

Patriarchy, Monstrosity, and Motherhood in Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child*

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Abstract

Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* portrays misfortune in the happy married life of David and Harriet after the birth of their fifth child Ben. Along with the storyline Lessing depicts the role played by David and Harriet after Ben is born with the features of monstrosity. *The Fifth Child* presents the gruesome issue of abnormality and the set principles of society. The novel symbolizes David as the role player of patriarchy and Harriet as an epitome of Motherhood. Lessing's *The Fifth Child* is a clear picture of how both patriarchy and motherhood finally lead to the family's downfall and how a happy and prosperous family finally turns out to be in devastation and isolation.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Monstrosity, Motherhood, Society, Devastation, Isolation

1.Introduction

Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* draws attention to the concept of patriarchy and motherhood in the happy married life of David and Harriet which starts shedding apart after the birth of their fifth child Ben who is not normal as other four children but rather has the features of monstrosity and tears the family apart. Lessing "is the most intensely committed to active persuasion to reform society" (Gindin 2003, 9) and this novel focuses on the important aspects of family life. Lessing dramatizes the plight of the marginalized child Ben, the power of patriarchy, and the miserable condition of motherhood.

The novel *The Fifth Child* starts with the meeting of old-fashioned David Lovatt and Harriet at the office Christmas party, fell in love with each other, find their way of thinking quite similar, and decides to start their life together. The novel depicts the period of 1980s' London suburb during the reign of Margaret Thatcher, an era which was considered as "a very conservative period during which the family and its values were highly elevated." (Watkins 2010, 153) The couple had an idea of the ideal happy family after marriage with lots of children as many as ten. They had a dream of a large mansion and finally finds a perfect three-story Victorian House with a fertile garden in a London suburb, a perfect place for their

children. The novel projects the aura of the middle-class family of that period, inherited by the Victorian spirit and family values. Harriet, the protagonist intends to be a full-time mother and a perfect housewife which can be seen throughout the novel. For her, family is more important than her career, and sacrifices everything to be an ideal wife and mother "She had done well enough at school and went to an arts college where she became a graphic designer, which seemed an agreeable way of spending her time until she married" (*The Fifth Child*, 10). At the same time David, shares the typical Victorian patriarchal husband's ideology "His wife must be like him in this: that she knew where happiness lay and how to keep it. He was thirty when he met Harriet, and he had been working in the dogged disciplined manner of an ambitious man: but what he was working for was a home" (*The Fifth Child*, 11).

David and Harriet's life moved on smoothly till Luke, Helen, James, and Paul fulfilled the expectations of their parents for fulfilling the desire of having a large family. Harriet's mother Dorothy devoted herself for the sake of her daughter's comfort during her pregnancies and child nurturing. On the other hand, David's father James was a source of financial supporter for them. Christmas and Easter were celebrated with great prompts. After the firstborn Luke, "That Easter was the first of

the family parties. Rooms had been adequate if sketchily furnished, and they were filled with Harriet's two sisters, Sarah and Angela, and their husbands and their children; with Dorothy, in her element; and briefly by Molly and Frederick" (*The Fifth Child*, 19). When Helen was born "the house was full to the attic, nearly all family" (*The Fifth Child*, 21). Jane brought "Happiness. A happy family. The Lovatts were the happy family. It was what they have chosen and what they deserved" (*The Fifth Child*, 22). Birth of Paul made Harriet look like, "Her lips were a healthy, attractive young woman, full of life. But tired" (*The Fifth Child*, 22). James, David's father has always been a helpful hand to David's family providing them with cheques.

