

Chapter Five

Motherhood to Old Age: “Ripeness is All”

Through nomadic History, Beauvoir shows that motherhood was considered sacred and it was related to nature where men were passive and dependent on Nature for their existence. Mothers were considered to be magicians and sorceresses as they had the capability to ‘give’ birth to a new life and were raised to the pedestal of divinity. Though motherhood led women to an inactive existence, yet they played crucial roles in trade and commerce. Gradually, the mother lost this status and was seen only as a wet nurse and a slave. She was stripped of mystical prestige and was doomed to immanence, procreations, and other secondary tasks. Luce Irigaray writes:

. . . all the social regime of “History” are based upon the exploitation of one “class” of producers, namely woman. There is no compensation for this reproductive value (children and work) otherwise it would be a system of exchange and a shattering of the monopolization of the proper name (and what it signifies as appropriative power) by father-man. (Irigaray 801)

Laws and customs impose marriage on a woman where contraceptive measures and abortions are banned and divorce is forbidden. Beauvoir writes, “Motherhood as a natural phenomenon confers no power” (Beauvoir 195). A mother is associated with ‘good’ being to whom man returns and also wants to escape from her. Beauvoir writes that in USSR the idea of woman as an erotic object is promoted, where she should be

flirtatious to catch hold of her husband by paying attention to her clothes and makeup. A mother is, still, seen as “a sexual partner, a reproducer, an erotic object”, but he does not give her the desired status and importance (68). Laura Mulvey writes:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (Mulvey 62)

Beauvoir feels that pregnancy and motherhood depend on situations whether these take place in revolt, resignation, satisfaction, or happiness. In the novel *The Golden Notebook*, Paul makes fun of the technology where a woman can have a child by applying ice to the ovaries and suggests Ella to do the same. A Professor, in the same novel, believes that there is no physiological basis for a vaginal orgasm in women and he draws a debatable parallel between female swan and woman while women do not question him.

Religion, occupation, property, marriage, poetry, and family are the ideological tools in the hands of men to control the life of women. Louis Althusser talks about Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) to describe how ideologies are produced and practiced in a culture and teach us the right and wrong ways of behaviour. The idea of ‘virtuous wife’, where adultery is considered to be a heinous crime; an unwed mother is seen as an object of scandal, has found place in many religions which binds woman to a man who

wants her to be both, his servant and his companion. Beauvoir offers a critique of different codes, books, laws, and countries where women are seen merely as sex objects and confined to the four walls of the house. Beauvoir writes, “What determines women’s present situation is the stubborn survival of the most ancient traditions in the new emerging civilisation” (Beauvoir 157). It is due to persistence of these situations that married women and mothers face worst kind of discrimination.

“Motherhood is seen as woman’s destiny, her sacred calling that mothers lack further identities and are selfless, they feel only tenderness for their children, never resentment or rage” (qtd. in De Sahzer 605). A woman is instilled with the idea that motherhood is a miracle, a marvellous privilege, and a game where a child is an object to be possessed and dominated while her feminine values and femininity are at stake if she finds it as a threat or as a parasite proliferating inside her body and opts for abortion. Pregnancy becomes an obstacle for Julie, in *Love Again*, as she does not get any job and she continues to live on her savings or what she gets from Remy for a year. She is also blamed for inducing forced abortions and killing her children. She is forced to work as a copier of music though she is far better equipped for this job and composes her own music, sings songs, and sells her paintings to earn her livelihood. She chooses to stand on her own feet and to fight against her circumstances instead of embracing prostitution or by becoming someone’s mistress. But she gives up her fight and commits suicide as she is not allowed to live life on her own terms.

Anne seems to age early due to her worries about her daughter, Joyce’s involvement in delinquent activities. Hal suggests her to leave her job to look after Joyce well while he can continue with his job and indulge in affairs. She feels guilty of passing

her responsibility of Joyce to Sarah. Linda Rennie Forcey also sees mothering as a socially constructed set of activities where a woman is cultivated for the nurturing and caring roles for people. Hal has failed in being a responsible husband or a father and still takes pride in introducing his wife and daughters through his own success, submerging their identities into his own. In one of Sarah's play, he introduces himself as Dr. Millgreen and never as Sarah's brother, but had Sarah been to one of his parties she would have surely been introduced as Hal's sister. This shows how men are very conscious of asserting their identities bereft of any relationship with any woman, but do not take into consideration the same case for women.

A woman's reproductive role has not guaranteed her an equal dignity and she is unable to establish an equal footing with man. Though a woman is the 'partner-worker' of a man in many agricultural societies just like Mary, in *The Grass is Singing*, yet it is only men who find a foothold over the society while a mother is confined to slavery in the family. Beauvoir feels, ". . . maternity is a strange compromise of narcissism, altruism, dream, sincerity, bad faith, devotion and cynicism" (Beauvoir 570). As soon as a woman feels the child in her heavy belly, she becomes an "ambivalent reality" where "[s]he is no longer an object subjugated by a subject" nor "she is a subject anguished by her freedom" and feels like becoming a plaything to her child. (552)

Mary hates the idea of a baby because of "its helplessness, its dependence, the mess, the worry" (Lessing, *GS* 135). Dick thinks that being the head of the family, he has the right to take the decisions in all matters and he wishes to improve his relationship with Mary by filling the gap between them by having a child, but only when he is well-established. He completely ignores Mary's wish which is to leave the farm and not to

have children. It is only when Mary is on the verge of nervous breakdown, she wants to have a child, but is denied because Dick realises that she wants to fulfill her selfish motive. Mary remembers her own mother who used her as a safety-valve and clung to her in all her worries. In the same manner, Mary wants a daughter for her as a companion to transfer all her worries, problems, her hatred towards her husband to the girl child.

Sometimes, a mother feels that the child is like a tyrant; sucking her strength, life, and happiness; she has become slave to her child, and she looks at her child as “a burden, a shackle, or a liberation, a jewel, a form of security” (Beauvoir 565). After childbirth, a thin girl, Frances has now become large, shapeless, slatternly, and flat and does not get time for herself as she has to look after two kids all alone while the father, Johnny has abandoned them. Beauvoir feels that pregnancy is experienced by a mother either as enjoyment or as a mutilation, but a paradoxical relationship exists between both the child and the mother where each claims to have the possession over the other. Adrienne Rich also talks of two types of motherhood that is “*motherhood as experience*, which encompasses the potentially powerful relationship of any woman to her reproductive capacities and her children, and *motherhood as institution*, which in a patriarchal society tries to keep women and children under male control.” (qtd. in De Shazer 605)

A child is thought to give ‘completeness’ and meaning to a mother if she fails to find this ‘completeness’ as a wife and it is only through the institution of marriage that this motherhood is respected. But there are times when another woman is forcefully handed over the responsibility of problematic children as parents expect the woman to be capable enough to change their children also. Sarah, in *Love, Again*, an effective parent, is forced to take up the responsibility of Joyce, a problematic child of her brother, Hal

and Anne. Sarah has to acquire a self-protective role with Joyce to avoid getting influenced by Joyce's disturbed state of mind, but wastes her time and energy on a person who is adamant and does not want to mend her ways. Her friend, Stephen, encourages her to learn to say no to such injustices and to refuse to own up this responsibility. Still, Sarah accepts this motherly duty and tries to bring out a 'good girl' in Joyce, but fails in doing so as Joyce runs away. When Joyce comes back again, Sarah refuses to take her responsibility and this refusal is taken as an act of defiance on her part by her brother.

Beauvoir examines the reason behind the sour relationship between a mother and a child and writes that it varies from situation to situation, that is, if the child is desired to strengthen the relationship between a husband and a wife, the mother will love that child, if the woman is sexually frigid or unsatisfied, or if she is socially inferior to man, or when she feels that she has no hold over her child, either she will devote completely to her child and lay her claim over the child, denying the claims of a father, or she will hate the child and will make the victim out of her child by loading frustrations and vengeance of her man or the world on her child, especially the girl child. Phyllida, in *The Sweetest Dream*, thinks that her daughter, Sylvia, is a curse, bondage, and an impediment in her way to success. She has always dreaded her motherhood and is haunted by those memories again when Margaret, Meriel's daughter, decides to stay with her. She wants to get rid of both of these girls in order to be free, but when Johnny hands over the responsibility of Sylvia to Frances, Phyllida is upset and wants to claim her daughter. She is also angry when her first husband leaves all his fortune for Sylvia.

The vengeance of a mother may not be in the form of physical beatings, but also in the form of claiming complete authority over her children to boast about it. A mother

begins the process of 'femininising' her daughter right from childhood so that she (daughter) may be accepted by the society. Mrs. Boothby does not seem to understand her daughter's situation or offers her a consoling shoulder and rather chides her and gets irritated by her behaviour only to realise her mistake later. She is unhappy by the idea of June leaving her after her marriage as she will be left with no emotional outlet because her husband does not have time for her.

There is no autonomy in a mother because, immediately after the birth of a child, she devotes herself completely to the nurturing and caring of the child just as Rich claims, in "Of Woman Born", "Maternal altruism is the one quality universally approved and supported in women" (qtd. in Kuhn 829). Beauvoir raises her concern for a mother who does not try to affirm her individuality. There are few women with masochistic devotion who are always asked to sacrifice their pleasure, independence; social, professional, and personal lives for their family and children just as Molly has to give up her acting again till Tommy recovers from his suicide attempt. Beauvoir writes that a mother always tries to give the warmth, intimacy, and nourishment to her child and tries to secure its future.

