CHAPTER-II

CHALLENGING THE FAMILIAL MYSTIQUE

“Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men—by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour—determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the Male.”

(Adrienne Rich, Of Women Born 57-58)

Origin of myths related to woman begins right from her home with the birth of a female child. The double standards and dichotomous attitude which continue to operate throughout a woman’s life start right from her parents’ home. She is prevented from developing her individuality. “She is constantly reminded by her mother that a girl is destined for a man and the one who gets the most masculine attention is the luckiest one. A woman in a male-dominated society is thus conditioned into the emotional and cognitive traits of subordination and dependence” (Segal 118). It is the family, which is “the source of women’s oppression because under patriarchal domination, it is the agency in and through which women and men are engendered and replicating men who dominate, women who submit” (Bigsy 145). Without any doubt, family and child rearing are gender stereotypes generally assigned to women. Most feminist theories also consider child rearing as a fundamental element in the “construction of gender identity and the self and in the origin and replication of male dominant gender relations” (Bigsy 157).

The institution of family, as an essential part of the social life of woman, is the most important aspect for making and perpetuating mystiques about women. A woman gets hardly any encouragement to develop her independent individual self in her parents’ home. She becomes someone’s daughter, someone’s wife or someone’s mother but is denied her own independent identity. In patriarchal society, the birth of a female child is traditionally less welcome than that of the male. Being born a boy
is itself a privilege. The moment a girl reaches adolescence, she is reminded of her femininity. In fact, the patriarchal society recognizes the supremacy of man in the family and assumes woman’s dependence on man in all matters denying her freedom, dignity and equality of status. In the patriarchal system, women are always under the supervision of their fathers, brothers or husbands.

The family of an individual has a great impact on one’s self. It becomes a burden when it comes to a rearing girl. Nancy Chodorow calls it, “an oscillating triangular relationship between the little girl, her mother and her father” (133). Martha also gets the impact of her parents as they are the representatives of the white British middle class. They, like other immigrants, have come to British Colony in Central Africa with the hope that they will be able to become rich by growing maize. They dream that once they become rich, they would return to Africa. Everything, however, turns into a failure. So, there emerges a sense of insecurity, imbalance and failure in achieving a social reputation in the society. Mr. Quest prefers to limit his desires to his control and triumph over familial issues. He tries to develop Martha according to his life experiences as he feels that he has learnt a lot from the different circumstances of pre-war and post war times. Jean Pickering is so much impressed that he calls him, a “pre-war and post war self” (41). He always guides her to adopt limited life style so that one can easily survive. He feels that she must have a sense of assessing the things and circumstances for her life and make her observations before coming to any decision.

Nancy Chodorow points out the “sense of insecurity” (71) and high level of concern in the nature of father for his daughter. Mr. Quest makes Martha feel comfortable in her early part of life. But, after the war, he becomes introvert and sensitive on the family issues such as participation of women members in social acts, the behaviour of women members outside the home and the role of women characters in marriage and motherhood. Holmquist opines that Mr. Quest’s behaviour turns towards the sense of insecurity, “because of his war experience” (43). After this, he has adopted a passive attitude and turned his life as of a sufferer of war. His restrictions, on selection of clothes and on her walking and playing in the street with the boys, are the consequences of his failure as a father and an
economically unsuccessful man. His sense of failure leads him to do all this. Holmquist divides his personality into a pre-war and post-war one, “because after the war, he does not consider him to be ‘himself’ as most of the time, he is locked in his thoughts about the war” (41). It all leads him towards the passivity and stops him to take interests in family affairs.

Doris Lessing exposes the male dominated psychology of the society that compels father to act as an oppressor and leader of the family. Adrienne Rich has observed that patriarchy has provided a lot of powers to the fathers. It creates a male dominated culture within a family which snatches, “certain powers” (57) from women and makes them powerless at home and society. Holmquist discusses this authority in the relationship between man and woman. He states:

> When the male sex role is confronted with the female in the interaction between the sexes a form of parent-child relationship is established....This interaction which may at first sight seem complementary involves a hierarchy in that the male sex role behaviour implies control of the woman, whereas her function signifies adjustment to and support of the man....The man...dominates while the woman is subservient. (66)

However, in the case of Mr. Quest, the World War I has played a vital role in bringing change in his attitude. Being in war and having enough experience, his role in family and society starts getting diminished. His poor health makes him feel insecure about the security of his daughter Martha.

Adrienne Rich points out the reason for a father’s restricted behaviour towards his daughter. Father appoints his wife to look after the personal growth of his daughter. She states, “At the core of patriarchy is the individual family unit which originated with the idea of property and the desire to see one’s property transmitted to one’s biological descendents” (60). Even, Upanishads exhibit the following philosophy:
The woman nourishes her husband’s self, the son, within her… The father elevates the child even before the birth, and immediately after, by nourishing the mother and by performing ceremonies. When he thus elevates the child… the really elevates his second self, for the continuation of these worlds… This is his second birth. (qtd. in Rich 226)

Rich shows the reason that why “daughters are nullified by silence” (226) and also by infanticide. Simone de Beauvoir finds out the reason for the discrimination:

The owner transfers, alienates, his existence into his property; he cares more of it than for his very life; it overflows the narrow limits of his mortal life-time, and continues to exist beyond the body’s dissolution—the earthly and material incorporation of the immortal soul. But, this survival can only come about if the property remains in the hands of its owner; it can be his beyond death only if it belongs to individuals in whom he sees himself projected, who are his. (82)

Nancy Chodorow also views that extra concern of fathers for their “property, power and wealth” (148) make women aware of their existential values. All of Doris Lessing’s women protagonists set themselves free from all kind of restrictions from their fathers and search for the possible opportunities. Julia Barr says to her father, “I am all free to develop my life” (Lessing, RTI 94). Mary is highly interested in formulating her life in her own way. They all feel that they are not made to follow the old taboos made up of social and gender contradictions. Adrienne Rich views that attitude of father is reflected in his longing for physical, economic or institutional powers. Mr. Quest’s behaviour towards his daughter Martha proves this statement true. In fact, he is not happy with the liberal attitude of Martha. He wants her to stay confined to her limitations:

‘What? she asked, exasperated, lifting her from the book.
‘You are not listening.’
‘I am listening.’
‘It’s all very well for you’, came the grumbling voice.

...
‘Oh, Daddy,’ she protested, grumbling, why is all very well,
I haven’t said a word!’ (Lessing, MQ 41)

Doris Lessing’s Martha is not submissive by nature. She dislikes, criticizes and protests all the male oriented psychological taboos. When, Mr. Quest makes objections on her naked body, she answers, “what wrong with it, if I am a child” (Lessing, MQ 32). Lessing makes her women characters speak right from their childhood.