Dorothy is always busy nurturing and rearing her grandchildren. Her place is either at Harriet's place or Sarah's. Harriet's fifth pregnancy proved to be a big chaos. Harriet tries three different nannies but all in vain. "They had put off telling Dorothy. She was not there, anyway, because Sarah had said it was unfair that Harriet got all the help. Harriet simply could not manage" (*The Fifth Child*, 22). It is here at this juncture the tragedy starts in Lovatts' family. Harriet's fifth pregnancy was not normal like the first four. She kept on weeping. Like every pregnancy where David comforted her, was always beside her, this time "she felt rejected by him" (*The Fifth Child*, 35). Throughout her fifth pregnancy, everything was very painful and also abnormal. During her fifth month when she visited Dr. Bret she revealed that "the energy of the fetus, which seemed to be trying to tear its way out of her stomach[...] It's large for five months but not abnormally so" (*The Fifth Child*, 37). To suppress her pain Dr. Bret suggested her some sedatives. But as Harriet could not bear it she took extra sedatives without the consultation of her doctor. She even fantasizes about cutting her stomach and lifting out the child. This created a feeling of bitterness and anger towards the fetus. Finally with lots of agonies, and stressful pregnancy the fifth child, Ben was born premature in the eight-month "a real little wrestler" (*The Fifth Child*, 46). Ben's birth proved to be a misfortune for Lovatts' family. When Ben was born:

"She raised herself with difficulty because the lower half of her body was too sore to move. The baby was put into her arms. Eleven pounds of him. The others had not been more than seven pounds. He was muscular, yellowish, long. It seemed as if he were trying to stand up, pushing his feet into her side [...] He was not a pretty baby. He did not look like a baby at all. He had a heavy-shouldered hunched look as if he were crouching there as he lay. His forehead sloped from his eyebrows to his crown. His hair grew in an unusual pattern from the double crown were started a wedge or triangle that came low on the forehead, the hair lying forward in a thick yellowish stubble, while the side and back hair grew downwards. His hands were thick and heavy, with pads of muscle in the palms. (*The Fifth Child*, 46).

Ben was disliked by both his parents because of his physicality. For David "He's a funny little chap" (*The Fifth Child*, 46) and for Harriet "He's like a troll, or a goblin or something" (*The Fifth Child*, 46). Ben began to be a troubled child, hurting everyone. Ben's siblings started disliking him. He becomes an unwanted child in the family. Finally, after the murder of two pets and threats for their elder kids it was decided to send Ben to an institution. Harriet could not take the injustice done to Ben and gets him back at home. His return, rather than making a complete family shattered the family, and Harriet was left alone with Ben and Paul at home where Paul was completely neglected. Ben's schooling, his meeting with new friends at high school, his violent behavior took Ben into the other world. At the end of the novel, Ben leaves the house leaving Harriet without any achievement of her sacrifices.

The researcher will focus on the role played by David as a patriarch of the family and the love of mother, fighting against all the odds to protect her child and giving him a normal life. The researcher will also highlight the role played by society in the context of monstrosity; how the child is treated and not accepted in society. It further illustrates British society in the eighties.

2. The Patriarchal Construction

Patriarchy and masculinity traits exist in every society and every house. The traditional masculine values and attitudes contribute to the patriarchal system in society. *The Fifth Child*

Lessing depicts different aspects of patriarchy and its consequences in the life of Lovatts' family. The word 'patriarchy' literally means the rule of a father or a family which is male-dominated. Earlier it was related to the eldest male having a hold on females, children, and all youngers in the society but today it is used more generally "to refer to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterize a system whereby women are kept subordinate in several ways" (Bhasin 2006, 3). The theorist of 'Patriarchy' views males parallel to Marxist as to the concept of the ruling class. Males are seen as the controlling agent over the female to suit their ideology and have controlling power. Dictionary.Com defines patriarchy as "a social system in which power is held by men, through cultural norms and customs that favor men and withhold opportunity from women. According to IGI Global "Patriarchy is considered a system within which men dominate women and maintain the power and control of resources, while women have minimal power and are dependent on men". AldaFacio (2013) opines that –

Patriarchy is a form of mental, social, spiritual, economic, and political organization/structuring of society produced by the gradual institutionalization of sex-based political relations created, maintained, and reinforced by different institutions linked closely together to achieve consensus on the lesser value of women and their roles. These institutions interconnect not only with each other to strengthen the structures of domination of men over women, but also with other systems of exclusion, oppression, and/or domination based on real or perceived differences between humans, creating States that respond only to the needs and interests of a few powerful men.

The researcher will highlight the psycho-social relations between male and female characters in the backdrop of patriarchy and how it becomes the cause of destruction in the ecstatic life of Lovatts.

