The Landlocked* which exhibit the attitude of men towards women, “Well, there’s only one thing for women, they have to stay married to one man and stay faithful, no matter what their husbands do” (Lessing 122). Men are basically, as Lessing comments, “bullies and betrayers, but particularly… underminers and sappers” (Lessing, GN 10). Her characters break this myth by rising high on her approach towards man’s liberty and her rights as a life partner to man.

Throughout the series, it has been observed that a number of men have had direct influence in Martha Quest’s life. The first being Solly and Joss Cohen, who have lived nearby on the farm, and who are responsible for educating Martha. Her life in the city involves a string of affairs, which gradually leads to her marriage with Douglas Knowell. Her introduction to politics begins with the arrival of RAF soldiers, one of whom she was romantically involved with, and later introduces to the organizations that are active at the time. Her stint at the Communist Party involves another marriage with Anton Hesse, the leader of the group. Her arrival in London leads her to Jack, an amorous sailor who treats sex as a way of life. Martha's development throughout the novels has been influenced by men. This influence has
kept her from identifying with other women, particularly her mother. She is critical of overt emotional expression:

Martha watched herself in the growth of an extraordinarily unpleasant and upsetting emotion, a self mockery, a self parody, as if she both allowed herself an emotion she did not approve of, allowed it and enjoyed it, but at the same time cancelled it out by mockery. “...It's as if somewhere inside me there was a big sack of greasy tears and if a pin were stuck into me they'd spill out.... (Lessing, RFS 226)

This aversion towards emotional feeling had made it possible to stay away from her daughter, having convinced herself that she does it for her good. Succumbing to a feeling is tantamount to losing one's sanity, the opposite of rationality and the exercise of the intellect. This is seen throughout in Lessing's novels, “Martha Quest coldly witnesses the breakdown of the characters around her, strangely distant from herself, and she notes how women “who are at twenty the liveliest, the most intelligent, the most promising” (Lessing, LL 205) become neurotic in their thirties, thus losing their personalities. Martha thinks of a “little space on to which, unless she was careful... emotions would walk like actors and begin to speak without (apparently) any prompting from her” (Lessing, 28). Later, she thinks of this stage again, the threatening “emotions she could not give soil and roots within herself.” (Lessing, LL 113). Anita Myles is of the opinion, “The island is a replica of the mythical four-gated city, the prototype of paradise, the ‘New Jerusalem’ of Martha's perpetual quest”(44). Lessing through Landlocked shows that woman gets a confirmed check on her way to success just due to man’s evil settlement of ideas towards woman.

However, Maratha holds quite a different view from that of Marjorie. It is amazing to see that the young woman, who frees herself from all the conventional roles of a woman, still prefers to define her position in relation to a man. It appears contradictory, yet this is true. If the man goes away, there is left an empty space filled with shadow. She mourns for the temporarily extinct person. She can only be with a man she loves; with the empty space at her side, peopled with images of her
own potentialities until the next man walks into the space, absorbs the shadows into himself, creating her, allowing her to be her 'self' and a new self, since it is the conception of man which forms her as a complete self. Martha's unsatisfactory marriage with Anton again pushes her to fantasize about the faceless men:

She looked straight up into a black, dry sky, clashing with barren thunder, split with dry lightning. Storms excited her sexually, and she was on the point of indulging in fantasies of faceless men who waited in the wings of the future, waiting to free the Martha who was in cold storage. Anton would be coming soon. She had learned to protect herself against him sexually. (Lessing, PM 141)

Martha simply cannot keep conforming to her husband’s life, for she considers herself a woman who has the same rights as a man. Furthermore, Martha “would not submit to what women always had submitted to” (Lessing, PM 370). Without any doubt, her decision to leave Douglas and to escape is a disgrace both for her mother and for herself. Martha contemplates about her feelings to Douglas and she is in doubts about whether she has ever loved him or not. Even her father explains to her that she has actually never loved Douglas and therefore she can never be satisfied with her marriage. However, Martha believes that emotions and love are not aroused rather, they are felt and enjoyed. Martha cannot believe that “Douglas really loved her, as she put it; really loving, now, meant the exquisite fragile relationship with William” (Lessing, PM 338). Martha needs to leave Douglas for her own good.