Lessing’s women protagonists prepare a base for the female rights. She creates the substance of “matriarchy” (Rich 59) through Martha’s mother. Lessing’s attempt in her different novels shows the dominance of women at homes. Martha Quest’s mother enjoys her dominance at home and she wants her children, especially her daughter to exert her identity. In fact, Mrs. Quest is a frustrated middle aged woman “living in a dead end marriage, attempting to compensate for her disappointment by domineering her family and especially her daughter Martha” (Holmquist 30). Mrs. Quest wants Martha to acquire a selfless attitude in life. She is somewhat ambivalent in regarding Martha’s role as a woman. In her opinion, Martha should get properly married and have children. On the other hand, she says that Martha has a “career” (Lessing, MQ 4). Though, this career is not of being a doctor, an engineer or a lawyer but “a kind of stick to beat the world with” (Lessing, MQ 4). Out of her ideology of life, she considers matrimony and motherhood to be more desirable institutions. She has a strong perception about the behaviour and acts of women. She feels that men have the power and women are more in the background. She does not like the fact that Martha wants to wear the clothes which no longer resemble a child’s clothes. But Martha considers the community around her as hypocritical and intolerant. The gender biased approach of her parents irritates Martha Quest. Doris Lessing shows that Martha is shocked at her birth in Quests:

…this cold, exasperated thought had never been worked out.
…
She still shared parents’ unconsciousness attitude, although she repudiated their day dreaming and foolishness, that this was not really her home. (Lessing, MQ 15)

The present conflict which starts from the very first book of the *Children of Violence* permeates through all the five books of the series. When Martha Quest becomes aware of how gender discrimination is practiced in her family, she raises her voice against all the familial taboos. While her younger brother with “half her brains” is put in an “expensive school, like a visitor from a more prosperous world,” (Lessing, MQ 34) and she goes to a local school. The awareness of the biased attitude makes her self-reliant and defiant towards her parents and she decides to seek her own identity outside the hold of her parents.

Traditionally daughters are expected to become like their mothers and acquire the good qualities from her. Martha’s image portrayed as a rebel against her own mother is actually a rebel against the concept of motherhood and the image of mother being worshipped over the years. Annis Pratt notes that women novelists have often made use of two or three generation of mothers and daughters to show how the protagonists suffer due to their closest role models. In such novels, the protagonists face difficulties due to the neurotic behavior of their mothers. Pratt views that the women of older generation suffer from “neurosis” (57). It happens on the basis of their past experiences. They do not want their daughters to face the kind of “suffering and breakdown” (Pratt and Dembo 69) which they have faced in their lives.

Nancy Chodorow while discussing the “all-powerful mother” (144) states that feminist writings proclaim “an image of all powerful mother totally responsible for the all round development of their children, and she is blamed, for her child’s limitations” (145). Being the mentor of the child, only mother is questioned at the child’s fault, as mentoring a child is considered to be the only vocation in a mother’s life and she is denied any individuality. Mothers are harmful to their daughters and the daughter’s misery and weakening originates from the initial relationship. Mothers tend to vehemently constrain and control daughters by denying them
individual recognition and sexuality and keep them from away from men. Mothers tend to mould and shape up daughters in their image and henceforth think that as “they have denied their own sexuality their daughters will behave similarly” (Chodorow 54).

Rich’s notion that daughters dislike their mothers because their main insecurity is the idea of “being controlled by their mothers” (98) at the same time the daughter can behave in a way the mother expects her to behave. Martha wants to obey the desires of her parents and follow her dream to realize her aim in life to become a successful woman who holds all the tasks of her homely affairs and emerge as successful working woman who carries a great value at the market place. Martha’s premarital life is ruled by her role of an ardent lover. But in married life, the role as wife and mother becomes central. Holmquist views about these roles:

These roles need a sea change from the psychological front which is totally new for Martha. In Mrs Quest’s generation most of the women are dominated by their motherly function and the same thing is repeated in Martha’s generation. (60-61)

So, the idea of controlling the daughters comes from the mother’s concern of her daughter’s security. Being a mother, the security of her daughter is prime and being a daughter, personal liberty is her desire.

Martha’s relations with her mother reveal the generation gap that describes the awareness among women for their roles. Mrs. Quest represents experiences of the past and Martha shows the courage and bold attitude of the young generation. According to C.G. Jung, there are “positive as well as negative effects of a daughter's resistance towards her mother” (98). He says that resistance to the mother can sometimes result in a spontaneous development of intellect for the purpose of creating a sphere of interest in which the mother has no place. Its real purpose is to break the mother's power by intellectual criticism and superior knowledge, so as to enumerate to her all her stupidities, mistakes in logic and educational shortcomings.
About the unconstructive effects of an uneasy mother-daughter complex relationship, Rich says:

On the negative side the mother archetype may connote anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate...Perhaps the historical example of the dual nature of the mother most familiar to us is the Virgin Mary, who is not only the Lord's mother, but also, according to the medieval allegories, his cross. In India, “the loving and terrible mother” is the paradoxical Kali. (91)

Martha’s hatred towards her mother tinged with a feeling of pity is indicated very poignantly by the following authorial comments, “Her face fell in patient and sorrowful lines, the Eternal Mother, holding sleep and death in her twin hands like a sweet and poisonous cloud of forgetfulness—that was how Martha saw her, like a baneful figure in the nightmare in which she herself was caught” (Lessing, MQ 47). In fact, Martha seems to develop a rebellious attitude against her mother which is also a rebellion against the patriarchal and colonial ideologies internalized and represented by her mother. But this self-sacrificing mother is rather a contemptible victim of the imperial system that lands her in Africa. She is not a monstrous and authoritarian figure, but is caught in the same chain of being that endangers her daughter's individualism.

Mrs. Quest and Martha are mothers and they clearly typify the two types of mothers: the archetypal and the unconventional mother. The difference between them about the ideas of mothering is also important. Mrs. Quest with her old notions of motherhood is often stated to follow the Victorian pattern whereas Martha’s attitude is compared with the modern approaches. Mrs. Quest behaves with Martha as if she is a child just because she does not want to admit that Martha is, actually, a young woman and if she would accept Martha as a sexual being, it would be against the Victorian sense of morals. The battle gets increased when Martha does not want
to accept herself a child and Mrs. Quest denies to accept Martha as a young woman. Then the battle between Mrs. Quest and Martha could be seen as the battle between Victorian and Modern world.

The famous psychoanalytic feminist Luce Irigaray says that the heavy dominance of mothers and the over-burdening stress that the mothers’ overwhelming ‘love’ has caused on the daughters make them feel, “you feed me/ yourself in my mouth, and I suffocate” (61). The over-protective mothers pose a threat to the liberty of the children. In The Golden Notebook, Anna Wulf is represented as the overpowering mother who discourages and frightens the less powerful child, Janet. This results into a situation where the child repels from the mother and seeks an alternative patriarchal way as the symbol of direct opposition of the mother’s control. For example, Janet decides to live a conventional life rather than the life lead by her mother Anna, a free woman, who flees from social norms. Janet dislikes the free life of her mother and gets back to the conventional life style.

Nancy Chodorow underlines that a dominating mother “continues to exist only in relation to her child” (Chodorow 167). It is also a fact that Janet is not happy with the life-style of her mother and she remains bothered of her mother’s free attitude towards conventional responsibilities. As a result, Janet deserts her and goes to stay in boarding school. In her absence, Anna’s life gets shattered. Anna comprehends:

Then, suddenly, I was sane, and I understood what is meant when I said, I am Anna Wulf and this is Saul Green and I have a child named Janet. …She has depended on the discipline which having a child had enforced on her-getting up at a certain time in the morning, going to bed soon enough…arranging regular meals, organizing her moods so as not to upset the child. (Lessing, GN 518)

The hectic schedule to look after a child actually retains the normality of a mother and keeps her away from madness or abnormality. Anna passes her several days in her room cutting up and patching papers which is definitely not a normal life-style.
Lessing points out that when Janet leaves Anna, she ceases to exist, to the extent that she finds herself unable to keep up her rationality and goes into madness.