Contemplating the English society of the sixties and the role males played in the novel one can understand the psychological qualities of the characters. All the male characters are bread-earners and occupy a respectable position

in society as per their profession. James Lovatt was a boat-builder, David was an architect, Frederick Burke was an academician and historian, and William has been shown into the profession of building trade. All the males hold a supreme power and have a complete hold on their women counterparts. Patriarchy (can be) defined as "social arrangements that privilege males where men as a group dominate women as a group, both structurally and ideologically." (Hunnicut 2009, 78). The construction of gender roles played by males results in selfhood. "This selfhood affects all spheres of the society and results in male supremacy. Therefore, the male-female dynamic of the household reflects the core-periphery relationships in the so-called public sphere. This selfhood leads to relational selves and this contributes to fluid boundaries between the public and the private spheres" (Joseph 1997). Holding a supremacy power the patriarch characters play a leading role in accepting the responsibility and fulfilling it. James has always been a financial supporter to David and Harriet, Frederick also gives his words for financial help to send Ben to the institution. Both James as a father and Frederick as a step-father accomplish the responsibility of paternity and do their best to restore the family happiness.

David's longing and dream for the ideal family is the result of his miserable and lonely childhood. His harsh childhood memories remained with him as his parents were divorced and throughout his childhood, he felt hatred, neglect, and discontent in his life. He grew up torn between his parents both remarried. On the other hand, Harriet's parents were happily married. This made her perceive the ideology of a happy married as the wife devoted herself completely for the sake of her husband and her kids. These different experiences both worst and best by David and Harriet respectively made them decide their conditions of love and marriage and to have many children. For them, marriage was pious because divorce leads to separation not only of husband and wife but results in a tattered family. Divorce in the mid to late twentieth was looked at in a derogatory and negative way. Marwick (2003) writes "divorce had been practically out of the question for the vast majority, partly because of social pressures,

more because of expense" (246). In the case of David, it was not affordable. David did not have good recourses of income, and in case of divorce, he has to rely on his father James which would have been an ultimate humiliation.

David grew up in two different homes of his divorced parents. His bedroom at his mother's house in Oxford was the only place where he could relish and found his world. This made him have a firm belief in having a big house and it is important that "everyone should have a room" (*The Fifth Child*, 24) where they can feel safe, secure, and enjoy their life. Early in the novel David is shown to be a loving and caring father and husband.

When David went off to catch his train to London in the mornings, Harriet was sitting up in bed feeding the baby, and drinking the tea David had brought her. When he bent to kiss her goodbye and stroked Luke's head, it was with a fierce possessiveness that Harriet liked and understood, for it was not herself being possessed, or the baby, but happiness. Hers and his. (*The Fifth Child*, 19).

David wished to be an ideal father and husband by rearing, nurturing, and taking care of all in the best possible ways, emotionally as well as financially. When Harriet used to be busy with kids he prepares sandwiches for himself and before going to sleep he makes it confirm that everything is right. "He stood looking at the big bed where Harriet lay. Asleep? Baby Paul was lying asleep close to her, unwrapped. David cautiously leaned over, folded Paul into his cuddling blanket, took him to his room next door. He saw Harriet's eyes shine as she followed his movements" (*The Fifth Child*, 34). Telling bedtime stories to his children was also a part of his happy family. He also searched for trained nannies in London when Harriet was pregnant for the fifth time.

David was sensitive and part of Harriet's emotions and feelings both good and awful during her earlier four pregnancies. It was during Harriet's fifth pregnancy David's attitude started changing. He could not take the continuous complaints of Harriet's painful experience during her fifth pregnancy. She complains as if there is a monster growing in her womb. She kept on groaning and grumbling. He