Frances has the tendency to bear an extra burden when Colin's teacher tells her to get him to visit a psychoanalyst. She overworks herself to make money for his fees, but does not take Johnny's help who is enjoying a lavish life. Despite all her efforts, Colin comes out pouring with "the complaints, the miseries, the angers" regarding Frances's decision of marrying Johnny and divorcing him, or about his messy upbringing, or making him lead a bohemian life, or being a world saver by feeding inmates who are like parasites which he cannot do with the doctor. (Lessing, *SD* 134). All his pent up anger

comes out at his mother, a 'weaker' being, instead of on his father who has never fulfilled his responsibilities. He warns her not to instruct, indulge, or interfere in his matters even if he is drinking hard. Frances is hurt and feels that she is being "shriveled up by rivers of lava", but bears the brunt of Colin's anger silently, accepting the role of a victim because she wants to see her son to be happy. (196)

Andrew, the eldest son of Frances, does not like anyone to intrude his privacy. Julia, his grandmother, reminds Frances of her motherly duties and encourages her to stop Andrew going astray from his path. Frances is worried about Andrew not having any girlfriend because he might be a homosexual. She wants him to have a woman only to prove to the world that he is a normal man. Here a woman not only acts as an object for a man, but also as a prized possession to prove that he is a normal man.

Julia is shocked and distressed to see that Frances is facing humiliation from her sons and is still trying to be a protective mother. Helen Cixous writes, in "The Newly Born Woman", "Either woman is passive or she does not exist. What is left for her is unthinkable, unthought which certainly means that she is not thought, she does not enter into the oppositions, that she does not make a couple with the father (who makes a couple with the son)" (Cixous 349). Frances cannot hear criticism of her sons, especially from Johnny, when he criticises Colin's book *The Stepson*. Andrew is shocked to see his mother in rage because she has always tried to play the role of a strong mother to them and now she becomes vulnerable in front of her son. Soon, she gathers up the courage to tell Colin not to interfere in her personal life and not to stop her to marry Rupert.

A mother feels heavily weighed down by the abstract demands of her husband to make her children obey and behave in the society well. Helen Cixous writes, “A woman by her opening up, is open to being “possessed”, which is to say, dispossessed of herself” (Cixous 353). Her continuous nagging at her children leads to bitter relations between them. Dorothy, in *The Good Terrorist*, is under pressure to provide a better future for her daughter and dreams of educating her well because she does not want her daughter to get struck in her kind of situation, but is disappointed to see Alice performing roles of being a cook and a nanny to several people.

A mother is always blamed if her offspring does not act according to will of the father. Molly’s secret source of uneasiness is Tommy who is also the cause of hostility between Molly and Richard. Richard feels that Molly is not a good mother and blames her for leaving her son all alone to enjoy her holidays and provoking and using Tommy as a weapon against him. Richard says that if Tommy had been given proper upbringing without being brought up on illusion of communism and had involved himself in any constructive work, then he would not have interfered in their matter. Both play blame game with each other and take defensive attitudes towards themselves, but none tries to find the desires of Tommy.

Molly does not want her son to grow up like “damned mother-ridden Englishman” or to make him “see the world in terms of the little fishpond of the upper class” and rather wants him to lead a free life whereas Richard wants his son to go to Oxford or run his business (Lessing, *GN* 37, 38). Both Anna and Molly are against bullying their children or forcing their own decisions upon them, but, for Richard, this leaves children directionless. Molly is protective towards Tommy and does not want him

to be affected by her broken marriage whereas Richard does not provide any emotional comfort to him.

Kate is blamed by her husband for over-protecting her son, Tim. She could ask for Tim's help only when he is willing to do so which shows that, as a mother, she is the victim of the mood swings of her son and is attuned to other people's moods. She has sacrificed everything for her children only to be shunned by them, making her feel like a pet kicked inadvertently by a friend or like a bird being pecked to death by healthy birds. She questions, "[I]t's not fair, what do they [family] expect from me?", but continues to bear the brunt of Tim's anger, rudeness, or his troubling attitude (Lessing, *SBD* 86). She is forced to build in herself qualities like patience, self-discipline, self-control, self-abnegation, chastity, and adaptability to others. She feels like shouting and slapping her son for misbehaving with her, but is bound by these virtues.

Beauvoir writes that a mother is destined to be "the prototype of bland *repetition*" because, for her, life is like a vicious circle repeating itself without yielding to anything worthwhile while the mother is locked and condemned to household works, disrupting her growth as an individual (Beauvoir 320). This happens when the housework is seen compatible with the duties of motherhood. Kate feels guilty of not devoting time to her family due to her work forgetting that her children are adults and can manage on their own. The emptiness, vacuum, and emotional void start settling in her life when she is away from her family and, now, her so long desired freedom seems meaningless to her.

Dorothy feels tied down by her daughter, Alice's responsibility because her husband, Cedric does not help her. She confesses to Alice:

I was married when I was nineteen. There should be a law against it. And then I just kept house and looked after you and your brother and cooked and cooked and cooked. I am unemployable. I used to sit there, when you and your brother were babies, thinking how my friends were all making something of themselves. And I was stuck. (Lessing, *GT* 353)

This sums up Dorothy's situation as a wife and, especially, as a mother as she repents for not doing anything fruitful in her life and her anger comes out in form of hostility towards her daughter. She is exploited by her own daughter when Alice forces her to take the responsibility of her boyfriend, Jasper, too, and is made to feel like a visitor in her own house. Her condition is described best in these words, "Years, years of my life I've spent, staggering around with loads of food and cooking it and serving it to a lot of greedy-guts who eat too much anyway." (Lessing, *GT* 350)

Coppelia Kuhn, talking about Chodorow's idea of mothering, writes, "[W]omen as mothers produce daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother itself grows out of the mother-daughter relationship. They also produce sons whose nurturant capacities and needs have been systematically curtailed in order to prepare them for their future as fathers" (Kuhn 827). Due to this, the wish to have a son is prominent in the society as it provides a woman prestige and status. She is deluded into believing that she can control and possess the world in her hands through her son. She feels that her son will be her liberator or saviour from the supremacy of his father, which Beauvoir calls as a "precarious expedient", because a mother is living her proxy life which might not turn out to be true (Beauvoir 643). Anna repents for not giving birth to a boy who could have supported her. So she creates a protagonist Ella, in *The Yellow Notebook*, having a son,

named Michael. Molly also feels that she can rely on her son, Tommy, but realises that she cannot interfere in his matters. Still, she feels worried about her child's future and cannot stop performing her duty.

According to Beauvoir, when a son grows up, the mother, gradually, loses control over him despite responding to his demands and needs and finds no reciprocity from him. The differences between them crop up when the son does not want to understand his mother's feelings while the mother fails to realise his dreams and desires. When a mother imposes her wishes on her son in excess, she gets frustrated if her son does not grow up according to her wishes. Molly is bound by Tommy and feels incapable of enjoying outside world other than England. Anna also feels the same as she says, "The control and discipline of being a mother came so hard to me, that I can't delude myself that if I'd been a man, and not forced into self-control, I'd have been any different", but all her resentment goes away as soon as she is with her daughter, Janet. (Lessing, *GN* 299)

The child rebels if he/she feels that the parents are sacrificing him/her for their own tranquility and forcing him/her to take up a career which he/she is unfit for. The conflict arises when a mother wants her son to be "infinite and yet fit in the palm of her hand, dominating the whole world and kneeling before her", but she does not realise that the boy escapes her hold once he grows up (Beauvoir 575). Tim shouts at his mother, Kate, for being overprotective and suffocating. He feels that she has disrupted his growth as she has always tried to instruct and dominate him. She is an invalid, "an uncertain quantity" or "an old nurse" for him as he neglects the sacrifice of her youth and energy (Lessing, *SBD* 91). He relates her irritation with her menopause whereas he has no right to point finger on her natural processes. Still, Kate tries to protect her children and

control them from becoming adults too early which creates a conflict between them because they see her as a dominating woman.

Contrary to this, Mary Finchley, Kate's friend, is considered to be a rebel because she does not bother about her family at all. She does not confine herself to conventions and shouts at her husband and her children if they do something wrong. This makes Kate question as to why it is necessary for a mother to be like a grindstone, always having to give her attention to their minute wants, demands, and needs and to have a "victim's good nature" or "defenceless *niceness*" (Lessing, *SBD* 90). But she is expected to bear the pressure from the outer world patiently while she yearns for a new journey leading to her self-exploration.

A mother is seen as the refuge, the slumber whose caress brings relief, but the son feels tied down by her. A mother is portrayed as the pacifier where "she is a being *in itself*, a ready-made *value*" (Beauvoir 553). She devotes herself completely to the upbringing of her children, but when the child gains an independent identity, the child wants to go beyond the mother's control. Anna protects Janet from all the hardships, but, sometimes, envies her daughter's happiness too. Beauvoir comments, "Imprisoned in the snares of seriousness, she envies all occupations and amusements that wrench her daughter from the boredom of the household . . ." (578). Some mothers care for their daughters deeply which makes them egotistical and hard towards the rest of the world while others find pleasure in seeing their daughters as victims of torture. Anna tries to shield Janet from the suicide attempt of Tommy lest she might get affected by it, but Janet wants to go away from her mother's world.