Doris Lessing posits a liberal way of mothering through Martha’s connection to her mother and her relationship to her daughter, Caroline. Being a daughter, Martha desires a liberal attitude from her mother. At the same time, she being a mother provides enough liberty to her daughter Caroline to lead a free life. In both forms, Martha opposes social surroundings and breaks the societal expectations. Chodorow describes the familial position of a woman from social point of view:

Women’s mothering is a product of feminine role training and role recognition. Feminist literature points out that over the year’s girls have been given the identity of wives and mothers; girls have been trained to become ideal mothers, taught about the process of nurturance, they have been instructed to become proper mothers. (Chodorow 30-31)

Mothering is considered to be the most important moral duty of a woman to the point that she is expected to sacrifice her individual wishes for nurturing her children. Martha has to face this implication that the prime role of woman is to become mother. But, she opposes this implication as she does not want to be identified only as a mother and eventually this leads to her separation from her daughter.

Marianne Hirsch highlights that a daughter can attain maturity only through a detachment from her mother. Hirsch states that Martha rejects the conventional constructions of femininity. For example, she separates from her daughter and denies becoming a mother and she opposes her husband by deciding not to get pregnant again. Doris Lessing shows that Martha becomes mature after the detachment from her mother. Lessing believes that liberty is the symbol of learning and achieving maturity. That is why, she blesses Martha with a sense of liberty.

Doris Lessing shows that a woman has to face many social conventions, traditions and moral obligations. Lessing traces various stages in the personality of Martha when she passes from girlhood to womanhood on a farm in Rhodesia. Mrs.
Quest wants to shape Martha strictly according to English traditions and putting many “don’ts” in her dress and make-up. She does not like that Martha should meet men, especially Jewish shopkeepers and the Cohen boys for several reasons. However, Martha has had a different psychology towards all these things:

Talking to them exhilarated her, every- thing seemed easy. She walked over to the Kaffir store when her parents made the trip to the station; sometimes she got a lift from a passing car. Sometimes, though secretly, since this was forbidden, she rode on her bicycle. But there was always an uneasiness about this friendship, because of Mrs. Quest; only last week she had challenged Martha. Being what she was, she could not say outright. “I don’t want you to know Jewish shopkeepers. (Lessing, MQ 16)

She defies her mother’s wish of remaining aloof from the Cohen boys. But on the contrary, she becomes friendlier with them and she frankly tells her mother about it:

‘I want to see the Cohen boys.’
‘You’re making friends with them?’ demurred Mrs. Quest.
‘I thought we always were friends with them,’ said Martha Scornfully. (Lessing, MQ 46)

Martha is very bold in demanding her choices. Martha expresses her likes and dislikes boldly, openly and in a more defiant manner. Mrs. Quest wants that her daughter should not go alone on the streets as she is afraid of the black natives who often rape white girls. Martha opposes her mother and announces, “If I don’t get a lift, I’ll walk,” which in itself was a daring step as it “infringed one of the taboos ‘young white girl walking alone” (Lessing, MQ 46). Martha Quest, in fact, is an idealist in revolt against the snobbery of her parents. She tries to live life to the full with every nerve, emotion and instinct bared to experience.

Mrs. Quest, in her youth, has been a “pretty and athletic-looking English girl with light-brown hair and blue eyes as candid as spring sunshine, and she was now exactly as she would have been had she remained in England”(Lessing, MQ 10).
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Now in Rhodesia, she is looking after her husband and teenage daughter with utmost care, like a typical English matron. She warns Martha against “walking alone” (Lessing, MQ 46) on the streets and imposes several limitations on her wearing lipstick or latest dresses. She considers women who use cosmetics “as fast” (Lessing, MQ 13). She wants her daughter to be a different girl from the bunch of fast girls and “did not consider her daughter to be on a level with Marnie, whom she found in altogether bad taste, wearing grown up clothes and lipstick at fifteen and talking about boys” (Lessing, MQ 13). Mrs. Quest, like all mothers, wants her daughter to maintain her dignity as she thinks, “a man will never marry a girl he does not respect” (Lessing, MQ 12). She wants, like other traditional women, her daughters to follow the likes and dislikes of men.

Martha, being a daughter, feels a sense of claustrophobia in the bond with her mother. She desperately wants to get free from the bond of her mother. Conventionally, mothers are considered to be the role models for their children. Generally, the child follows the footsteps of the mother. Rich introduces the concept of ‘matrophobia,’ when she discusses the relation between a mother and daughter. By ‘matrophobia,’ she means not the fear of one’s mother or motherhood, but of becoming one’s mother. This is a very unique concept as in ideal notions of motherhood to conceive and become mother is considered to be a blessing for women. Women are supposed to be blessed with the power to reproduce the progeny or off-spring, but in case of Lessing’s mothers there is a drastic deviation. They do not want to become mothers as the heroines are entrapped in a cyclic cobweb where neither daughters are attached with their own mothers, not even mothers with their daughters. They fiercely fight to establish a separate entity rejecting the widely accepted notion that women are born to rear children and children are expected to follow their parents.

Despite several restrictions, Martha rebels against her parents. One day standing before the mirror, she takes a pair of scissors and severs the bodice from the shirt of her dress. She is trying to make the folds like Marinie’s when the door suddenly opens, and her father comes in. Looking at Martha, he remarks:
Your mother won’t like you cutting her dresses to pieces” She said defiantly, “Daddy, why should I wear dresses like a kid of ten?” And when her mother enters the scene, she argues.

“I’m sixteen,” said Martha, between set teeth, in a stifled voice...

“My dear, nice girls don’t wear clothes like this until...”

“I’m not a nice girl,” broke in Martha, and suddenly burst into laughter.

(Lessing, MQ 21)

In fact, Mrs. Quest tries to project herself upon Martha and wants to model her daughter according to her own wishes. Martha revolts against her and asserts her independence. Desirous of her welfare, performing like an alert guardian, she does not want that society should raise a finger at her. She wants to bring them up as graceful, dignified young girl, who would be in high demand in the marriage market.

Discussing the mother-daughter relationship, Simone de Beauvoir observes, “the daughter is for the mother at once her double and another person, the mother is at once over winningly affectionate and hostile towards her daughter, she saddles her child with her own destiny, a way of revenging herself for it”(309). In other words, a daughter is an alter ego of her mother. The mother wants to realize her unfulfilled dreams through her daughter. Mrs. Quest, a traditional mother, wants her daughter to be a “good” girl and “properly married” (Lessing, MQ 44). Simone de Beauvoir says, “a generous mother who sincerely seeks her child’s welfare, will as a rule think that it is wiser to make a ‘true woman’ of her, since society will more readily accept her if this is done”(309). Mrs. Quest tries to fulfill her duty as mother by bringing up her daughter as model of grace. Although, Martha resents the maternal authority. Times have changed since her mother’s days and moreover she is socially aware girl rather than conforming girls who happily accept her roles.

The imbalance in the relationship between Mr. Quest and her daughter Martha results into the difference in ideas of both mother and daughter. Mother wants her daughter to have the resemblance of her self, and the daughter desires to get free from all the bondages with her mother just for the sake of gaining
individuality and freedom. This imbalance makes Martha perceive the world around her:

Besides, the experts themselves seemed to be in doubt as to show she should see herself. There was the group which stated that her life was already determined when she still crouched sightless in the womb of Mrs Quest. She grew through phases…Then there were those who said that it was the birth itself which set Martha on a fated road. For the feeling of fate, of doom, was the one message they all had in common. Martha in violent opposition to her parents, was continually being informed that their influence on her was unalterable and it was much too late to change herself. (Lessing, MQ 11-12)

Rich has several similarities with the analysis of Martha’s development of character; for example Martha’s main insecurity is to resemble her mother and she rebels against this idea when she rebels against her mother. She is a fiercely independent woman and wants to establish an entirely separate entity. The mother represents an orthodox woman. Martha feels consumed by her mother and she tries to split herself when she is pregnant.

Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing*, however, depicts her woman’s level of understanding through mother-daughter relationship between Mary and her mother. Mary often shares her mother’s sorrow, who has been a victim of male-oppression. She would often comfort her mother who is unhappy and weeps silently or sometimes openly resents her drunkard husband. Her mother “made a confidante of Mary early...Mary comforted her miserable longing to get away, but feeling important too, and hating her father” (Lessing, GIS 34). And after the death of her mother, whenever, Mary is reminded of her, she remembers her in terms of miseries. Till the age of thirty, Mary does not marry as the unhappy memories of her childhood and miseries of her mother flash before her eyes.

There seems a parallel between Mary and her mother, when Doris Lessing states, “if Dick had not got ill when he did,…she might have died quite soon, as her
mother had done, after a brief illness, simply because she did not want particularly to live” (Lessing, GIS 102). Mary’s indifference, which has been her “defining quality” since her days in the Girls’ Club, paradoxically results from her mother’s indifference, which “dismayed the child Mary” (Pratt 483). She decides to have a child with Dick as she feels depressingly lonely and nothing to do. She remembers her own days as a child with her mother; she begins to understand how her mother clung to her, using her as a safety valve. She identifies herself with her mother, clinging to her most passionately and pityingly. Lessing shows:

She sees herself, that barelegged, bareheaded, silent child, wandering in and out of the chicken coop house close to her mother, wrung simultaneously by love and pity for her, and by hatred for her father; and she imagined her own child, a small daughter, comforting her as she had comforted her mother. (GIS 135)

This statement shows that Lessing has a sense of respect for both motherhood and daughterhood on the level of humanity. She admires motherhood associated with “care and affection” (Chodorow 67) and daughterhood carrying respect and mutual understanding with parents. In every relation, Lessing desires a stance of liberal human growth.

Mrs. Quest ranks motherhood ahead of career for a woman. She views that main responsibility of a woman is to become a caring mother. According to her, career comes at a second position for a woman. That is why, she does not allow Martha to meet Jewish boys and spend much time on reading. Lessing tells:

She had reached the point where she could not read one of these books without feelings as exhausted as if she had just concluded one of her arguments with her mother. When a native bearer came hastening over the veld with yet another parcel of books from the Cohen boys, she felt angry at the mere sight of them…There were a dozen of books lying neglected in her bedroom…There was always an uneasiness…because of
Mrs Quest...Being what she was, she could not say outright, ‘I don’t want you to know Jewish shopkeepers.... (MQ 12-13)

In fact, in relation to the traits of mothering a mother tends to feel hesitant towards her daughter because she wants the daughter to be her replica but at the same time pushes her into adulthood. Mrs. Quest’s attitude is such that by giving importance to the aspects of motherhood she actually wants Martha to follow her path. She thinks Martha would be closer to her life if she gets married and bears children. If it happens, Martha will also be dependent on her. On the contrary, if Martha lands up having a real career she would become more self-sufficient and less concerned about her mother.

Mrs. Quest plays an important role in Martha’s quest for identity. The understanding of this fact can be seen through Martha’s constant struggle against her mother. There is an imbalance between how Martha’s mother perceives the role of women and how Martha actually takes it in her life. She rejects her own mother as her role model. Her sole aspiration was to be distinct from her mother. She wants to achieve something which her mother could never achieve. It is underscored by Chodorow that a girl wants to be identified with anyone else but not with her mother. Martha always wants to detach herself from her mother. Lessing defines the situation:

The experts themselves seemed to be in doubt as to how she should see herself. There was the group which stated that her life was already determined when she still crouched sightless in the womb of Mrs. Quest …Then there were those who said it was the birth itself which set Martha on the fated road…For the feeling of fate, doom, was the one message they all had in common. Martha in violent opposition to her parents was continually being informed that their influence on her was unalterable, and that it was much too late to change herself. (MQ 9)

The anxiety in the mother-daughter relationship provokes the daughter to break-free from her mother. Martha uses sexuality as a weapon against her mother, sexuality is
such a taboo that even the word poses a threat to Mrs. Quest. In order to stand against her mother, Martha intentionally makes decisions opposite to her original plans. For example, she hesitates about taking the matriculation exam. Instead of going to the University, she stays for two more years at the farm with her parents this is a stark contrast of what Mrs. Quest has actually thought of. In fact, the relationship between Martha and her mother is a struggle for power. Martha sees her mother as “a baneful figure in the nightmare in which she herself was caught” (Lessing, MQ 24).

Doris Lessing shows Martha’s struggle in the family which binds woman to the limited roles and spaces, “her difficult family relationships are never satisfactorily resolved, especially that with her mother” (Lessing, MQ 29). Mrs. Quest represents the feminine mystique as she is very particular about the activities of Martha right from the home to the world outside. But Martha Quest retorts her mother’s statement that ‘nice girls don’t wear such dresses’ and says that she is not a nice girl. In fact, Martha is all set to go beyond the reach of Martha Quest. She states that “the metric was a simple passport to the outside world” (Lessing, MQ 23). Since Martha rebels strongly against her mother, she seeks for other alternatives, but the result is an unsatisfactory one, “She (Martha) would not be like Mrs. Van Rensberg, a fat and earthy housekeeping woman: she would not be bitter and nagging and dissatisfied like her mother. But then who was she to be? Her mind turned towards the heroines she had been offered…” (Lessing, MQ 10). In fact, she revolts against her mother’s ideology of life as she does not find in her an ideal model to follow. The social quest of a heroine starts in alienation and she looks for integration into human community where she can develop more fully. In Martha’s case, it is evident that she strives to alienate herself from her home and especially from her mother and her unconscious wish is to encounter new surroundings where she can learn more about her life in the male oriented society.

Martha does not take the mystique way imposed upon her by her mother. She believes in her full development in adult age where she is supposed to make social connections and live with daring dignity among males during her young age. She does not bind herself into the regulations of her mother and she develops physical
relations with Donovan Anderson as he is the one who appreciates the way she behaves and dresses. She immediately accepts the proposal of having sex with Donovan. Lessing shows:

> Half past four soon came, and Martha flew home to dress though Donovan was not expected until six. She anointed and prepared herself…She bathed and painted and fingernails…her toenails, powdered her body, plucked her eyebrows which did not need I, and arranged her hair…Donovan’s dark and languid dictating what she must do. ‘Well, it seems that we are supposed to make love’ he says. ‘yes…she murmured, yes.’ (MQ 126-127)

But, Martha feels that how man takes her as a means of enjoyment and wishes her to behave in a particular manner which is submissive in nature. She does not prefer, “manipulation of dress, speech and behaviour” (Holmquist 13) and breaks her relations with him instantly. Later, she develops her relations with Adolph King, a Jewish musician. He gets into relations to find a new identity as a human being. On the other hand, Martha wants to teach a lesson to her mother through this relation as Mrs. Quest dislikes the Jews. She leaves Adolph also as he considers himself superior and boasts that he has other girl friends like Martha Quest. She not only meets all the men freely to assert her identity but also dislikes the limited way of living life preached by her mother for the young girls.