didn't know how to act and comfort Harriet. David "stopped putting his hand on her stomach, in the old companionable way, for what he felt there was beyond what he could manage with" (*The Fifth Child*, 38). David was distraught after seeing Ben at his birth and sounded aghast. For him, he was something extraordinary. Harriet though seeing Ben as a troll or goblin still commented on him as a normal and healthy baby. David could not stand by and remain silent "it was this anger, this bitterness in her he could not handle" (*The Fifth Child*, 48). The relationship between David and Harriet started getting more and more strained as Ben grew up. Ben's siblings saw him very differently amongst them. They disliked his violent behavior. David too hardly touched Ben. Scarcely anyone loved Ben. Sarah, Harriet's sister feels scared to leave her daughter Amy alone with Ben. Harriet's entire attention was focused on Ben leaving all other members unattended and cared for. The peaceful and happy environment of Lovatts' family turned out to be tempestuous. Finally, for the sake of the betterment of the entire family David with the suggestion of other members decides to send Ben to the institution. This decision was not accepted by Harriet being a mother. Harriet's protest didn't find any place in David's life. David firmly said, "It's either him or us," [...] "He's probably just dropped in from Mars. He's going back to report on what he's found down here" (*The Fifth Child*, 69). David being a dominant person in nature remains stuck to his decision in sending Ben to an institution. Before his decision in marrying Harriet, he found the quality he needed in his wife. "His wife must be like him in this: that she knew where happiness lay and how to keep it" (*The Fifth Child*, 11).

The turning point in David's role as a father and husband takes place when Harriet brings Ben back home from the institution. For David, it was a betrayal from the wife's role, a traditional wife whose responsibility is to follow her husband at any cost. According to Kandiyoti in classic patriarchy, the senior man has authority over everyone else in the family including younger men and women are subject to distinct forms of control and domination" (1998, 22). David started distancing from Harriet. "David had moved his things to another

room" (*The Fifth Child*, 81). He started working for more hours not to earn more money but to remain away from home. David's indifference towards Ben can be justified in the light of Lupton and Barclay's theory of fatherhood. After conducting interviews with fathers their findings concludes "that the one thing fathers find most important and rewarding is the fact that their child recognizes their face and voice and starts to smile when he or she sees or hears them (1997, 137). In the relationship of David and Ben, Ben does not recognize David, but does not respond to him with love rather acts differently and completely avoids his existence. Thus according to Lupton and Barclay, this can be the reason why David could not build a bond with his son Ben. He doesn't hesitate to say "Well, he certainly isn't mine" (*The Fifth Child*, 69). On the other hand, he has a great attachment to his other children. He showers all his love and fulfills the responsibility for them. Finally, he turns out to be the person he never wanted to be.

3. Monstrosity and Social Crime

Collins English Dictionary defines monstrosity as an outrageous or ugly person or the state or quality of being monstrous. Dictionary.Com defines it as frightful or hideous, especially in appearance or extremely ugly. It also defines it as deviating grotesquely from the natural or normal form of a type having the nature or appearance of a fabulous monster. Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* centers on the fifth child, Ben parented by David and Harriet who is looked at as a monster by his parents, siblings, relatives, and society. The birth of Ben turns the happy life of Lovatts into a nightmare. The family sees Ben as a creature from the other world, an alien or a goblin rather than a baby. Harriet has a feeling of dislike for Ben throughout her pregnancy and later felt uncomfortable when he was an infant troubling her during nursing and milking him.

Ben sucked so strongly that he emptied the first breast in less than a minute. Always, when a breast was nearly empty, he ground his gums together, and so she had to snatch him away before he could begin. It looked as if she were unkindly depriving him of the breast, and she heard David's breathing change. Ben roared with rage, fastened like a

leech to the other nipple, and sucked so hard she felt that her whole breast was disappearing down his throat. This time, she left him on the nipple until he ground his gums hard together and she cried out, pulling him away. (*The Fifth Child*, 48).

Ben was disliked by his father and the consequences resulted in David's distance not only with Ben but also with his wife Harriet. At first look, Ben's siblings were confused rather than happy to welcome their brother. "The three older children stared down at the newcomer who was so different from them all: of a different substance" (*The Fifth Child*, 47). Ben's presence was disliked to such an extent that people start moving away from his existence. Every human society has certain norms and social values regarding good and evil, right and wrong, normal and abnormal, able and disabled, and so on. When a person doesn't meet such criteria or standards he/she is seen in a disrespectful or humiliating manner. Every born person has a right to live with respect and dignity. Lessing in *The Fifth Child* focuses on this social issue of how such a person is marginalized in society. The researcher will focus on how the existence of Ben was not welcomed by his family, relatives, and society just because of his monstrous features which is very unjust for him.