Mary belongs to the colonizing culture and comes from a middle class white family which is full of problems. Mary’s childhood reveals many details affecting her sense of belonging and the issue of identity in adult life. She is depicted as a woman who leads “a happy single life in the town” (Lessing, GIS 4). However, at the same time, the author indicates that Mary has a meaningless existence by saying that “she seemed immune” to any outside effects”(Lessing, GIS 37) and she likes “the friendly impersonality of” a routine (Lessing, GIS 35). Throughout her life, Mary has to face the identity issue. Mary’s relationship with her immediate family, people in the town and the country and her husband is an issue of roots of woman as
human being. In fact, there are certain black characters that Mary comes into contact with them in social context. Nevertheless, she has relations with the servant Moses, the black policemen and houseboys. Mary comes from a poor white South African family in which the father is a drunkard and the mother a helpless complainer with three children, two of whom die of dysentery. She grows up as the “confidante” of her mother, “hating her father” (Lessing, GIS 33). She “inherited from her mother an arid feminism” (Lessing, GIS 35) though it is not of much use to her.

The effects of growing up with an extreme resentment against her father are also reflected in Mary’s adult life later in the novel. Such a troubled family, and its financial problems do not leave Mary much room for developing a healthy personal identity and sense of belonging to a family unit as she only feels important when comforting her mother “Mary comforted her miserably, longing to get away, but feeling important too” (Lessing, GIS 33). It shows that how family consequences bring mess to her determination to be a developed woman.

Doris Lessing, the iconoclast, trenchantly brings out that even after achieving cherished freedom in all spheres, women are not truly free and happy as they envisage and have to pay a heavy price for their independence. A free woman feels lonelier and unprotected in a sexist society which is ready to crush her identity and individuality at every opportunity. Julia has to pay for her freedom being in relations with Roger:

“You can’t understand, what I ‘ve suffered with”.
“You needed freedom that I ‘ve given to you”.
She cries and finds no one to see around.
Jan has left. She recalls Roger and searches for him. (Lessing, RTI 221)

It reveals both sides of divorce that it provides one kind of freedom, i.e. freedom from oppression and exploitation by the husband and it creates new forms of sufferings and problems as well. Anna exposes the reality of her desire that she wants to be a married woman. She can’t stay alone in her life. Lessing presents the conversation between Marion and Anna:
Marion winked, horribly; and said with drunken roguishness: ‘Oh but I think I’ve come because I'm envious. You are what I want to be-you're free, and you have lovers and you do as you like.’ ‘I'm not free,’ said Anna; heard the dryness in her tone and understood she must banish it. She said, ‘Marion, I'd like to be married. I don't like living like this.’ ‘It’s easy to say that. But you could get married if you want. Well you'll have to let me sleep here tonight. The last train has gone. And Richard's too mean for me to hire a car. Richard's awfully mean. Yes he is.’(Lessing, GN 277)

After remaining a free woman for long, Molly too finally decides to remarry. The reward of freedom is, thus, insecurity and loneliness. If love within marriage is not possible, it is further difficult after divorce. Lessing’s women remarry neither because they are anti-feminists nor because they are willing to return to oppression within marriage. In fact, they envision a well organized ideal human world around there. Jean Pickering puts it, “the good qualities deemed masculine, courage, strength and skill, for instance and the good qualities seen as feminine, tenderness, the ability to feel and express feelings should be the qualities available to all”(14-15). She shows the spirit of humanity and sense of responsibility. She is not against marriage but hates it as a contract of relations between man and woman where man always betrays and woman survives as a partner and is always expected to perform like a ‘slave’ to her man.