Martha deserts both Douglas and Caroline. She contemplates about leaving Africa and settling in England. Mrs. Quest is also under the illusion that she would accompany Martha to her homeland. But, as ever, in spite of all her compassion for her mother, Martha does not want that her mother becomes an intruder in her life in England too. Martha simply tries to evade any mention of England. Mrs. Quest says to Martha, “Perhaps I'll come to England and live with you” (Lessing, LL 123). But, Martha replies, “But I’m not there yet!” (Lessing, LL 126). Martha feels a sense of need to detach herself from all the familial bondages. In fact, Martha is more and more relegated towards claustrophobia as she has to spend more time with Caroline. There is an urge in Martha to break these stifling bondages of motherhood and
housekeeping. Later, she does come out of that crippling system. Lessing shows that Martha leaves Caroline for giving her the most precious gift of life, the freedom from the overpowering shadow of a mother that Martha always desires in her own case:

Martha held the energetic and vibrant little child tight for a moment and whispered in a flush of pure tenderness, “You'll be perfectly free, Caroline. I'm setting you free.

… Martha feels a sense of divine… There seems a dark silence around there. (Lessing, PM 241)

Martha stems a new psychology of woman which includes the sense of freedom.

Martha despises her mother because of her behaviour towards Mrs. Van Rensberg, who is sometimes condescending and hypocritical. However, Martha also despises Van Rensbergs because of their gossiping and their racist attitude towards the natives. Martha is a typical teenage girl who dislikes her parents and promises herself never to become like them. She likes to annoy her parents by not agreeing with them and starting a discussion about everything that they do not appreciate. However, the aspects of puberty, which are common for many teenagers, are based on problems which are present on a broader social level as well. With the character of Mary and Martha, Lessing shows the struggle of the whites, born in South Rhodesia, who are bound to the social and cultural heritage of England by their upbringing but are not entirely part of that particular culture because of the country they are born in. “Now, it is quite easy to remark the absurdities and contradictions of a country’s social system from outside its borders, but very difficult if one has been brought up in it …”(Lessing, MQ 57).

Doris Lessing presents the ideal form of motherhood through Martha Quest, Anna Wulf and Molly. Annis Pratt views that motherhood is the state of ‘a female parent’ or one who shows ‘motherly qualities’ and the idea of “motherhood is also defined by its characteristics” (144), the ability to love, to craft, to create, to match over, nourish and protect. In spite of the fact that motherhood basically revolves
around woman’s capacity to reproduce, its innate concept is primarily defined by the prevalent social and cultural practices of its times. Motherhood is enveloped in many cultural meanings. Birthing and nurturing new life actually has lead to a conflation of ‘feminine’, ‘maternal’, and ‘feminine spirituality’ in many ethnicities and religious traditions. Motherhood has been highlighted as a hallowed and powerful pious path. For Lessing, motherhood is a common and recurrent theme prevalent in almost all the texts. She loves to explore the circumferences of this issue where she talks about the varied roles of the mothers and how they follow or break the traditions of the notions of old motherhood.

Doris Lessing’s women revolt against the traditional concept of motherhood. Traditionally, women have been considered the sources of producing large families. Her women do not follow to the notions of motherhood propounded by history, religion, literature and social conventions. However, women are still expected to follow certain norms and act accordingly to become perfect mothers. For a long time, the opinion about the ideal motherhood has oscillated a lot according to the differing cultural and social perspectives. There have arisen assumptions about prototypes of behaviour that differ according to conventional cultural beliefs and attitudes within each strata of the society. Therefore, it is likely that there would also be dissimilarity in the concepts of perfect motherliness with respect to the beliefs about the sense of devotion in mother-daughter relationships or mother-child relationships.

Martha denies entering the stereotypical role where a woman’s prime and important role is to be a mother. Martha’s intention is not to conceive but her plan fails because she is already pregnant when she decides to marry Douglas. She is unaware of it for a certain time and when she discovers that she is pregnant, she gets disappointed. She drinks a bottle of neat gin, baths in a burning hot water, climbs repeatedly on to a table and jumps off. In other words, she does everything to get rid of the foetus. In *A Proper Marriage*, when everything fails, she decides to go for an abortion which is, of course, illegal, and this shocks Martha and she goes “into an angry tirade against government who presumed to tell women what they should do with their bodies; it was the final insult to personal liberty” (Lessing 106).
Lessing’s concept of motherhood involves both the maternal and erotic life. Over the last three centuries, outlook towards mothers, and ‘mother craft’ have changed significantly. Undoubtedly these approaches are also related to the common insights about women. Women have been regarded as animalistic creatures principally obsessed by their passions and sexual desires. Their capability to replicate has been used as a justification for the factor that their entities are commanded by their bodily whims and requirements. Doris Lessing explores the recesses of motherhood and unique depiction of typical mothers where they deviate a lot from the orthodox images of motherhood.

There is a cyclic pattern of relationship between the mother and daughter which contradicts the conventional concepts of motherhood. It is believed that the existence of mother-craft centrally revolves around the “nurturing of the progeny” (Rich 238) but in Doris Lessing’s novels this concept is challenged and the differences between the mother and the offspring is highlighted at a large scale, especially the mother-daughter relationship. Most interestingly, the mother is also considered to be the ‘Other’ of the child. The intricate nature of mother-daughter relationship is observed through the love–hate relationship which is pervasive between mothers and daughters in almost all of her novels. It is even not difficult to identify that mothers mostly act as the ‘other’ for their daughters.

Lessing shows how the women protagonists are all ‘single mothers’ who bring up their children devoid of much of paternal interruption where the fathers rarely appear. In such a condition, it is assumed that the mothers would have a beautiful bond with the children but the reverse happens as the relationship of the mothers with their children becomes so much terrible that the children turn away from their mothers and break their bondage from them. Conventionally, it is believed that that the role of ideal mother is to go by the rules of patriarchy. So, overruling the existence of fathers in nurturing a child is a very modern idea. Fathers are conventionally believed to be the bread earners of the family. It is almost a compulsion to have the father in the family to bring up a child. Therefore, in order to negate the father’s existence, the mother also has to become financially independent which is quite a modern concept and indicates the overall development of a mother.
Chodorow argues that the mother-infant relationship is unbalanced in its mutuality as the infant’s requirement for the mother is supreme while for the mother it is relative. She adds that special mothering is necessarily better for infants. As it is often stated that the child grows up to be the replica of his/her mother, so it is expected of mothers to have a good bond with the child so that they contribute towards healthy development of a child. But, Lessing shows just the opposite in her novels where the mothers are not in good terms with their children/daughters. This results into an abnormal situation in the family. But she strongly believes that the child will certainly grow up and become independent when detached from the influences of her mother.

The disagreement between mothers and daughters appears when Anna resists her best friend Molly’s supremacy over her. Molly is marked to be older and physically bigger than Anna. She dominates Anna in all the matters. However, Anna learns to present her viewpoint in front of her. Lessing tells, “Anna learned to stand up for herself. Even now there were moments when she should challenge Molly when she did not and she admitted to herself she was a coward; she would always give in rather than have fights or scenes” (GN 9-10). Molly acts as a surrogate mother for Anna when she continuously blames Anna for the droopiness in her writing career, exactly like a mother who nags at her children for not performing well in academics. Molly because of her physical supremacy feels like Anna’s mother who is shy but Anna dislikes this attitude of Molly. Anna thinks that “I am not an extension of you” (Lessing, GN 40), and she quickly comprehends that she would have told this to her mother if she was there. Anna feels the necessity to fight back this strong motherly figure if she doesn’t want to lose herself or to become an annexation of her mother where she herself is rejected by her daughter, Janet. Lessing presents:

Putting too much of her into the daughter, to such an extent that Janet, who is usually a docile and sweet little girl.