Harriet and David were so scared of the birth of abnormal Ben that they thought of not having any more babies. They were so afraid that marital relations, lovemaking was at stake thinking about the deformed baby in near future. Their pace of normal harmonious life was disturbed because of Ben. More important to note is strange thoughts regarding Ben by his parents. How can parents differentiate between their children? Amy, Sarah's daughter is a sweet girl with Down Syndrome. Amy too is not normal like others but still is loved by all because she doesn't behave the way Ben does. Ben's aggressive nature, violence, screaming, battering, groaning made everyone worried. Dorothy, James, Molly, and David opined to send Ben to the institution. Harriet was against sending Ben to the institution "He's a little child," [...] "He's our child" (*The Fifth Child*, 69). David in a rage of anger replied "No, he's not," [...] "Well, he certainly isn't mine." This

conversation shows the difference between motherly and fatherly love. Though Harriet too disliked Ben for a mother attachment and love develop and last forever as it is affectionate from the womb itself. When Ben is taken to the institution, his siblings are overjoyed “Four pairs of suspicious, apprehensive eyes became suddenly full of relief. Hysterical relief. The children danced about, unable to help themselves, and then pretended it was a game they had thought up then and there” (*The Fifth Child*, 71).

Ben’s abrupt, violent, intolerable behavior is the result of his genetic makeup and not as a disobedient child. Society, including his family, is unable to understand this. Society doesn’t accept the person who is not like them hence Ben becomes the victim of social discrimination and is marginalized. Regarding the abnormality and disability Lenard J. Davis comments:

To understand the disabled body, one must return to the concept of the norm, the normal body. So much of writing about disability has focused on the disabled person as the object of study, just as the study of race has focused on the person of color [...] I do this because the ‘problem’ is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the ‘problem’ of the disabled person. (1975, 5)

In a way, Ben was punished for what he was. Harriet was shocked to see the condition Ben in the institution when she went to see him against the wish of her husband.

On the floor, on a green foam-rubber mattress, lay Ben. He was unconscious. He was naked, inside a strait-jacket. His pale yellow tongue protruded from his mouth. His flesh was dead white, greenish. Everything—walls, the floor, and Ben—was smeared with excrement. A pool of dark yellow urine oozed from the pallet, which was soaked (*The Fifth Child*, 76).

The meaning of disability is not the lack of ability but it is to show or perform certain abilities differently. David did not welcome Ben again in his house. “David did not try to reassure

him; as far as he was concerned, Ben was Harriet’s responsibility, and he was for the children - the real children” (*The Fifth Child*, 84). A mother has to face a curse in society if she gives birth to an abnormal child. Harriet went through the same as if she was responsible to give birth to a child, like Ben. His siblings with fear gathered the courage to interact with Ben. Helen said, “Hello, Ben.” Then Luke: “Hello, Ben.” Then Jane. Not Paul, [...] Ben at last said, “Hello.” His eyes were moving from face to face: friend or foe? He ate, watching them. When they went to sit and watch television, he did, too, copying them for safety, and looked at the screen because they did” (*The Fifth Child*, 84). Ben wanted to play with his siblings and act like them as if to be accepted by them and society. Ben has been described as not only different from his family and human norms but is indeed not even recognized with any recognizable animal. This makes his condition very worse. His appearance is not accepted-

“He had a heavy-shouldered hunched look, [...] His forehead sloped from his eyebrows to his crown. His hair grew in an unusual pattern from the double crown were started a wedge or triangle that came low on the forehead, the hair lying forward in a thick yellowish stubble, while the side and back hair grew downwards. His hands were thick and heavy, with pads of muscle in the palms” (*The Fifth Child*, 46).