Sarah seems to agree with Henry who believes that boys become strangers to mothers when they turn ten or eleven, especially, when they have to live in a boarding school while, earlier, they cried out for their mothers. Elizabeth knows how to make her sons obey her, but also knows the fact that they will turn out to be men in their lives later, and she will be unable to hold her dominance over them any longer. Kamala Das, in her poem "Middle Age", also talks about the similar dismal state of a mother whose love, devotion, and intimacy are rejected by her son. She depicts the loneliness of middle aged people who are avoided by their children when they grow up. A mother cannot scold and hug her son freely and rather bears her pains all alone and weeps secretly by touching different things of her son as reminiscent of his childhood memories.

Children want to go beyond the limits of home and try to escape the situation created by the mother who wants to "constitute a universe of permanence and continuity" through them (Beauvoir 497). Kate's outings are disturbed and restricted by her family problems as she is expected to be available at everyone's beck and call and to act as connector to her family, while her children enjoy complete freedom for their outings. Despite all discomforts, a mother has to wear an appropriate smile on her face. Sacrificing comforts, happiness, and plans for outings for the sake of her family is considered to be the greatest virtue of a mother and Kate is gulled into believing that she is an expert in keeping the house very well, but she lacks decision-making power. Kate may be highly educated, but her sense of being a working woman is lost since she is happy playing the role of a housewife and a doting mother, and this sense is revived only when she is forced by her husband to accept the job of a translator.

Kate is surrounded by “a web of nasty self-deceptions” which makes her feel like a “cripple or an invalid”, or “servant”, or “doormat” (Lessing, *SBD* 218, 92). But she is forced to block this idea of protest and is expected not to demand her freedom as she feels guilty of deriving pleasure out of the absence of her children. After staying away from her family, Kate becomes emotionally weak and feels like “a monstrous baby” who needs to be soothed, but she also remembers Natalia’s statement, who asks people in the play, “*Have you forgotten who I am, my position in this house?*” (166). Kate prepares herself to do the same with her family, but she is ashamed to say it aloud. The dilemma of being free from her shackles, but not being happy about it, forces her to return to her cage at the end of the novel. She ponders on questions like ‘who has gone wrong, whether it is the society, her children, her husband or herself’, still, she goes on playing her traditional roles. Kate’s family survives despite having several conflicts only because she has played the role of “a mother who had to be resisted, fought, reacted against—because she wasn’t always loved and appreciated.” (218)

In *The Sweetest Dream*, the children, who come to live in Julia’s house, have left their homes permanently because of the differences with their parents. Julia has differences with her son, Jolyon, regarding his way of life. She suggests him to take up a job to support his family, but he sees it as an idea coming from an exploiting class and he, rather, wishes to sit behind and relax, enjoying the fortune of his mother. After the death of his father, Philip, Johnny claims his right over the property and asks his mother to move to a smaller flat. Till now, a submissive wife and a passive mother stands her ground and refuses to yield to Johnny’s unnecessary demands for which she faces abuses like “old bitch” or “fascist bitch” and other kinds of threats from him (Lessing, *SD* 45).

He believes that a woman can never handle property well and it is his responsibility to look after it which does not happen in this case.

Beauvoir writes that a woman does not realise that she has more claims over her daughter than her son. A woman tries to seek the double in her daughter and tries to project her ambiguities on to her, but feels betrayed if conflicts arise between them just as Chodorow also feels that a mother looks at her daughter as “physical and mental extensions of themselves” and try to create “a deeper identification and more prolonged symbiosis” with her daughter than with her son (qtd. in Kuhn 828). For Anna, Janet is her emotional support as she feels calm, responsible, simple, affectionate, and alive with her, but, sometimes, she sees her daughter as her shackles too. When Janet goes to the boarding school, Anna feels free of running at the clock’s time and also feels the revival of Anna who died when Janet was born. But she also feels childless and becomes claustrophobic and is on the verge of madness as she spends her whole time in the flat with anxiety, in idleness or in cutting and pasting news clippings all over her walls, as if she is “being attacked by a million unco-ordinated facts” (Lessing, *GN* 563). Still, she wants to rely on the belief that only a man can redeem her from this situation.

Michael sees Janet as another woman whom he is betraying to sleep with her mother and calls Anna “a real woman” only when she responds to him in bed according to his desire (Lessing, *GN* 218). He forces Anna to send her daughter to school before he comes to her house which creates a conflict between Janet’s mother and Michael’s mistress and she never enjoys the status of being real Anna. Despite submitting herself completely to him, he complains and says, “Well, the cares of motherhood must ever come before lovers” when she neglects him and pays more attention to her daughter

(214). He rejects her as he finds nothing in common with her apart from sex. Similarly, Ella is blamed for paying more attention to her son rather than to her lover, Paul. So he tells her not to expect any respect from him as she is his mistress and starts withdrawing from her as soon as she begins to claim him.

A daughter guides her mother to follow the convention and to be a sympathetic woman. The relationship between a mother and a daughter is strained which is reflected in various situations. When the grown up daughter tries to affirm her autonomy, the mother gets frustrated as she is forced to renounce the privilege and authority which she enjoys over her daughter. For example, Alice does not pay attention to her mother's advice of leaving the terrorist group which is working on rotten ideas. Dorothy is heralded abuses, both by Alice and her boyfriend, Jasper for asking them to vacate her house. Dorothy is forced to move to a dingy place because of her inability to manage the expenses of a large house for which she is blamed by her daughter as her need for money has corrupted her sensibility. At last, Dorothy strongly refuses to help Alice and says, "Try to understand that you can't say things to people you said to me this morning and then just turn up, as if nothing had happened, with a bright smile, or another hand-out" and at the end says, "I wanted to be done with *you*" (Lessing, *GT* 19, 351). Dorothy, later, tries to achieve her desired freedom and says, "I am *thinking*-do you see? I'm *thinking* about my life. That means I am examining a lot of things." (359)

Beauvoir writes, "Whether she is a passionate or a hostile mother, her child's independence ruins her hopes. She is doubly jealous: of the world that takes her daughter, and of her daughter who, in conquering part of the world, robs her of it" (Beauvoir 577). This is how a girl is exploited in the hands of her own mother. Anna uses Janet as a

pretext to ask Saul Green to leave her house when she finds his presence too confining, but the real reason behind is that Anna sees her daughter as a threat who would try to woo her lovers, like, Saul. She feels that if she had a boy she could have allowed Saul to stay as she would not have faced any objection by the society and neither would she have had any competitor in relation to Saul which arise conflicting emotions in her.

Alice performs her role of being a nun, a mother, or a sister to jobless Jim and asks her father to offer him a job. Just as a mother ensures that her child has taken breakfast before going to school, Alice acts out her role with Jim who feels obliged to her for getting him a job. Alice also helps Philips in painting a house so that his job can be saved despite being aware of the fact that he is adequately paid for the work, for which he is hired by her, quite contrary to what he feels. The Greek employer of Philips finds Alice unfit for painting walls as he classifies it to be 'men's job'. Her helplessness seems to surface after the death of Philips because no other man in the house offers her any help.

A mother is always expected to endure the pains just like Sarah who gives up her heart's desire to act in theatre and starts translating plays for *The Green Bird*, a theatre, to support her children after the death of her husband. Her success, in this venture, leads her to the position of running, managing, casting, and directing plays along with her three friends Mary Ford, Roy Strether, and Patrick Steele. From being "an almost amateur, badly-paid hanger-on to the edges of real theatre" she becomes "the influential manager" and the director of the theatre (Lessing, *LA* 10). But she never admires herself for her efforts as she has been told not to take credit for her success. Sally, a single mother, playing the role of Sylvie, Julie's mother, in a play, is busy raising her three children through hard work. She knits on the sets for her children in her free time and wants to

give her daughter a good education, but, in her absence, the daughter is also handed over the responsibility of her siblings.

When a woman of higher status marginalises other women, she is unable to find any company to cope up with her marital problems. Mary has distaste towards native women and their exposure of flesh, with suckling babies hanging on their mothers' breasts like leeches or hanging on their mothers' backs like monkeys. The sight of naked women above the waist with their black breasts hanging down repels her and she feels sick with the idea of having a child's lips on her own breasts. The dread and fear towards this motherhood develops due to her disturbed childhood and failed marriage. This degrading look by a woman towards other women is the major cause for the weakening of feminism. If Mary had enjoyed the mutual and equal relationship with her partner she would have surely enjoyed her motherhood.

A prim and proper Julia feels disgusted, shocked, and embarrassed to see Frances stripping off her stockings and exposing her solid white legs; or to be exposed to a half naked woman, nursing her son; things scattered in a haphazard manner quite contrary to her dignified life. Julia is aghast to see the miserable condition, unhealthy surroundings, and squalid place in which Frances is living with her children. She is worried about the pitiable condition of children and wants them to get proper education so she offers help to Frances but is refused. Julia is always presented a well-washed child by her servants and she refuses to breast feed her child as she sees it as a degrading act equivalent to being an animal. Some women are worried about their disfiguration and, hence, they refuse to feed their children which is a misguided notion created by certain extremists. Still, Julia

always supports his son's wives like Frances, the first wife of Johnny and pays the fees of Andrew and Colin which lightens Frances's burden.