However, even this free existence is no promise of constant happiness. When Michael after four years of togetherness leaves Anna, there is a disintegration of her being. She feels as if everything is “divided off and split up”(Lessing, GN 273). When, Michael rings Anna for the last time to inform her that he will not come, she feels as if:

An awful black whirling chaos is just inside me, waiting to move into me. I must go to sleep quickly, before I become that chaos, I am trembling with misery and with tiredness….Tomorrow, I think—tomorrow—I’ll be responsible, face my future, and refuse to be miserable.
Then I sleep, but before I am even asleep I can hear myself crying, the sleep-crying this time all pain, no enjoyment in it all. (Lessing, GN 360)

After having a happy life full of love, the blow of separation becomes more severe and painful for woman. When Anna’s alter ego, Ella, is deserted by her lover Paul, she too feels cracked up, as if she is “in pieces”(Lessing, GN 311). In fact, her whole “life was shaped around a man who would not return to her”(Lessing, GN 305).

Paul’s presence and his demanding and possessive nature has blocked Ella so much that even after Paul “had left her… everything she did, said or felt, still referred to him ”(Lessing, GN 305). She is utterly miserable when Paul plays a fraud, “She was listless and flat. It was as if Paul had taken with him, not only all her capacity for joy, but also her will”(Lessing, GN 305). She loses her will to enjoy the things, the places, the emotions, the happiness, which she earlier shares with Paul. She says, “the truth is that my happiness with Paul was more important to me than anything and where has that landed me? Alone, frightened to be alone”(Lessing, GN 312). There is a total disintegration of her personality and the “emotional vacuum”(Lessing, GN 313) deepens. In their new-found freedom, problems still exist and disappointments in love continue.

A free woman experiences not only an awful feeling of disgust, loneliness and futility but she longs for companionship and togetherness more desperately than before. In the beginning of The Golden Notebook, Lessing’s ‘Free Women’ Anna and Molly are able to live ‘free’ of men and marriage, are engaged in what’s wrong with men and marriage session. Their discussion vividly reveals the precariousness of their freedom. Anna and Molly develop a number of affairs after divorce in search of companionship and permanence in life but are repeatedly disappointed and deserted by men who come to them for their sexual gratification only. While Molly finally decides to remarry, Anna feels so desperately alone that she cannot sleep without a man. Paul Schlueter rightly remarks:

Probably more than in any other novel, The Golden Notebook captures the authentic quality of what it is to be a woman, especially a woman in a man’s world, and even more especially a woman who frankly admits the
existence of her sexuality, her neuroses, her intellect, her desperation in living, her disgust at the mediocre so feverishly sought by those of either sex who are themselves mediocre, her refusal to compromise her essential being. (38)

Lessing’s Anna and Molly are quite resilient and have the capability to “create order, to create a new way of looking at life” (Lessing, GN 80) but even then they feel broken, forlorn, forsaken, “insecure” and “uprooted” (Lessing, GN 31).

Fear of loneliness, insecurity, emotional vacuum, financial pressures and unjust division of responsibility make the divorcees “realise better than the single persons that married life, at large, is satisfying, and this consciousness makes them plan to return to it by remarriage” (Oakley, SGS 68). Remarriage or settling down again in marriage is not anti-feminist, it rather amounts to maturity and better understanding of the ideals of marriage which insists on “life-long ‘till death do us part’ commitment arising from mutual love and selflessness” (Rigney VII). They return to marriage in the hope of “co-existence,” (Spelman 737) in the hope of a world “shared” equally by both the sexes. In the West, one in every three marriages ends in break up and divorce is spreading like an epidemic. Hence, countries like Britain are seriously considering tightening the divorce law, e.g. by banning divorce at least within three years of marriage. Thus, in Europe the stability of marriage and family is being re-stressed. Remarriage also amounts to transcending the trivial self-created sexual prejudices and reaching out for the world where the male and the female have relations based on equality and understanding. Remarriage, however, can be helpful only if husbands are ready to care and share. Otherwise, the ordeals of the woman in the patriarchal set-up will continue.