…

She openly confronts the mother and states that she “wants to be ordinary…Don’t want to be like you the mother. (GN 517)
Henceforth the daughter’s negation of the mother’s authority is expressed which is unusual as the mother’s role is being questioned.

In fact, Anna loves her daughter so much that her life nearly depends on the presence of her daughter. She is an unconventional mother who denies the influence of Molly in her life. Sadly, her own daughter Janet does not like Anna’s ways of leading her life. This again reverts back to the view that though Lessing and many other modern feminist writers and critics challenge the old stereotypical concept of motherhood yet it is followed by most of the population till date though many do really negate the archetypal images of a mother and adhere to the modern unconventional image of a mother.

Doris Lessing shows that there is nothing wrong in becoming a mother. In fact, her women like to be home mothers. Martha feels “terribly happy to be having a baby” (Lessing, PM 130). Even, she questions herself that why she has refused to have a child. This reconciliation with the fact that she is going to be a mother makes her contemplate about her child in a completely different way, “She, Martha, the free spirit, would protect the creature from her, Martha, the maternal force; the maternal Martha, that enemy, would not be allowed to enter the picture. It was as one independent being to another that Martha spoke” (Lessing, PM 127). Even Mr. Maynard, as well as Martha’s mother, asserts that “children are the only justification of marriage” (Lessing, PM 132). Eventually, having given birth to her child, Martha has mixed feelings about her motherhood again, “Martha found herself disliking the child, hating her swollen breasts, and filled with disgust at the way milk flowed over her a dozen times a day like a tide” (Lessing, PM 172). And later she even keeps rejecting her motherhood:

Miss Galbind came to ask how she did…‘It’ is the reaction, dear,’ she explained; and Martha, who could never feel anything but resentment at the idea that her emotions might be the result of predictable chemical processes in her body, said, ‘I don’t care a damn what it is, but I wish I’d never had a baby at all. (Lessing, PM 172)
She goes through different feelings of indifference and states of “lethargy” (Lessing, PM 174). She feels as if she has not planned anything about the major happenings in her life. She shares this feeling with her friend Alice:

She cried out that she wished she had never got married, she knew now that she had never loved Willie at all; she couldn’t understand how she had been so crazy as to tie herself down to being nothing but a piece of livestock to be stuffed three times a week, and then swollen like dropsy, and then a cow streaming with milk, and her breasts were so sore she couldn’t bear it. (Lessing, PM 174)

Immediately after the birth of her child, the author depicts Martha’s attitude, “There was this band of tension, felt deeply as a web of tight anxiety, between her and the child. Every moment, every sound Caroline made reverberated through Martha” (Lessing, PM 223). Martha still keeps struggling with feelings of “guilt and defiance” (Lessing, PM 224). She does not assume properly the role of a mother and what is more, she lacks affection towards her daughter. “She wished it were already the end of the day, and Caroline safely in bed and asleep…the hours of evening were as restless and dissatisfied; she always went to bed early to put an end to them. Her whole life was a hurrying onwards, to get it past; she was back in the tension of hurry, hurry, hurry…(Lessing, PM 224). In fact, she starts accepting Caroline as an approval of her exploitation as a mother. Martha cannot accept that motherhood may come as a big road block in her progress. She feels that it has increased Douglas’s egoistic behaviour towards her. Martha even admits that she dislikes Caroline. She bursts out:

But as far as I can make out, one of the most important functions of parents is that they should be suitable objects of hate …Well, then, so it’s right and proper you should hate my guts off and on, you and I are just victims, my poor child, you can’t help it, I can’t help it, my mother couldn’t help it, and her mother…. (Lessing, PM 227)

Martha wants to be an ideal mother but not at the cost of her personal growth.
Holmquist views that Martha’s reason for disliking Caroline is her personal assumption that Caroline has brought an “impediment in her individual growth” (174). Martha has to spend her maximum time in her care.

Being psychologically and sexually subvert, Mary realizes that motherhood can give her some happiness and fulfillment, and at one stage she talks to Dick about having a child but Dick refuses on account of his poverty, which, in fact, is caused largely by his own failures and stubbornness. Mary tries hard to find meaning in life by sewing, stitching and mending “as if fine embroidery would save her life” (Lessing, GIS 65). The gulf between the two, however, keeps on widening and in their small, lonely home “they were stunted, unfulfilled figures” (Lessing, GIS 67). The woman, who is once admired and loved by the society, is disqualified because of her sloppy appearance and unpolished manners. She comes back and ultimately resigns herself to the traditional role of a woman, i.e. of looking after her home and husband.

There has been a radical shift in the theorization of motherhood and mothering in feminist thought. Zillah Eisenstein says, “feminism and motherhood were in diametrical opposition …had seemed almost axiomatic” (69). Of all the differences between men and women, the most immutable appeared to be women’s reproductive capacities. Simone de Beauvoir sees biology as an absolute determinant. She presents:

The Women, who gave birth, therefore, did not know the pride of creation. She felt herself the plaything of obscure forces, and painful ordeal of child birth seemed a useless or even troublesome accident…Woman’s biological role as child bearer “imprison her repetition and emanence. (57-58)

In fact, theorists present the bearing and rearing of the children as a form of drudgery. They hold them capable for keeping women tied to the home, thus preventing them from going into the public sphere of paid employment and political struggle. Radical and socialist feminists alike devoted their energies to thinking up means to liberate women from the practice and ideology of motherhood. Shulasmith

Doris Lessing highlights that abortion is illegal and having a baby without the name of a father is considered a social sin. However, for the pregnancy both male and female partners are responsible. But as a whole, only woman has to suffer throughout. In fact, the state of being pregnant is considered good only for married women; to be an unwed mother is an offence and her child a stigma or a handicap. In *A Ripple from the Storm*, when Maisie becomes pregnant before her marriage to Binkie, his parents, the Maynards, refuse to accept her and even hesitate to inform Binkie when he is away to war. It is only Andrew, a member of the communist group (to which Martha belongs) who agrees to marry her to give a name to the unborn child. Anna, who has been living with Max Wulf without marriage, marries him when she conceives so that their child (Janet) is not considered an illegitimate. She divorces him after the birth of the daughter.

Adrienne Rich undertakes to make a feministic analysis of the concept of motherhood by dividing it into two halves which she names, “experience” and “institution” (144) respectively. The point of this distinction has enabled her to discuss what has been done to women as mothers under patriarchy on the one hand and, on the other hand, from what might be the experience of women in motherhood when it could be detached from and freed of the bondage imposed by the male domination. She endeavours:

…the distinction between tow meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the potential relationship of any women to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the institution, which aims at ensuring the potential and all women –shall remain under male control. (13)

The feminists who reject the institution of marriage also discourage motherhood. They find it another form of slavery, as it breaks woman's self-sufficiency. They
argue that with the coming of children, woman depends much more on man economically and emotionally. She remains subordinate to him and her position becomes more vulnerable on becoming a mother. Juliet Mitchell observes that it is within the “role as mother and housekeeper that woman finds the oppression that is hers alone”(14). Traditionally, motherhood is regarded as the “biological destiny”(Lessing, LL 84) and the greatest ambition of a woman. A child is considered to be woman’s happiness and her justification, through which she is supposed to find self-fulfillment. Swami Vivekanand glorified motherhood in these words:

The ideal of womanhood…that marvellous, unselfish, all-suffering, ever forgiving mother. The wife walks behind the shadow. She must imitate the life of the mother, that is her duty. But the mother is the ideal of life, she rules the family, she possesses the family. (qtd. in Baig 58)

However, contrary to these glorious assertions, motherhood proves to be a suffocating experience for most of Lessing’s women. Anna, Molly and Ella sacrifice themselves to bring up their children all by themselves. Their progenies often add to their suffering. Germaine Greer rightly observes that a woman has no right on her children, “the children are not hers, they are not her property” (322). In a patriarchal society, the male child is always preferred as he perpetuates the father’s name.