To overcome emptiness and uselessness of life a woman seeks compensation in romantic liaisons, but if these relationships fail, she borders on destroying herself. Contrary to this, after being abandoned by Paul, Ella is able to banish the idea of being abandoned by Paul with the help of her son's company which revives a spur of life in her because she wanted to end her life. She feels annoyed with Cy Maitland who has bound his wife to a kind of a grindstone as he sees marriage and motherhood to be two ultimate goals for a woman while he wants to enjoy his affairs.

A moral woman is defined in terms of "the strong woman", "the admirable mother", and "the virtuous woman" (Beauvoir 525). Alice has become a mother figure for all inmates, accomplishing the roles of being a motherly figure to them, but she becomes a fodder for the dangerous terrorist act of the group. Contrary to what Alice wants to be, she is seen as "one of these big maternal lezzies, all sympathy and big boobs" and a sponge absorbing agonies and pains of inmates (Lessing, *GT* 129). This situation clearly explains how a mother is created by the society when it starts expecting from a woman to perform her duties. At times, she also wants to react, rave, and rage by grinding her teeth or by holding her fists tightly, but she has to calm herself down.

Alice is implicated and plotted into a conspiracy by Andrew without giving her complete information about the boxes containing material which is, later, revealed as separate parts of guns. She faces the anger and threat of Gordon O'Leary when she refuses to tell him about the boxes as he is determined to hit her. She tries to calm him

down by assuming her role of a placating woman and reasoning it out with him politely. This confrontation leaves a deep impact on her mind and she feels physical weakness creeping into her as she finds herself staggering on her way to find some support.

Men want their wives to be tied down by the family once they have children and they do not allow women to enjoy their lives. Molly questions Richard and says, “Of course I had a good time, why shouldn’t I?” and further says, “I was glad to be free for the first time since I had a baby. Why not? And what about you-you have Marion, the good little woman, tied hand and foot to the boys while you do as you like” (Lessing, *GN* 37). Richard blames his wife for breaking off their marriage which, he feels, is the reason behind Tommy’s suicide. But Anna defends Molly saying that since Anna, herself, has a broken marriage that does not mean that Janet will also commit suicide. It is easy for men and society to blame women when something goes wrong, making it difficult for a single mother to thrive in the world until and unless she finds a real consoler.

Frances feels the pressure of her motherly duty as she become a “house mother” to “the bruised souls, the waifs and strays” and is forced to give up her dream of becoming a well established actress (Lessing, *SD* 67, 2-3). Frances has to bear the tantrums of these people who make fuss while eating and she remains busy cooking different dishes, catering to different needs of different people while people bring their friends and relatives and increase her workload. She becomes immune to her motherly duties and finds no relief from “the pressure of exorbitant teenagers, or emotional dependents who suck and feed and demand” (86). She is never praised for her culinary skills because people consider cooking to be part of daily routine and she does not have the courage to tell the inmates of the house to look after themselves.

Frances does not escape from the vicious circle of taking care of several people at home as she is forced to pay for Meriel's therapy, her monthly allowance, and fees of Margaret and William for which she has to sacrifice her dream of having her own house or a part of land and her desire to live independently gets shattered. It is remarked that "ideology has pronounced their condition impossible" just because she, herself, has chosen to be confined to her family (Lessing, *SD* 338). She is unable to escape this condition, especially when Sylvia dies and she, automatically, takes up the responsibility of Clever for which she has to give up her heart's desire to run an experimental theatre and rather forces herself to write books. She asks Andrew to share the responsibility of Zebedee despite facing protests from William, her step son, who has started claiming it to be his house and does not want to share it with anyone.

Frances plays the role of the mother substitute for Rupert's children only for her love for Rupert, but she could feel familiar vicious circular pattern in it as Adrienne Rich says, "The two-person mother-child relationship is by nature regressive, circular, unproductive, and that all culture depends on the father-son relationship" (qtd. in Kuhn 827). This affects the intimacy between Rupert and Frances as she feels that she is being "sucked into the insensate demand of teenagers", facing "two obstinate faces, two antagonistic bodies" (Lessing, *SD* 263, 268). She decides to move into Julia's house with Rupert and kids, but cannot do so without taking the permission from Colin who wants to live in the house with his wife Sophie and child Celia.

Quite contrary to this, Mary Finchley feels cramped by her children and says, "Why should we scale ourselves down, children shouldn't be allowed to be tyrants" whereas Kate feels the pressure of "four battling and expanding egos" and the pressure of

an emotionally void husband who does not involve himself in family matters (Lessing, *SBD* 11, 85). Mary's outlook of seeing her children as casualties is strongly opposed by Kate, but she, too, feels the same and is unable to speak out her feelings. Kate is made to believe that Mary's life is "a French farce" so that she should not get 'negatively' influenced by her (38). Mary is considered to be an immoral lady because she tells her children to leave her alone as she is tired of their questions regarding her private life and admits that she likes sex. Similarly, Marion, in *The Golden Notebook*, after being betrayed by Richard, believes that a woman has children because she loves a man, but if the man betrays her, she should not be responsible for those children. She questions the notion where mothers are held responsible to look after their children while fathers keep themselves busy.

Beauvoir feels that a woman may welcome the child and try to seek the fulfillment of her secretly harboured dream by joyfully welcoming her pregnancy, but she might also dread it in isolation due to pains. Julie, an unwed mother of two children from Paul and Remy each, seems to enjoy it, but both her children die in infancy, while people blame her for killing them. The society allows a woman to live in the world till she is useful to them otherwise she is discarded, maligned by ugly rumors, and removed from the society once she becomes a threat. Just as Mary, in *The Grass is Singing*, is seen as a threat to the prestige of the white society and she is cleverly removed from it without remorse from anyone similarly, Julie is forced to commit suicide.

Even a drunkard mother is seen as a polluting effect on children. To cite an example, Marion is forced to drink too much due to her husband's affairs while Richard wants to send her away from her children to which she replies, "But why should I care

about the children if you don't care about me-that's why I say to him. But he doesn't understand that why should you care about a man's children if he doesn't love you?" (Lessing, *GN* 252). But no judgment is passed upon a drunkard father who stays away from home, most of the time, and has affairs. Richard justifies this by saying that men can enjoy outside too, but that does not mean that his wife should resort to drinking.

Beauvoir suggests that a mother should not see her children as substitutes for her disappointed and thwarted life and she should not shrink away from her responsibility. Julie's illegitimate father loves his flings with women, but marries a poor aristocratic woman from France so that she does not object to his pleasure-seeking activities. He becomes the benefactor of Sylvie and provides basic amenities to his daughter, Julie, but never accepts her as his daughter in public. Sylvie always lives in the estates of this man because she is made to believe that she has no life outside the estate and she will have to earn her living only through prostitution though she is an expert in cooking and knows a lot about plants and herbs. She thinks that getting her daughter married is the best thing for her daughter instead of being a slave or to have same fate as hers, of being an unwed mother. Ironically, she is unable to prevent Julie getting pregnant twice out of wedlock.

Beauvoir raises the problems faced by old woman, in her book *The Second Sex*, as an old woman is considered to be the 'third sex' or a eunuch and is placed at lower level than other women. She feels that an old woman is free from being prey to the powers that subjugate them. But this is not so in actual case because an old woman is the worst victim of humiliations and rude remarks as is reflected in the statement, "The top of the house, where Julia had her being was often a subject of mockery" while she is always referred to as "the old woman", "old witch", or "an old cow" by Andrew, Colin, Johnny's sons, and

Rose respectively (Lessing, *SD* 45). Julia's area has been marked off as an alien zone in the house by the inmates though it is her own house and she is portrayed as a proud woman who never mixes up with people easily. But the fact is that Julia is unable to bear the rough inmates of her house as Wilhelm Stein remarks that strict upbringing of Julia has "severely incapacitated" her (125). Gradually, the perception regarding Julia changes and she becomes a helpful, warm, and caring person when Andrew, Colin, and Frances realise that Julia always helps them in resolving their conflicts.

Young women feel threatened by old women and "punish older women with derision, punish them with cruelty, when they show inappropriate signs of sexuality" (Lessing, *LA* 133). Sarah feels that there is a need to raise questions like, "Why is it that for two decades, more, I lived content with a deprivation I only now feel is intolerable?" or "*I have to come back to the same question: how is it I lived comfortably for years and years and suddenly am made ill with longing- for what? By deprivation- of what? Who is it that lies awake in the dark body and heart and mind, sick with yearning for warmth, a kiss, comfort?*", just to overcome "pretty orthodox reactions" by men and to realise how women are being tied down by conventions. (141, 212, 133)

Mrs. Fowler, a woman of fifty, is described as "an old nuisance" and fussy like an old hen which, clearly, indicates that women of her age are marginalised as old ladies and are expected to have low energy level and if any of them protests their signs of ageing, they are made a butt of joke (Lessing, *GN* 106). Mrs. Fowler is silenced, guided, moulded, directed, and controlled by authoritarian like Willi who believes that women need to be bullied so he commands her to stop tormenting Maryrose. Acquiring the role of a bully, he makes her "a well-brought-up small girl" which proves that a man of any

age can command woman older to him (106). Lessing has remarkably presented this kind of woman in Mrs. Fowler, Mrs. Boothby, and Mrs. Lattimore.