Divorce, which is admittedly a relief from the painful life of an imbalanced marriage, is hardly enough to re-establish the woman socially, psychologically or financially. Even after divorce, the aggrieved or relieved woman does not find herself the same situation as before marriage. Despite the wounds inflicted in the unsuccessful marriage which have to be borne for a long time, a woman has to further bear the onslaughts of a harsh society which does not allow her to be free and
happy. Divorce is the beginning of another phase of troubles. Even on the emotional level, divorce does not bring easy happiness or freedom to women. It turns out to be a traumatic experience, a shock and often disintegrates a poised and amiable woman’s balanced personality and disturbs her psyche. In fact, to free oneself from the past, and to soothe the wounds of a broken marriage, one needs moral strength and time which ultimately prove to be the healing factors. The social responses also add to the sense of trauma, since a divorced woman is seen as a culprit or as a pitiable creature which increases the sense of deprivation, loneliness and insecurity.

Martha does not believe that marriage is the only source of happiness as it is demonstrated in various novels that she often consults with the intention to find some references to her own life. Furthermore, she takes into consideration the fact that the role of women may have changed in the course of years and by expressing her idea that there might be a “new kind of woman in the world” (Lessing, PM 229), she actually provides a new insight of Lessing’s female characters. The analysis of existence of this “new kind of woman” is actually a fundamental point of research in this thesis. On one occasion Martha comes up with the following idea:

From these dreary self-searchings there emerged a definite idea: that there must be, if not in literature, which evaded these problems, then in life, that woman who combined a warm accepting femininity and motherhood with being what Martha described vaguely but to her own satisfaction as a ‘person’. She must look for her. (Lessing, PM 229)

The present situation implies that Martha openly expresses dissatisfaction with her personal identity that presumably cannot be fully realized and developed if she complies to marriage only. Both Martha and Mary search for a new form of life that would satisfy her. However, Mary is bound only by her marriage whereas Martha is bound by marriage and her daughter Caroline both. Marta actually refuses to be identified with her daughter as well as with her married life:

Two years ago, I was as free as air. I could have done anything, been anything. Because the essence of the daydreams of every girl who isn’t married is just that: it’s the only time they are more free than men. Men
have to be something, but you’ll find when you grow up, my poor child, that you’ll see yourself as a ballet dancer, or a business executive, or a wife of the Prime Minister, or the mistress of somebody important, or even in extreme moments a nun or a missionary. You’ll imagine yourself doing all sorts of things in all sorts of countries; the point is, your will will be your limit. Anything’ll be possible. But you will not see yourself sitting in a small room bound for twenty-four hours of the day—with years of it in front of you—to a small child. For God’s sake, Caroline, don’t marry young, I’ll stop you marrying young if I have to lock you up. (Lessing, PM 228)

As it is manifested in this quotation, Martha endeavours to prevent Caroline from making the same mistakes as she herself had made. This negative point of view concerning marriage stems from the fact that her foolish expectations of romantic love and satisfied marriage are not fulfilled. Moreover, she is tied to a child to whom she does not feel any affinity but only a social responsibility.