Molly after divorce from Richard, brings up her son, Tommy, as a single parent, sacrificing her ambitions and desires. In return, she finds him hostile and revolting in the end. He treats her “as his prisoner”(Lessing, GN 377). Anna finds motherhood quite a soothing and satisfying experience. Her daughter Janet is her “normality”, she feels, “she anchors me in what is normal in myself” (Lessing, GN 526). In her moments of turmoil, tension and disintegration, Anna finds comfort and stability in the thoughts of Janet. But then Janet is still a child. One does not know how she would respond to Anna once Janet starts thinking on her own.

For women, children are considered to be the blessings for the stance of womanhood. But, it turns into a device of securing more power for men 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. Molly tells Anna 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. And they do not have to submit to the arbitrariness of conception.

Lessing realistically depicts the dreadful tensions many women experience between their biological urges for another child and their need to cherish and protect their freedom. Martha does not come out to be an ordinary human being as she has a great zeal to find her true identity. For this, she passes through the different phases of life. Martha tries to solve many questions related to the identity of woman and faces the entire crisis forced by all hegemonic powers with great courage and mental balance. Sometimes, she finds herself caught in social influence on her personality but she emerges out of all that and proves herself a new woman who is capable enough to fight against all the calamities of life and society. Lynne Segal believes that “men wield power over women through terror” (12). Man evokes fear in the mind of women by his superior muscular power and by extreme emotional indifference and callousness which makes woman so vulnerable. Woman suffers not only by man’s act of physical violence, but also crippled by his arrogance, cynicism and indifference.
Doris Lessing’s women occupy ambivalent approach on pregnancy as they consider it a blessing to them for being able to bear a baby who later becomes a man. Alice, who considers pregnancy a blessing, “It’s all very well, dear, but this worrying all the time just gets me down. Sometimes I think I’ll have a baby and be done with it. That’d be nine months’ peace and quiet at least” (Lessing, PM 24). But, when it comes to the mystique of woman towards her efficiency to the compulsion. They retort it and decide to have liberal approach on pregnancy.

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)

Martha remarks heavily on the idea of accepting pregnancy as the compulsion to a woman, “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). Lessing provides her women protagonists a sense of courage to follow their wishes. Alice does not want to have pregnancy, Lessing remarks, “The two women looked at each other, acknowledging frankly in this moment that they wished...they were not pregnant” (Lessing, PM 152). Martha becomes anxious over pregnancy but her mother Mrs Quest, however, considers pregnancy as “the greatest experience in a woman’s life” (Lessing, PM 118). However, Martha has to bear pregnancy for social prejudices. Lessing describes it:

Stella was now explaining to both Alice and Martha that it was the duty of young married couples to have children while they were young...their duty to the children, who would naturally prefer to have parents who were brothers and sisters to them. (PM 144)

Through Martha, Lessing shows the state of pregnancy where a woman has to be very careful about her every movement. Lessing shows:
She could not keep still. She could not read. Above all, she felt there must be something wrong with her, to feel like this. For at the back of her mind was the vision of a woman calm, rich, maternal, radiant; that was how she should be. (Lessing, PM 148)

It comes out to be a difficult task of her life. Martha and Alice feel pregnancy as “humiliating and intolerable” (Lessing, PM 152). But above all this, it is the ability of a woman that she completes the arduous task of producing a child.

Martha is just nineteen when she gets married and she is really afraid of becoming pregnant. Both Martha and Douglas don’t want children at that point. They are conscious of the war which was rumoured to begin any moment. Martha goes to Dr. Stern to make sure that she is not pregnant but the doctor in turn tells Martha that she is four months pregnant. This news shocks Martha into silence. She asks the doctor if he can help her with an abortion but the doctor denies. Martha starts feeling the pang of sickness inside her. Doris Lessing narrates:

The child five inches long with eyes, nose, mouth, hands and feet, seemed very active. Martha sat feeling the imprisoned thing moving in her flesh, and was made more miserable by the knowledge that it had been moving for at least a week without her noticing it than by anything else. (PM 420)

Martha changes her mind. She feels happy that she is pregnant. Her husband Douglas also became happy hearing the news, “We’re having a kid’ said Douglas proudly” (Lessing, PM 423). Everybody is happy except Martha’s father. He says, “So if one damned foolish girl wants to make a mess of her life...” (Lessing, PM 429). He gets worried about Martha and her age. He thinks that she has not yet come of age to deal with responsibilities. When she marries Douglas, he is the one who is unhappy. He thinks that she is in a hurry with everything. On the other hand, Martha is making things clear to Douglas about the baby’s future. First, even to suggest that the child might be one sex rather than another might have deplorable results.
Both Martha and her friend Alice are pregnant. Martha is supposed to give birth towards the end of the rainy season. She is feeling extremely restless during the days. She is afraid if something will go wrong while giving birth. In order to overcome their fear Martha and Alice go out in the rain. Claire Sprague writes, “In A Proper Marriage, the middle-class and very pregnant Martha and Alice perform an almost orgiastic rite. They stripe naked and plunge into a pothole” (417). Martha stands “to her knees in heavy mud, the red, thick water closed below her shoulders” (Lessing, PM 166). This celebration of fecundity and union, so obviously prelapsarian, contains ebullience and abandonment which is rarely found. In the course of time Martha gives birth to a baby girl. Being a progressive woman, independence is important to Martha. She wants to make her daughter independent as well. So, Martha is making Caroline independent by ignoring and not breast-feeding. Instead Caroline is fed through the bottle. Mrs. Quest visits Martha and looking at her, she says, “I suppose you’ve been starving her as I starved you” (Lessing, PM 248). In fact, as a modern woman, Martha likes to stay fit. However, she does not do it for the sake of her husband. By eating less she is taking control over her body. She is not breast-feeding Caroline anymore and she starves herself to get her figure right. Ingrid Holmquist writes:

Denying her body by refusing her hunger becomes an accomplishment in itself; she is acquiring a disciplined body. By the time she grows to be politically active, self-deprivation is a habit and she slips easily into a pattern of hungry irritability because she is simply too busy to eat. (84)

Sarah Sceats’s ideas on the personal care properly fit in the personality and ideology of Martha. By acquiring a slim body and sound health, she wants to overcome the consequences that a woman has to face after pregnancy.