Sarah's condition of being in love, especially with younger men, is always put in inverted commas to mark it as unconventional and an act of guilt in her own mind. She has been instilled with various notions regarding love that, "Love is the noblest frailty of the mind" or "He that loveth is devoid of all reason" or "One hour of downright love is worth a lifetime of dully living on" (Lessing, *LA* 248-49). It is surprising to see an independent woman, Sarah, who is capable of raising her children single-handedly, is turned into a meek and docile woman in terms of love. She tries to look young and responds to consumerism by relying on beauty creams, getting her face lifted up, and wearing dresses she has never worn, or using sexual undertones while conversing with people, but she realises her futility in not being able to stop her ageing.

The notion of being an old woman is considered to be a curse as she is asked to give up all her desires, fancies, and pleasures like Sarah who is struggling to avoid falling in love with much younger men, in *Love, Again*. Similarly, Frances is shocked to see Julia getting intimate with Wilhelm Stein, at the age of sixty almost the same age as of Sarah. Julia's friendship, with him, is termed as liaison in sophisticated terms, but Frances is afraid that this will set a bad example for other. Age restricts a woman from expressing her feelings for anyone.

Later, Frances feels bound by her children who do not approve of her relationship with another man because they cannot see their mother going for a weekend holiday with Harold. Her right to freedom and right to take independent decisions are usurped by her

sons. Frances goes to meet Harold secretly walking hand in hand with him, while they get, themselves, registered as husband and wife in a hotel. Due to the fear of revealing the relationship with the man and the fear of drawing flak from people, an old woman does not reveal her true identity. Frances is, now, following her heart's desire which seems wrong to her in case of Julia. Certain social customs restrict Julia and Frances, initially, and they have to meet their lovers in secret. Julia warns Frances not to get carried away by illusionary dreams of being in love. But they do not have the courage to question prescribed notions for old women.

Frances also finds her love in Rupert Boland, who works with her in *The Defender*, and she chooses to live with him, inspite of drawing flak from Colin. She feels helpless as she is unable to take independent decision because it is very difficult to go against the norms and follow the heart just as Frances dares to challenge the norm and decides to marry Rupert. She has to face problems as this pair is termed as an odd 'older woman-younger man pair' and Margaret hates seeing old people being in love and remarks, "I think it's disgusting, old people like that, holding hand" because she feels that only young people have right to fall in love. (Lessing, *SD* 465)

Once Kate becomes old, she feels light and floating that she has escaped the notice of her friends and lewd comments and gaze of men, while she also wishes to attract the attention of men by lifting up her skirt to expose herself, but does not realise that it is also an act of subservience, defeat, and obeisance at her part. It is remarked, "Kate was in one version of that female dilemma exemplified at its most extreme by the young girl who has shortened her skirt to top-thigh level, left all but two buttons of her

blouse undone, and spent two hours making herself up . . .”, but then she feels awkward if a man stares at her. (Lessing, *SBD* 44)

When Kate observes herself in the mirror she feels laughing at her pitiable condition. At this point of time, she feels that friendship, ties, and acquaintances with people are shallow and hold no importance in the lives of people. Despite all this, Kate decides to go to parlour to change her appearance because Kate becomes invisible for her acquaintances. She wishes to be an object of gaze of young men; wishes to stamp her foot, and scream to draw the attention of public. The problem with her is that she, desperately, tries to follow the convention without realising that it is made by men for their own comforts. She finds herself “*fitting into expectations that had been set in that other person by the modes of the time*”, but still goes and buys dresses to look young. (Lessing, *SBD* 177)

Old woman feels the horror of degradation especially when she starts ageing and makes extra efforts to preserve her beauty while “this negative stubbornness” against their ageing makes her bitter towards herself as well as the whole world (Beauvoir 592). Contrary to this, Marion who is also ageing is shown to be “the image of an abundant, happy, lively matron”, behaving in a coquettish manner when compared to other women, like, Anna or Molly (Lessing, *GN* 350). Sylvia Plath’s “Mirror” traces the theme of ageing of a woman as she writes:

A woman bends over me,
 Searching my reaches for what she really is.
 Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.

I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.
 She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.
 I am important to her. She comes and goes.
 Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.
 In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman
 Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish. (Plath 10-18)

Sarah reads a memoir of a beautiful society woman who gains wisdom only when she grows old and realises that, most of the time, people measure the importance of a woman in terms of her beauty. Sarah is able to relate her condition with this woman and learns how to grow old gracefully by not losing one's pride and by accepting the fact that "the flesh withers around an unchanged core" (Lessing, *LA* 3). Similarly, Kate denies dyeing her hair as she does not want to miss the chance of being her 'real' self.

The young women want to dye their hair because they yearn for lively colors while they accuse old people of doing the same. Old women, usually, feel in a dubious situation as they are humiliated in both ways as the author remarks, "One minute (so it feels) they are using the language of our time (ugly, crude, honest), and in the next, they have become, or feel they soon will if they don't do something about it, 'little old ladies', because the younger generation have begun to censor their speech as if to children" (Lessing, *LA* 41). As soon as a woman shows the signs of ageing, men flee from her to new "large brown haired girls with large bosoms" until she also ages. (Lessing, *GN* 352)

An old woman is referred in terms of her fertility, dry womb, menopause, loss of beauty, and her ability to satisfy men or else she is condemned to loneliness. The poverty,

the farm, the deteriorating condition of the dilapidated house, heat, and loneliness drives Mary mad and she is haunted by dreams of being abandoned by everyone or seeing her relieved at the death of her husband, Dick. After six years of her troubled marriage, she gets to notice herself and observes that her face has become faded and wrinkled; her skin has become dried and brown; little white marks have appeared under her eyes; her hands are thin and sun-burnt and she has become thin, dried stick, with thin yellowish neck. This makes her “viciously, revengefully angry” against everyone, especially Dick who is always a torturing reminder of her miserable condition. (Lessing, *GS* 101)

Once the fashion conscious Mary, now, is horrified wearing ragged, faded, and torn clothes. She becomes panic-stricken and decides to go to a beauty shop in the town to get a makeover, but to her displeasure she is left with no money. She tries to avoid the gaze of her old friends and decides to dine with Dick in a remote restaurant. People see her as “an angular, ugly, pitiful woman” who is left with nothing in her life (Lessing, *GS* 194). The only way she finds to relieve herself from this emptiness is to have a child though she dreads it. This is the time that she also realises that she is nearing forty and, if delayed further, she will not be able to produce children. She tries to persuade Dick to start a family in order to develop a cordial relation between them but Dick refuses. This completely snaps off the bond between them and she hates accompanying and assisting him to his farm. Dick’s obstinacy fills her with despair and she becomes hopeless creating “dispassionate tenderness” in Mary for Dick. (137)

Mary lacks proper direction which could lead her to a new path and help her recover from her illness and she is “waiting for something to propel her one way or the other” instead of grabbing the opportunity directly as she feels that “one should take

things as they come” and is forced to accept her destiny quietly (Lessing, *GS* 141, 30). Mary gets demoralised once she is rejected by her old boss when she runs to the town for her old job, unlike Tony Martson who keeps on pursuing his job. Mary refuses to take any help from Mrs. Slatter out of her disgust and shame for her pitiable condition while believing that Mrs. Slatter is there to make fun of her.

The society has made old age seem like a hindrance; an age to be hated, despised, and avoided, no matter, how old women may perceive or feel about themselves. Kate is made to feel old because her husband and society want her to think so and act accordingly while old women delegates want to maintain themselves, especially, when they go to some conferences by trying to look young. Kate also becomes obsessed by “the *womanhood* of the well-off nations of the world” and tries not to look even a day older than thirty (Lessing, *SBD* 43 emphasis added). She raises certain questions like why does she have to give-up her make-up just because she is termed as old woman; or why should she wear old woman’s clothes just to make herself look ugly; or why does she have to sit in a huddled and discouraged position during the conference so as not to attract the attention of men, but she lacks courage to question men directly who force her to do so.

This silent protest towards limiting old women to certain margins is questioned by Kate as she tries to regulate her flame not to attract men, but, gradually, she succumbs to the pressure and wants to be judged in terms of her ability to attract men rather than her ability to work. Charlie, at work, wants Kate to attract delegates for his benefits by banking on old woman because he thinks that she is more patient than the younger ones. The dilemma of keeping her thermostat low for the sake of her family creates problems

for her at work as Charlie's business survives on this charm and Kate is forced to be part of this group. This shows how appearance, dress, and even postures are taught to women for selfish motives.

Sarah seems to restrict her freedom by wearing clothes just to give herself the look of an old woman, but, unfortunately, she looks younger than her age which attracts men. She has to dress well when she meets Benjamin, her American sponsor of the play, and tries to use the art of charming him through her smile and gestures. Sarah could easily observe the difference between the 'smile' of a woman, when she has to meet a man or when she is in women's company; and the 'laughter' of a man, when he is in men's company. To cite an example, Shirley and Alison, Stephen's maids are directed not to indulge in laughter. Both Benjamin and Stephen carry an air of being patrons of art and feel as if they are doing a great favour to the artists by funding their plays.

An old woman is made to be obsessed with the idea of beauty and dress due to which she is unable to embrace her old age as she knows that once it fades away, she will not be able to attract men. She is told to evade signs of ageing through various advertisements of face creams deluding her to believe in the miracle. Frances tries to grab the attention of people only when she dresses elegantly proving the statement that "clothes makyth manners" (Lessing, *SD* 162). Sarah feels beautiful only when Henry tells her so and finds it to be the sole reason to submit her completely to him; otherwise she thinks of herself as a ball of lump. Sarah shares an atmosphere of charm, ease, solace, and comradeship with him just as she finds in Stephen's company. Despite having a desire to go to Berlin with Henry, she refuses as she is afraid of attracting attention of people being

an 'odd' younger man-older woman pair just as Kate and Jeffrey. She admits that if she had been young, this relationship would have prospered which is not possible now.