In the game of power within marriage, children who are the blessing of a marriage turn into a device of securing more power over women. “Men prefer a large number of children as the greater the number of pregnancies, the less opportunity women had to compete for power” (Toffler 127). Children become a device for men to enchain women forcibly in marriage. In an incident in The Golden Notebook, the husband, De Silva impregnates his wife against her wishes and then mercilessly abandons her with two kids and no money at Ceylon and comes to live in London. He again pursues women there. Both Molly and Anna talk about him:

He came back a couple of months ago. He’s abandoned his wife, apparently. She’s much too good for him, he says, weeping big tears, but not too big, because after all she is stuck with two kids in Ceylon and no money: so he’s safe. (Lessing, GN 69)

Martha is determined to leave Douglas but he threatens her, “I'll give you another baby - that’s all; put an end to this nonsense” (Lessing, PM 351). Aware of the stifling and destructive influence of the unwanted pregnancies, feminists insist on,
and then succeed in, getting the abortion legalized so that at least women have control over their bodies. Now, of course, women do not have to submit to the arbitrariness of conception. Lessing explores that the woman’s biological functions have been often exploited by the husbands to keep her enslaved in marriage.

Lessing’s Martha and Alice suffer because abortion is illegal, a crime. After her marriage to Douglas, Martha is advised by her friends Stella and Alice to see the doctor to know about the methods of birth-control, and warn her that “if you start a baby, then it's illegal not to have it” (Lessing, PM 25). Martha is appalled to know it and remarks outrageously, “Do you mean to say that a woman's not entitled to decide whether she’s going to have a baby or not?” (Lessing, PM 25). Martha and Alice both find child-bearing and child-rearing debilitating, frustrating and irritating experiences. Motherhood neither soothes Martha nor brings her closer to her husband as is expected. After the birth of her daughter Caroline, Martha feels as if she has been confined perpetually in the nursing home and calls it a “factory” (Lessing, PM 27). She hates the business of child-bearing, the cycle of procreation and cries in anguish, “I wish I’d never had a baby at all” (Lessing, PM 172).

Martha’s friend Stella experiences similar emotional turmoil after the birth of her baby boy. Both feel as if they are “a couple of cows” and tell their common friend Alice that “we both wish we were dead” (Lessing, PM 173). Martha repents marrying at a young age and advises her unresponsive infant, “Two years ago, I was as free as air. I could have done anything, been anything. Because the essence of daydream of every girl who isn’t married is just that...Caroline, don’t marry young” (Lessing, PM 228). Unlike her mother who is always interfering and putting pressures on her, Martha wants her daughter to grow into an independent and free human being. She tells Caroline, “I’ll send you to a nursery school, where you are well out of my poisonous influence” (Lessing, PM 227).

Gradually, Martha too develops tender emotions as a mother and a “desire to hold a small baby in her arms again” (Lessing PM 244). She is also aware of the needs of Caroline to have a companion. But she also knows that “if she had another baby, she would be committed to staying here, she would live in the pattern till she dies” that is, to “housekeep and mind babies” (Lessing, PM 266) which she does not
want. And when Douglas insists on having another baby, she feels her deepest self threatened” (Lessing, PM 281). Finally, the emotional turmoil is over when maternal emotions of Martha are overpowered by her desire to be free and she decides that she will not go in for another child at all. Her “vision of the brooding mother with the flock of children” and she in their “middle like a queen ant” (Lessing, PM 304) vanishes the desire for emancipation become stronger.

Instead of being a housewife, she prefers to join a political group and to behave as a modern and independent young woman. On the other hand, she also feels her natural female desires, “Martha knew her female self was sharply demanding that she should start the cycle of birth again” (Lessing, PM 279). These two voices keep conflicting in her mind. Finally, she decides to follow her maternal desires longing for a new baby which is stronger than her feeling of being imprisoned by her pregnancy. According to the general view presented in this novel, women should follow the “voice of their female selves”, although it seems to be a duty for them” (Lessing, PM 280). There is actually something “irresistibly satisfying about the process of self-destruction,” as most of women claim” (Lessing, PM 281). According to Schlueter, “Martha and other ‘emancipated’ women of any generation find themselves so lonely and fragmented” (29).