Holmquist argues that in Martha’s opinion, children are hindrances to her own freedom and Martha perceives them as the ultimate link in the cycle of recurrence which connects her to her family history. The nightmare of repletion is what Martha thinks when she realizes that she is pregnant. She compares her own association to her mother. She is afraid that her own child will lead the same life that
she has lived. To her utter surprise, she finds that even her mother Mrs. Quest does not have the intention of having her “How, then, had she (Mrs. Quest) come to accept her?” (Lessing, PM 110). Martha, the uninterested housewife, goes through experience of pregnancy and maternity that she finds it shocking, and culminating which degenerates into a battle of wills, with her daughter Caroline. She sees that their troubled relationship is unavoidable as she is caught in a claustrophobic and crippling system which causes Martha to leave Douglas and Caroline and give them the beautiful gift of freedom.

Tess Cosslett writes about women’s reaction on childbirth. The mother feels that she is a vehicle for the foetus and breast-feeding which is considered to be signs of inequality and exploitation to the mother. It is implied that the baby devours the mother. Martha’s relationship to her child encompasses such experiences; feeding Caroline resembles a struggle for Martha, and as the child derives nourishment Martha starts losing her weight. She feels that motherly role is like a prison where child orders and mother obeys. It makes mothers feel that nurturing her child is her sole responsibility. In Martha Quest, Mrs. Quest belongs to a middle class family background. It is shown that by acquiring a “profession of a nurse she tried to rebel against the society and especially her daughter Martha” (Holmquist 30). She wants Martha to become a nice middle class girl who does not have any silly ideas about politics or other serious matters.

Lessing’s Martha and Alice suffer because abortion is considered 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. 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” (Lessing, PM 188). Doris Lessing describes:

Stella looked at the two women and stopped abruptly. 
What on earth is wrong with you? It’s the first day they’d let me in, I’ve been everyday to ask.’

‘It’s no good coming to see us,’ remarked Alice flatly. ‘We both wish we were dead.’ (PM 201)

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). Martha, later, 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 as the desire for emancipation becomes stronger.

Martha denies entering the archetypal role where a woman’s prime responsibility is to become a mother. Martha decides not to have any child but she lands up giving birth to a child. Before the child is born, Martha decides what kind of things she should avoid in the upbringing of the child. They decide not to form
the mind of the child and to send her to a progressive school at a very tender age because Martha thinks that “a child without parents at all dearly had a greater chance of survival as a whole personality” (Lessing, PM 128). She disagrees with her mother’s view that mothers should sacrifice their interests to live life in order to nurture their children. She believes to give an independent realm to her child right from a tender age and hence decides not to influence her too much so that her ideas and thoughts about life are guarded properly. Martha, rather like an unconventional modern mother expects Caroline to think independently and grow up without being entirely dependent on anyone. She also wants to send her child to a progressive school where she will develop the ideas of free and independent thinking without being influenced by her mother. Martha believes that this will lead her child to become more matured and act independently in life. However Martha is not really detached from her child Caroline, but most of the time she does not enjoy motherhood. For example, feeding Caroline seems to Martha as a tiresome struggle during which Martha ends up feeling frustrated. As Knapp puts it, “the natural fulfillment of pregnancy is quickly broken by the realities of caring for the child, which Martha resents” (43).

When Martha, at the age of twenty one, starts feeling that her life is slipping away from her “two years ago I was free as air, I could have done anything, been anything” (Lessing, PM 228). She separates herself from Douglas, leaves Caroline to her husband and after a while she marries again. Martha is glad to be relieved from the role of motherhood. Martha’s inherent fear of repeating her mother’s mistake, to accept her fate as a housewife and mother, also leads her to depart from Douglas and Caroline. Before she leaves them, she meets Mrs. Quest, who is absolutely shocked at her decision of leaving Caroline. According to Mrs. Quest a woman’s role is to “sacrifice herself, as she had done for the sake of her children” (Lessing, PM 373). She is highly concerned about the people of society that what they will think about Martha. But, Martha Quest does not think much about the society. Rather, she plans to achieve solidarity through her individual identity, personal liberty and psychological maturity.
The process of women developing solidarity among themselves is defined as ‘sisterhood,’ when women cease to be rivals of each other or stop competing for the attention of a male, and develop deep “social relationship with one another” (Mitchell 13). Feminists exhort women that they should protect, advise and boost each other’s morale to face the male-hegemony. Raymond Williams also warns women, if they “do not take initiative to change conditions no one else is likely to do so” (70). Sisterhood aims at cutting across the racial, political, class or age barriers. Freud detects jealousy as a feminine trait, but Lessing’s women do not manifest it. On the contrary, they bolster up each other, offer solace, help and support each other. The chief aim of sisterhood is to help women in distress irrespective of colour and class. Feminists repeatedly warn women, “None of us can be free until all are free” (Rubenstein 36). The best example of sisterhood can be seen in *The Golden Notebook*. Anna and Molly, separated from their husbands, live together, provide security, support and company to each other without encroaching on each other’s privacy or identity. Sisterhood is not binding on them. Anna, when she likes, moves out to a separate flat without any ill feeling for Molly. Men accuse women who live together of being lesbians. Ella protests against the false allegation. Lessing presents:

Paul dislikes Ella’s relationship with Julia. He sees it as a pact against him, and makes professional jokes about the lesbian aspects of this friendship. At which Ella says that in that case, his friendships with men are homosexual? (GN 214)

There is sense of collectiveness and togetherness which is quite disturbing for the patriarchal set-up.

However, jealousy has been alleged to be a feminine trait, there is no sense of jealousy among Doris’s women characters. A great chemistry has been observed in Molly and Anna when they have no issue on the aspect of relationship with Richard as earlier he has been in relations with Anna and later on with Molly. Even, Molly infuses necessary courage in Marion to assert her individuality against the raucous, hostile and oppressive attitude of Richard. Lessing’s women help each other, confide in each other and whatever freedom is possible it comes with the help of the women
friends alone. In *A Ripple from the Storm*, Lessing highlights the invigorating solidarity among the white women. Martha is helped by the kind, benevolent comrade Jasmine, whenever she is in financial or emotional trouble. Martha also helps Maisie when the latter is in the family way and successfully arranges her marriage with Andrew. Again Martha in *The Four Gated City* helps Lynda to be rehabilitated to some extent.

Doris Lessing shows how human relations stay alive among her women characters. They may not have blood or familial relations but still they carry a good respect for caring and mutual understanding and a sense of devotion for each other. They sacrifice their comfort zone and try their level best to perform the best human acts. Juliet Mitchell views, “women have become aware on the fact of achieving collective identity” (183) for the whole human race. Raymond Williams says, “women are together to achieve harmony among themselves” (123). They are fully conscious about it. Anna and Molly help, support, suggest, motivate and guide each other. Martha is totally open to Stella on her different personal issues as pregnancy, abortion and dealing with maternal affairs. Through these women, Lessing idealizes human relations than familial or blood relations. She views that it is not the family but desire for humanity which is needed. But, the parents as father and mother create adverse circumstances for their daughters so that they are not able to develop their individuality to the full potential of their capabilities. Lessing’s women develop solidarity among themselves and criticize the worried circumstances created by the male hegemonic, social institution or patriarchal system.

Thus, we have seen how Doris Lessing has artistically cherished the ideal growth of woman right from her birth to teen and young age. She has presented how Anna, Martha, Mary and Julia as new women make a new way of living life among all the social and psychological hurdles created by patriarchal and conventional system. Impositions of earlier generation disturb her new women in achieving emancipation over different myths which restrict their full development. She does not hate to be a mother but can’t endure the compromises which are, to live up to the mystique of womanhood, propagated by patriarchy. Lessing’s new woman decides her own fate and lives to assert her identity by making personal decisions.