Frances never keeps a tab on her beauty as she thinks she is old until she meets Harold and Rupert who make her comfortable with her body finding no fault in her. Julia conforms to the notions of femininity by acting like a demure woman through her well guided actions like dressing well, putting up a smiling face, and lowering her eyelids as if in shyness just to show her feminine youth like Kate, in *The Summer Before the Dark*, who also sees her transit as a sex object to attract men. Julia is fed up of meeting like teenagers in love and wishes to marry Wilhelm so that they can stay together. Contrary to this, Maureen bats her heavy black lashes in a 'feminine' manner deliberately to make fun of certain conventions which makes Kate realise the futility of conforming to the patterns as if "twitching like a puppet to those strings." (Lessing, *SBD* 177)

A woman knows that this destiny of ageing is inevitable, still her toilette is "an asset, capital, an investment, it demands sacrifices; its loss is an irreparable disaster" (Beauvoir 593). Her husband also plays an ambiguous role in this obsession, if his wife is too attractive, he feels jealous whereas he also wants his wife to be presentable, elegant, and pretty while, sometimes, he never notices her outfits or hairstyles. Beauvoir comments that an old woman dresses to display herself in order to "make herself be" a woman and "submits herself to a painful dependence" (595). To look attractive and young, Kate gets a hair cut according to her hairdresser while she is taught not to look, act, or behave like a young girl, so she gets disturbed by the evocation of her young self through her new hair cut and colour.

During her tour to Europe with Jeffrey, the same Kate does not mind wearing different 'odd' dresses and does not bother being on self-displaying mode to men. Restrictions are imposed on women in terms of fashion and clothes, but Kate tries to defy it. While at sea beach, an open display of love makes her uncomfortable as she is not allowed to do so. The fear of rejection by her children for being too glossy, gleaming, and silky makes her sacrifice her desire, but she hardly questions these conventional codes of dress and hair style. She is even forced to keep her thermostat low and to evade friendship offers from men because she cannot seek pleasure outside marriage, while her husband enjoys his flings with other women. She is reminiscent of her inspection by men which makes her feel in a state of eternal youth.

Kate's illness aggravates her ageing as she loses considerable amount of weight and observes a greenish, sagging, pale, white face, grey rough hair, prominent bones. She looks awful in her sack like clothes and looks like a thin monkey or a "skeleton in a shocking-yellow robe" (Lessing, *SBD* 169). Maureen makes Kate conscious of her health by telling her that she is like "a faulty machine" which needs oiling (167). Maureen forces, convinces, and encourages Kate to get a changeover and a new outlook by dyeing her hair and gives Kate her own tight-fitted clothes unlike Mary, in *The Grass is Singing*, who feels offended when Mrs. Slatter offers her a help. When Kate wears tight clothes, she becomes the attractive 'Mrs. Kate Brown' again and feels the gaze, invitations, and compliments of men turning towards her again while other women feel envious with her as her old bony face and body, now, looks slim and decorative.

But the attempt to grab at youth by Natalie, a lady in a play, makes Kate uncomfortable when she says, "*One last effort and I shall be free. Freedom and peace,*

how I have longed for you both" (Lessing, *SBD* 151). The play reflects the general condition of old women, but creates a self-deception about beauty and youth in them. At times, Kate is reminiscent of her lost youth when she watches Maureen going wild, doing things at her will, like Mary Finchley, while Kate is unable to do such thing. She feels burdened by the demands, strains, and claims of her family and still wants to return to her cage. She realises that sex is a commodity that has to be traded widely only till a certain age after which an old woman is respected and not loved.

Beauvoir points out that the most salient characteristics, in an ageing woman, is "the feeling of depersonalisation" due to which old woman starts living in an illusion of denying her 'real' self, or she tries to express herself by keeping diary, having long conversation with her friends, or pondering over her regrets (Beauvoir 637). Shiela Rowbotham also observes this split and writes about it and feels that it leads to "tongue-tied paralysis" of identity in a woman. (Rowbotham 31)

The separation from Henry makes Sarah write diaries, where words like emptiness, pain, anguish, grief, longing, and hurt find place. Sarah has a nightmare about "a phantom body" soaked in "a stinging hot wetness" and "filled with a [violent] longing" and realises that love is unattainable to an old woman and she should live a stoic life (Lessing, *LA* 163). The dream is the symbol of her realisation of the lost youth, lost beauty, and lost vitality and she feels like she has entered into a whirlpool. Sarah's feelings are described as follows, "She could not remember ever feeling the rage of want that possessed her now. Surely never in her times of being in love has she felt this absolute, this peremptory need, an emptiness that hollowed her out her body, as if life itself was being withheld from her" (164). Maureen Corrigan writes, "*Love, Again* is

Lessing's first novel in eight years, and . . . it is, by turns, an exhilarating and disquieting meditation on old age and romantic love." (Mauro 290)

Sarah feels split in herself, that of a young Sarah who thinks that adult Sarah has been a fool to be content with very little love; or of "the ordinary and quotidian Sarah" who is content and does not want to be corrupted by this "daydreaming girl"; or of a woman "sodden with grief" who keeps on suffering pains in love (Lessing, *LA* 225). She tries to question why does Nature allow a woman to forget the pain of childbirth and make her remember other pains, but finding no answer to the question she realises that, as a young and sexually desirable woman, she has been very callous and wrong in taking it for granted that any man will fall in love with her throughout her life.

Sarah is subjected to "a quick hard calculating look" from "a young god" Bill and to "a masculine judgment" from Andrew (Lessing, *LA* 90, 86, 101). Bill, described as a young man with "reckless sexuality", makes certain intimate, sexual, and brutal movements towards Molly and uses his "sexually haughty look" and postures to make Sarah uncomfortable (202, 139). Despite her attempts to control her desires, Sarah feels "hot knives" slicing her back, or poisoned, or wrapped in a garment of fire whenever she sees him with other women (110). This creates rivalry among Sally, Molly, and Sarah. There are incidents where Molly and other women try to resist Bill's temptations, but they allow themselves to live in an illusion that they are 'being' loved by men. It is remarked about Bill, "Self-doubt, weakness, discouragements could be silenced because he could make people fall in love with him" (92). He carries an arrogant attitude and does not accept his defeat easily and is quite stubborn to achieve unattainable things to prove his superiority.

Joyce's presence is a boon for Sarah who finds relief in her, now, which used to be a burden earlier. Sarah tries to forget all her torments, tensions, and pangs of love in the guise of paying attention to Joyce. In contrast to Bill's love which is tormenting and shameful, Sarah finds Henry's love to be real, serious, mature, and an antidote to all her sufferings. Sarah feels that love is madness and is afraid of drawing raucous laughter from people, but she also feels drawn towards love.

The dilemma continues in Sarah as she says, "*If someone were to reach out a hand to me and I stretched out my hand to him, I know my hand would go into a cloud or mist*" and tries to look for "*warm fingers*" or kisses from a man (Lessing, *LA* 77). She tries to ignore her "little inflammations" for Henry or Bill as she is reminded of "the hard law that says you must suffer what you despise" and remembers the warning, "Beware of condemning other people, or watch out for yourself" (41, 9, 2). She is made to believe that old age has its own compensations like being free from the anguish and pains of lying awake at night due to love but this is not so in her case. Shiela Ruth writes, "By the time we are old enough, wise enough, and angry enough to discard the visions [fantasies and desires], the seed planted in infancy and constantly tended has so taken root, become so integral a part of us, that to reject it has almost the force of rejecting ourselves." (Ruth, *The* 125)

Sarah's sexual pride is hurt when Bill, her lover, expects only physical embraces from her or when she is expected to live in "a desert of deprivation" as she is not considered to be "sexually viable" for men (Lessing, *LA* 141, 109). She is made to feel like a senior 'old' female chimp that is sexually attractive to other chimps but finds no love. She is angry when Bill and Andrew admit that they see her as their mother and not

as beloved. She feels old age striking her “sharp and cold” and making her “a husk without colour, above all without lusture, the shine” and “a small damp body filled with [insatiable] craving” (140-141, 172). She associates herself with ugly, deformed, crippled people or people with skin disorders just because she is old.

An old woman thinks that she is playing an aggressive and dominant role when she takes young lovers without realising that it is she who is ‘taken’. She relies on various subterfuges to attract lovers like pretending to offer herself by using charm, and gratitude, but she also expects from the lover not to be emotionally attached to her. Beauvoir feels that this happens only in the case where money is involved and the male lover is hired to gratify sexual needs which happens in the case of Kate and Jeffrey. She feels that the woman is determined to live her life and tries to seek young lovers, while a young man, who turns to older women for love, seeks a guide, a tutor, and a mother in them and this is merely a phase for him. An old woman chooses her lover carefully and does not give him any advantage over her husband.

When Kate and Jeffrey visit places, this “time-honoured” and younger man-older woman pair surprises everyone and is under the scrutiny as they are seen as desperate couple where, people feel that only “passionate anguish” is involved in this “non-loving” and “sterile” relationship (Lessing, *SBD* 73-74). But Sarah, in *Love, Again*, feels torn off from happiness of her life by Bill, who is like a leech sucking up her blood and vitality. Beauvoir feels that an old woman’s wisdom always remains negative and sterile as it is always full of “contestation, accusation, refusal” (Beauvoir 652). The dilemma, whether Sarah is angry at herself for desiring to spend a night with Bill or at the conventions which stop her falling in love, continues in her.