Reading makes Martha idealize her world, though reality seems to be much different. Not only literature but also her dreams and idealized visions are an inevitable part of her introspective view of her life. However, she always finds out that there is a great difference between what is ideal and what is real. In other words, Martha’s “quest for freedom” is full of contradictions. She feels free when she gets married but later she takes divorce from her husband. She has a baby named Caroline. Later, she leaves her also. She says, “You’ll be perfectly free, Caroline. I’m setting you free, Martha explains in her final exclamation” (Lessing, PM 374). This act is a result of her lack of social commitments and affection to Caroline. According to Schlueter, “most of Lessing’s female protagonists are concerned with a self-conscious awareness of either being free or lacking freedom, and Martha Quest, as we have already seen, is especially concerned with liberating herself from the
conformist institutions around her‖ (74). Despite all her efforts, Martha still needs to find the right explanation for her concept of freedom.

Doris Lessing depicts marriage as an emotionally stifling and tyrannical institution for women. Most of her characters like Mary Turner, Martha, Maisie, Marjorie, Molly, Ella, Marion and Anna are victims of gender-oppression. However, most of these women refuse to accept the polarization of sexes. They do not want to define themselves in relation to men and hence seek identity and individuality in their own way. When they realize that they are being used and abused, they turn subversive of the tradition of being submissive and conforming persons, asserting their “individuality” (Greer 329) and “consciousness” (Greer 343) which are prerequisites for women’s liberation.

As for Mary’s relationship with her husband Dick, it can be said that their marriage is based on Mary’s gratitude to Dick for acknowledging the fact that Mary married below her status and expectations by accepting him. Mary accepts Dick because “his worship restores” (Seligman 486) Mary’s “feeling of superiority to men” (Lessing, GIS 44). Dick is aware that he dragged Mary into a miserable poor farmer’s life by proposing to her. He is very determined and hardworking, but he is a poor and jinxed farmer. He thinks “he had no right to marry” (Lessing, GIS 55). His sense of guilt manifests itself as shyness and meekness whenever they have a fight. He is intimidated by his not having been fair to Mary by marrying her. In other words, he has a certain latent inferiority that Mary comes to appreciate and enjoy in time. For instance, when Mary asks Dick to put in ceilings, Dick refuses as “it would cost too much” (Lessing, GIS 63). The second time, she wants to ask him the same question, because she knows that he would have a painful expression on his face. She finds energy to sustain her marriage in Dick’s crushed dignity due to his poverty. But she knows she cannot easily ask and bring that heavy tormented look on his face. Dick also understands the poor situation of the family. That is why, he takes her hand endearingly and kisses it submissively and asks pleadingly:

‘Darling, do you hate me for bringing you here?’ she replied, ‘No, dear, you know I don’t.’ It was the only time she could bring herself to use
endearments to him, when she was feeling victorious and forgiving. His craving for forgiveness, and his abasement before her was the greatest satisfaction she knew, although she despised him for it. (Lessing, GIS 66)

Lessing exposes the reality of a few marriages, where female is a dominated personality. She is caring and kind both. Mary not only helps Dick in his work but assists him in his poverty too.

Doris Lessing emerges as a humanitarian to present woman who cares for men and is full of emotions. Her woman has no objection as to be identified with man but noticeably she wants no compromise on her own status. Mary contrary to her dreams accompanies Dick Turner for his success as a man in the economic affairs. She comes along with him abandoning and leaving Britain because her husband feels the great depression. She lives in Africa where her husband tries to find a hope in the agricultural activity of the colonial society. Paul also finds it so comfortable on his part that he can easily rely on his life partner. Lessing states:

Much later he married a woman fifteen years older than himself. Last year he wrote me a letter in which he described this marriage—it was obviously written when he was drunk and posted, so to speak, into the past. They slept together, with little pleasure on her side, and none on his ‘though I did put my mind to it, I do assure you!’—for a few weeks. Then she got pregnant, and that was the end of sex between them. In short, a not uncommon English marriage. His wife, it appears, has no suspicion he is not a normal man. He is quite dependent on her and if she died I suspect he'd commit suicide, or retreat into drink. (GN 71)

Lessing presents that woman can really provide extreme happiness and joy in married life. But she wants permanent and stable relationship where both the man and woman are committed. She expects mutual understanding than mere sexual attraction.

Women have long been accustomed to divide their lives into compartments. Lessing shows it through Anna’s mode of keeping things separate, isolating parts of
her experience in individual notebooks, literary and self-aware characters. She replies to the threat of chaos, which makes freedom meaningless, by creating limited orders, necessary, but necessarily false; recognizing their falsity, she sees herself therefore as an enemy of possibility. But communicating in this way, Anna is paradoxically exercising the qualities as of the freedom of the individual, the freedom to fight, to “push boulders”, to write for others, to work responsibly to improve the world, to try to eliminate personal and social chaos. Nonetheless, Martha continues the relationship for some time and also carries on her political activities. Even when she drifts with the Left Club, Martha never loses sight of a beloved shore:

She had been dreaming of 'that country'; a phrase she used to describe a particular region of sleep which she often visited, or which visited her—and always when she was overtired or sick. 'That country' was pale, misted, flat; gulls cried like little children around violet-coloured shores. She stood on coloured chalky rocks with a bitter sea washing around her feet and the smell of salt was strong in her nostrils. (Lessing, MQ 191)

Martha’s inclination, towards achieving the emancipation over personal hurdles created by her own man, shows her humanity who wants consonant growth and freedom from the bondages.

Martha stays, in fact, freer throughout her life, but it is still not enough for her, “Martha went home with the feeling that she had accomplished another stage in that curious process which would set her free” (Lessing, PM 373). Every stage of her freedom actually makes her feel imprisoned again and consequently, she has to keep searching for something to set her free. Her thoughts are always full of contradictions:

For if she remained in the colony when she had wanted to leave it, got married when she wanted to be free and adventurous, always did the contrary to what she wanted most, it followed that there was no reason why at fifty she should not be just such another woman as Mrs. Quest, narrow, conventional, intolerant, insensitive. She was cold and trembling
with fear. She had no words to express this sense of appalling fatality which menaced everyone, her mother as well as herself. (Lessing, PM 42)

As a matter of fact, her unclear idea of identity continually keeps afflicting her. There is a reference mentioning “her unhappily disconnected selves” (Lessing, PM 75), which supports her contemplation about her fragmented self.

Doris Lessing uses the phrase “pattern of behaviour” in *A Proper Marriage* to indicate man’s jealous response to wife’s decision of divorce. Towards the end of this novel, when Martha overcomes her initial reluctance to leave Douglas and her decision becomes publicly known, several women of the town come to her to congratulate her on what they could not do in their own lives. They also blurt out the truth of their unhappy marital relationship. But, her husband gets desperate and tries everything from threats and appeals to request her for staying with him. Lessing gives a psychologically realistic description of the behaviour in which a man indulges when he learns that his wife is going to desert him:

When a woman left her husband, or threatened to leave him – that is, a woman of her type, who insisted on her rights to behave as a man would – then the husband went through certain actions like an automaton, beginning with confiscating the contraceptives, threatening to make her forcibly pregnant, accusing her of multifarious infidelities, and ending in self-abasing weeping appeals that she should change her mind and stay... they were involved in a pattern of behaviour which they could not alter. (Lessing, PM 368)

Douglas tries his best to stop Martha and threatens to impregnate her in order to break her-self-sufficiency. He indulges in physical abuse to terrorize her. But nothing could alter Martha’s rock-hard decision to break the stale, unjust, one-sided relationship. Martha finally leaves him, he spies on her in order to blackmail her and win public sympathy. His jealousy comes down to the level of meanness and he demands back the money she has spent on her personal items like “sandals” or “sweater” during her stay with him:
He informed her that in the year before she had left him, she had bought goods to the value of $20 at the shops, and he was incurring a great deal of extra expense due to her having left him.... He produced an account like a shopkeeper’s on a sheet of stiff paper: Item one pair of shoes; Item one sweater, 25’s.; and so on, handing it to her with a sentimental and appealing smile. (Lessing, RFS 30)