Sarah's contact with Bill revives her old memories of how she never thought about love outside marriage even after her husband's death and she keeps herself busy in raising her children and now she is not permitted to fall in love with a younger man. The long suppressed erotic self and romantic fantasies of Sarah surface again with the presence of Bill. She raises certain questions:

Is it that we all have to suffer the fate of falling in love, when old, with someone young and beautiful, and if so, why? What was it all about? One falls in love with one's own young self-yes, that was likely: narcissists, all of us, mirror people-but certainly it can have nothing to do with any biological function or need. Then what need? What renewal, what exercise in remembering, is Nature demanding of us? (Lessing, *LA* 107)

Men, like Stephen, laugh at the idea of Andrew falling in love with an old woman because they cannot accept an older woman-younger man pair. Similarly, Stephen disapproves of Sarah falling in love with a younger man and warns her not to get trapped by the feeling that any man will fall for her irrespective of her age, though Bill and Henry fall in love with her, as he finds it a disgraceful and an immoral act. He thinks it to be his duty not to let any woman go astray from her path just because he is unable to accept his step-father who is fifteen years younger to his mother.

An old woman is reminiscent of her past which could have been different from what she lived and she is often "jolted into saving her wasted existence", or tries to seek solace in God because she feels deprived of human love and her life as wasted (Beauvoir 635). Old women in Zimilia are not treated well and are handed over the responsibility of

their grandchildren and other orphans, while, it is assumed, “Old, that is, by third world standards: in luckier countries these fifty-years-old women would be dieting and finding lovers” (Lessing, *SD* 453). The truth is quite different and these old women are confined to their families.

Women are likely to fall into the trap of losing their critical power, misguided by anyone, and becoming an appropriate prey to “religious sects, spirits, prophets, faith healers and any charlatan” (Beauvoir 638). During her visit in Konya, Kate finds that old women devote their time to God in church and are expected to forgo all their worldly pleasures and embrace the god for attaining salvation. These nuns are also guided to put up a smile on their faces for the guests while serving them and to believe that they are serving God. Kate also observes that women, in a village, look older than their actual age due to poverty and continuous forced pregnancies. These women are described as worn-out like animals forced into hard labour carrying heavy loads.

For an old or widowed man, the life is more difficult as he loses his public importance and becomes useless, but it is only through his wife that his presence is felt at home. Wilhelm, an old widowed man, wants to shift in Julia’s house with all his belongings, but, gradually, he starts laying claim over her. Once his force fails he even resorts to using his emotional charms saying, “I have always loved you more than you have loved me” and asks her to prove her love (Lessing, *SD* 224). Even after depending on Julia after his accident, he comments that beautiful women should never be blamed and reproached for tormenting men as they have the permission of the Gods in it. These people are like “shadows [,] a bare branch lays on the earth” as both of them want to spend their last years together (248). Julia faces opposition from Johnny regarding her

decision to let Wilhelm stay with her. He does not want her to spend money on Wilhelm, but Julia tells him clearly not to interfere in her life.

Woman loves her man in his strength, but is unable to find a reciprocal dependence from him. Frances is seen to be dependent on Rupert emotionally and is made to feel that her life without him would have been dull, with no love and intimacy. An old Johnny remains undeterred by the circumstances and does not want to acclaim the role of Frances in his life as he believes that she is “a lousy housekeeper” while Frances allows Johnny to stay in the basement of the house because he is ageing, who says, “It’s my house anyway, so don’t make a favour out of it.” (Lessing, *SD* 477)

Beauvoir offers a critique of patriarchal system where all feminine functions make woman slave to her husband and it is believed that when an old woman loses the capability to produce children, she escapes this slavery, but in case of Frances or Julia, this is not possible as they have to support many other children who seek refuge in their house. The old age is “the ‘dangerous age’” for many women who are unable to come to terms with it and as a result it creates some disorder not in terms of bodily changes, but due to their anxious fear of ageing, while for others, who have not “essentially staked everything on their femininity”, take it as a positive thing and find a huge relief from the servitude of their menstrual cycle. (Beauvoir 633)

“In patriarchy, for women, “anatomy is destiny,” and our physical capacities determine for us two separate and often conflicting roles: that of procreator-mother and that of sexual partner” (Ruth, *The* 131). But menopause “brutally cuts feminine life into two” as it creates an illusion of a new life for an old woman and instead of fighting

against her despair she gets intoxicated with this problem which creates conflicts between her husband, her friends, and relatives. (Beauvoir 639). While a woman starts ageing in her mid-thirties, man enjoys his youth till late. Richard Portmain looks younger than his age and loves to enjoy his life by going on holidays and has no time for his family. He dislikes Anna and wants his ex-wife, Molly, not to invite her when he is at home as he wants Molly to be dependent on him. He is a patriarch and asserts his “masculine point” like Charlie Slatter of *The Grass is Singing* who thinks that women are born to serve them. (Lessing, *GN* 34)

An old woman is made to realise that she is useless and idle. The old woman staying at Joan Robbin’s house is described as “a heap of sticks inside a jumble of cardigan and skirt” and feels as if nobody cares for her (Lessing, *GT* 116). This woman is introduced as Mrs. Jackson, in terms of her husband and rest is unknown to the readers. Joan is taking care of this lady well despite being her landlady. In order to avoid the crisis of her existence and to while away her time, an old woman makes herself busy with handiworks like embroidery and knitting, listen to music, read books, learns musical instruments, starts attending events and social parties, gossips and comments about others or might give advice to her friends. But all these activities are worthless as these are performed without any objective as their main motive is to keep themselves busy.

An old woman is taught to resign or devote herself to a man till her death while she is made to feel that nobody needs her. Mary accepts her destiny with tired stoicism which is the beginning of “an inner disintegration in her” as she feels the numbness creeping through her body (Lessing, *GS* 102). She gives up her hopes and waits for her death and lets everything slide away and she tries to come to terms with her ageing by

accepting her rough flesh and rough hands. She is passively waiting for her death to strike her in the form of Moses. It is clearly described in words, “She entered the house, and faced the long vigil of her death” as she realises, “It would soon be over soon; soon, in a few hours it would be over” (201,202). She feels defenceless and finds nothing to pin her hopes on to as Lessing writes, “There was nothing. Nil. Emptiness.” (132)

Mary is in a dire need for a moral support, but feels distanced from Dick. She is disliked both by Dick and Charlie when she uses flirtatious tone with Charlie or flirtatious coyness and appealing tone with the native who, rather, uses the tone of “surly indifference, but with a note of self-satisfaction” (Lessing, *GS* 177). Charlie thinks that it is immoral for an old married woman to behave against the dictate of the law of White South Africa and advises Dick to remove the servant immediately foreboding the danger to their prestige. The tone of conversation between them is either of brutality or of hatred.

Beauvoir compares the condition of an old woman with that of the adolescent boy where both feel distressed when their lives do not open for them, but as soon as the boy finds an opportunity, he readily accepts responsibilities and starts working for certain goals, while an old woman feels that it is too late for her to start any venture as she lacks confidence and hope in future. She relies on her daily routine work or on god and renounces all her familial responsibilities. Mary Ford’s mother, an old woman, seems to be a burden on her daughter as she feels neglected by other people. Since she is of no use to the society, she is made to feel that she is unwanted, but it is her daughter who takes care of her inspite of being busy with her work. When Roy’s son sits on her lap and finds comfort in her, she feels she is important to someone. Beauvoir writes:

Every period of woman's life is fixed and monotonous: but the passages from one stage to another are dangerously abrupt; they reveal themselves in far more decisive crises than those of the male: puberty, sexual initiation, menopause. . . ,the woman is brusquely stripped of her femininity; still young, she loses sexual attraction and fertility, from which, in society's and her own eyes, she derives the justification of her existence and her chances of happiness: bereft of all future, she has approximately half of her adult life still to live. (Beauvoir 633)

Alice thinks why a woman allows herself to age, especially, in the case of Dorothy and her friend, Zoe Devlin, without noticing it or fighting against it. She forgets that this is part of natural process and one can only delay it, but cannot stop ageing completely. These women seem unperturbed by their ageing as they have accepted the natural phenomena, but women like Alice force other women to become conscious and anxious about their ageing.

Even Kate does not observe her ageing apart from appearance of grey hair which does not dampen her youthful spirit. She, still, believes that she has the charm to attract young men, contrary to the notion that old women are minor people and should go into hibernation. But societal inspection and reactions make her face the reality that a pleasant-looking woman is on the verge of middle age who is trying not to enter the next stage of being an old woman and she repents her lost youth and carefree childhood. When ageing comes to her notice, she, desperately, tries to tie her hair too tight to look young or keeps her weight down and remarks, "*Ah me, time flies! . . . Before you know it, life had gone past . . . Ripeness is all*" or "*I'm afraid I am not as young as I once was*" (Lessing,

SBD 9, 10). There is a silent protest in Kate, but she does not have the courage to oppose it openly. The idea of ageing has struck many protagonists of Lessing's novels for whom it is like ice which has settled very slowly down the valley that it goes unnoticed until the whole valley is completely covered with snow.