Even when the woman is not the one asking for divorce, she still has to bear with such pettiness in her husband. In The Golden Notebook when Richard is contemplating a divorce from Marion to marry his young secretary, he delimits his wife’s monthly expenditure and checks her accounts regularly. Marion unveils his meanness to Anna:

Would you believe it, that he could be so mean? He’s as rich as hell. Do you know, we are among the one per cent of people as rich as – but he examines my accounts every month. He boasted that we were among the top one per cent, but I bought a model dress and he complained.
(Lessing, GN 277)

Lessing presents that her women protagonists don’t want to fit in social norms which are restricted to one sex only. Mary, “whose own psychological failings make it impossible for her to conform to the dedicated thoroughness that her repressive society requires of its members” (Fishburn 2). She starts looking for a husband and just as her gossiping friends predict, she allows a much older man than herself to approach her. Mary prefers “a widower of fifty-five with half grown children” because she “felt safer with him…because she did not associate ardours and embraces with a middle aged gentleman whose attitude was almost fatherly” (Lessing, GIS 42). At this point, the influence of Mary’s oedipal trauma caused by her father becomes obvious once again in the novel. Mary’s distaste for sex and her considering an old man for a husband carry implications of Freudian ideas, which explain female adult sexuality by means of the relationship with the father in childhood. Mary quite predictably chooses an old man to flirt with in order to compensate for the fatherly affection she has lacked when growing up. However,
when he tries to kiss her, she runs away and the whole town learns about this humiliating situation. The reaction of the society is meaningful because “when people heard it they nodded and laughed as if it confirmed something they had known for a long time” (Lessing, GIS 43). The colonial society is depicted as an entity whose colonial discourse is always considered an ideal one. It grows even more powerful and dogmatic because people have faith in it.

So, the views of Lessing’s women on marriage, whereby they first avoid it and then marry and then they take divorce and then remarry, show that they don’t hate to be wives but they can’t bear the torments caused by men just because they are their husbands. They want an ideal human relationship. Daniel Rogers points out an ideal relationship:

Husbands and wives should be as two sweet friends, bred under one constellation, tempered by an influence from heaven, whereof neither can give any great reason, save that mercy and providence made them so, and then made their match: saying, see God hath determined us, out of this vast world, each for other; perhaps many may deserve as well, but yet to me, and for my turne, thou excellest them all, and God hath made me to thinke so but because it is so. (qtd. in Singh 25)

In fact, Lessing’s women argue that unless a wife is regarded as a friend and an equal partner in marriage, she cannot adequately carry out the burdens that marriage places on her. They consider ‘as much equality as may be’ as the basis of happiness of marriage. Lessing, indeed, rejects the whole idea of natural inferiority of either sex and states that relation between the two sexes is mutual and dependency a reciprocal.

Thus, Doris Lessing presents that marriage is not a project imposed on woman only, rather she feels it a bond between two different selves of man and woman into one. If it does not include loyalty, honesty, dedication, truth and care towards each other, it is not a subject for pursuing throughout as burden. Whenever, Martha finds it challenging to her development as a human being, she deserts every impediment including her both the husbands and her boyfriends. Marriage, for them, is a source
of companionship and mutuality. Love values the emotional substance than physical level. Lessing’s women desire for the sense of liberty and belief for each other in married life. Martha discerns the attitude of her husband because he denies co-operating his wife to help her wife in nourishing and child caring. In fact, Doris Lessing’s women deny accepting marriage as a traditional offer and private institution. They dislike the circumstances of marriage which relegate women to the subjugated, marginalized and sidelined partner in the conjugal life.