Young woman, who is made to think that her sex appeal is the most important thing, finds it mysterious when it disappears as she ages. Sarah realises that her work has kept her very busy to notice her transition from a young woman to an old one. But when she observes her naked body in the mirror, she finds out that her breasts, which were earlier considered as a beauty asset, are now seen in terms of nourishment of her children and grandchildren. She is deeply involved in the codes of beauty and censors out those things from her body which do not look beautiful anymore. She is disturbed by the irrevocable condition of her beauty, but reminds herself that this is the fact and she should accept this truth that she has aged.

Molly busies herself with Tommy's care due to which she is also unable to notice the signs of ageing. Later, she notices that she has developed streak of grey hair, hollow eyes, and has become very thin while bones are visible in her body. Molly is advised to dye her hair, but she refuses to do so. She remarks, "I expect I'll sensible again when I've got used to it all . . . I was thinking yesterday about that-the words, getting used to it, I mean. That's what life is, getting used to things that are really intolerable . . ." (*Lessing, GN* 335). Anna is also busy with Janet and Michael's care and observes, much later, that her body has become "a thin, meager, spiky sort of vegetable, like an unsunned plant" and does not know how to react to it (533). On the one hand, she feels pleasure that she

does not care about it, while on the other hand, she finds it disgusting due to which she also neglects the deteriorating condition of her flat.

Sylvia loses her angel like quality with the appearance of dull dry hair, wrinkles on her face, and pale face as she remain busy due to her work. Andrew develops a dislike for this dark woman wearing jeans and a loose top with her hair tied down because he has seen Sylvia in a better condition too. Sylvia faces accusation from him for lowering her status for these poor and black people and for living among them. He never offers any help from his side or from his organisation apart from sending few books which are not even required. His race prejudice comes forth when he shows his disgust for Rebecca, but does not admit it.

Franklin admits to Colin that he was in love with Sylvia who was “a new yellow chick, as sweet as the Virgin and the female saints on the Holy Pictures at the mission” and not the girl who is pale, weak, thin, and bonny (Lessing, *SD* 232). This clearly shows that a woman is loved for her beauty and is rejected once she loses her charm. He boasts of marrying a shy woman who does not speak a single word in front of his friends as he always wants women to be submissive to him. Ruth remarks that the idea of beauty and attractiveness is a social construct. She remarks:

In Patriarchy, men construct the ideal in their own interests, and women, whose lives have no purpose outside of being chosen, or whose identities and fortunes have been made subject to their appeal to men, have little choice but to struggle with the requirements of “beauty”, ever if the ideal

is impossible or destructive, like the current obsession with a starved-looking body profile. (Ruth, Feminist 181)

Beauvoir observes how different types of women deal with the idea of ageing and try to delay it. For example, a maternal woman would seek to create life once again, that is, to give birth to a child, a sensual woman would conquer a new lover and a coquette would be more passionate in pleasing men, while some women would dress like young women or act childishly, or adorn themselves with perfumes, jewellery to exaggerate their femininity. But Beauvoir calls this agitation as “eccentric, incoherent and useless” because it creates an illusion around an old woman and only provides symbolic compensation for past errors and failures (Beauvoir 636). Just as Mrs. Patricia Brent, a fifty year old woman, an editress of a fashion magazine, looks it as her defeat to work in “the cultural band-wagon” where the atmosphere is “coy, little-womanish, snobbish” and every woman has acquired the same tone despite being different (Lessing, *GN* 169,170). This clearly shows how women are made monotonous at a larger level.

Patricia is shifted to the section *Women at Home* where she is comfortable in dealing with problems of working-class women. As a married woman, she is abandoned by her husband for a younger woman and she is, now, living with her grown-up daughter all alone facing the society boldly. She carries an attitude of “gallant, good-natured, wisecracking cynicism” with men and is devoted to work (Lessing, *GN* 190). But when it comes to an offer by a man “the tough, efficient, professional” Patricia becomes soft and she gives up her defenses and agrees to go out with Dr. West acting like a demure woman (397). She finds in Ella the symbol of her own youth, but Ella is too absorbed in her own happiness.

The old woman starts escaping burdensome chores, avoids her husband's embraces, and carves out her own 'new life' unlike Sarah's mother, Kate Millgreen, a ninety years old lady, who is still active and does her work independently. This shows that 'old age' cannot dampen the spirits of an old woman if she is determined to fight it and is sure enough that she does not require support from anyone. But Kate Millgreen is afraid that her children will decide her fate and will force her to move out of her village. Every old woman is made to feel outdated and is expected to disdain fashion, diets and beauty treatments. She feels free when she is relieved of her familial duties without realising that she is now idle and has nothing to do with this kind of freedom.

Despite making several attempts to look young Kate, finally, decides what she wants to be and gives up the idea of pleasing everyone and decides to return to her house in an unkempt manner with rough and grey hair just because she does not want to give up under the compulsion of her family. This attempt towards self-preservation becomes important for her which she realises only when she goes for a trip and tries to remove the discomfort which she feels being Mrs. Kate Brown and a mother of four children. Kate is determined to be a changed woman when she goes back to the house, but she is again condemned to play traditional role of a subordinated woman.

Beauvoir writes that the old woman is "pure offering, gift" for others because at this age she realises that she is dependent on others (Beauvoir 679). She is discouraged from taking difficult tasks. It is believed that an old woman is at the mercy of men, if men take interest in her, and she is forced to accept her subservient position. On the one hand, Kate is shown to defy the statement, "*I am available, come and sniff and taste*", and on the other hand, she is disturbed when she does not get the desired attention (Lessing, *SBD*

37). She wants “to light a flame, to set certain currents running” and to act like a young girl to attract men thinking, “Ah, how infinitely desirable you all are; if I wished I could be available, but it is upto you, and really it is much more exciting to be like this, floating in the air of general appreciation and approval; it would be awful bore to confine myself to one” (38). She is gearing up to defy the teachings of her husband and to indulge in affairs as she feels it to be a daring task which no married woman will do.

According to Beauvoir, a girl is seen as the double of the woman who is believed to assassinate the one from which it emanates so she is a threat when she becomes a woman. But when a mother becomes extremely possessive about her daughter’s sexuality, she condemns her daughter to eternal childhood and does not allow her daughter to grow up. While some mothers and even grandmothers try to relive their youth through their daughters and granddaughters. They imagine themselves as young women who can give birth again which is not possible for them after their menopause and they welcome the child even if the mother of the child feels perturbed with it.

Julia strikes a rapport with Sylvia and helps her to recover from her fear and helps her to come out of her shell of being weak and timid. Julia nurses her day and night and even pays for Sylvia’s education to fulfill her own dream by making her a doctor. Later, Julia gets betrayed by Sylvia once she becomes an individual who can take independent decisions and Julia feels that she has lost her “little lamb” to sick lunatics who present themselves as fortunetellers (Lessing, *SD* 137). This snaps off the bond between them and they feel like strangers, especially, when Julia shows no interest in Sylvia’s discoveries. Julia feels an invalid when the girl, who has been afraid to go out alone, has become capable of going out with her friends forgetting the pains which Julia has taken

for her. Julia feels more distanced once Sylvia embraces Roman Catholicism and involves herself deep in her studies giving no time to Julia. This leaves her heartbroken and she gives up her fight against the world and finds solace in her reclusion.

Sometimes, when a woman does not have any child of her own, she tries to find it in her young lovers or tries to adopt a child. But it is only in rare cases that a woman can find justification of her declining years in posterity because once these young people grow up they are likely to leave the woman all alone who will be “facing the desert of the future, prey to solitude, regret and ennui” (Beauvoir 648). Julia has been living in an illusion that she will be able to hold Sylvia for long, but this dream shatters when Sylvia leaves her for her patients.

Beauvoir writes that an old woman is considered as a parasite and is expected to show “stoic defiance” or “skeptical irony”, but she never succeed in achieving complete freedom (Beauvoir 652). Whenever a woman becomes single it is presumed that she is free to indulge herself in affairs. For example, Frances is targeted by Harold Holman, an old friend of Johnny. He shows interest in her and Frances easily yields to his charms because she has already presumed that men will not show interest in an old lady. She has been forced to “shut a door on her amorous self” for years out of the fear of offending her sons, but, now, she feels as if someone is knocking at her door giving her a new lease of life just as Julia feels when she is with Wilhelm. (Lessing, *SD* 112)

An old woman is always confined in patriarchal convention even after her death just as is observed in *The Grass is Singing*. The dead body of ‘Mrs. Turner’, Mary, is not put in the same car with Moses, a black native, out of the fear of defiling the dignity of a

white woman though dead. The standards made by patriarchal society are tough and a woman is forced to obey all the laws and if ever she tries to defy it, she is punished just as Mary is killed by Moses. He has his revenge with a woman who betrays him, but never dares to raise his hand on Tony Martson, who is responsible for it.

It is observed, in the selected novels of Doris Lessing, that mothers have raised their children independently while men are shown to be busy with their work, politics, or business meetings. These men and few leaders have neglected their family because they give preference to political and social matters over their family. Moreover, the struggle which these leaders talk about is an illusionary one where real and needy people never get any benefits. In this Chapter, it is shown how a mother and an old woman are treated by the society and subdued through various issues raised by Simone de Beauvoir which have been observed in various instances of the select novels of Doris Lessing. The findings and observations along with some important suggestions from Beauvoir will be concluded in the final chapter.

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