For Harriet, nothing was normal right from the time of her fifth pregnancy with Ben. She felt discomfort, exhausted, unhappy, and restless at the time of her fifth pregnancy. She even felt disconnected and isolated. The abnormality of Ben was constructed in Harriet’s mind right from the womb. To a certain extent Harriet herself is responsible for the non-acceptance of Ben in society. Once Ben was back from the institution, Harriet was sure nothing is going to be normal with his arrival. She was nervous about the thought of who will take care of Ben. At this junction, she remembers John, who has helped her in “cut hedges, dug up a couple of ailing shrubs, sawed-off a dead branch, mowed the lawn” (*The Fifth Child*, 84) to take care of Ben. Here one can see Harriet could not think of a good nanny to take

care of Ben rather as per his physical appearance and behaviorshe thinks of an unemployed person. John “was a big, shaggy, amiable youth, good-natured, patient: he treated Ben in a rough-and-ready way as if Ben were indeed a puppy that needed training. “No, you just sit there now and wait till I’ve done” (*The Fifth Child*, 84). Ben’s relationship with John and his gang further widened the gap between him and his family. Ben’s widening gap from his beloved maddened him. In this regard, Lynn Sukenick comments: “Lessing takes her hero on a journey away from the customary responsibilities of his social role and into schizophrenia” (1973, 17). Lessing’s presentation of Ben’s character is the projection of England in the 1960s where having a retarded child was taken in a derogatory way in fact as a curse. The mother and the family were outcasted from society further mother was made to feel like a criminal for giving birth to such a baby. Similarly, Harriet in the novel is made to feel like a criminal. Harriet starts feeling a sense of guilt, and belief that she has committed a crime by bringing Ben to this world.

Ben’s presence makes Luke, Helen, and Jane move to their grandparents to get rid of him. Ben is seen hardly at home. First at school and then with John. At the age of six in school, some complaints show that Ben is not normal. Headmistress, Mrs. Graves tells Harriet “He doesn’t seem to fit in with the others. It’s hard to put one’s finger on it” (*The Fifth Child*, 92). Again “Ben had hurt someone” (*The Fifth Child*, 92). Further, “He doesn’t seem to be remorseful in any way. You might think he doesn’t know he did it. But at that age – he is six, after all – he should know what he is doing” (*The Fifth Child*, 93). Ben’s life with John and his gang go on smoothly and steadily. But a sudden announcement of John leaving Ben and going to school shattered Ben’s world. He pleads John to take him with him which was impossible. At the age of eleven, Ben was sent to another school where he makes four friends – Derek, Billy, Elvis, and Vic. They start visiting Ben’s house very often. Though Harriet and David didn’t like them for the sake of Ben they tolerate them. Looking at the mental status of Ben, Harriet thinks Ben to be a pity chap amid his friends but was shocked to know that Ben

was the leader of the group. As Ben grows up he and his school gang have a problem adjusting to the society and find it very difficult to carry on in the society following its norms. They start disappearing from the house. The irony is that whenever Ben’s gang is out there is a crime in the city. Ben’s situation can be seen as a psychological drift from society as he has been mistreated and shunned by society.

Finally, David and Harriet decide to sell their house and move to an unknown place without informing Ben. But Harriet discloses the new address to Ben which was reacted unnoticed by him. Getting disconnected from their dream house further makes them disconnected emotionally too with their children. Harriet’s concern as to what Ben will do in this so-called socialized and civilized society remains unanswered Harriet. She keeps wondering that Ben has left them in the search of people of his type where he can feel comfortable and loved, have a companion for himself, and have his world. Searching for his type reveals that he is not the same as others in society. The novel ends with Harriet sitting in front of the television waiting for news where “she would see Ben, standing rather apart from the crowd, staring at the camera with his goblin eyes, or searching the faces in the crowd for another of his kind” (*The Fifth Child*, 121).

4. A Tragic Motherhood

Motherhood is one of the most intimate and essential of human connections and therefore of concern to all, and female biological reproductive capacity and social assignment for childrearing and the maintenance of domestic life have been centrally connected with women’s subordinate status across many cultures and historic eras. (Chavkin 2010, 4)

Doris Lessing in her *The Fifth Child* raises the issue of motherhood in 1980s England. The novel pictures the marital life and motherhood of Harriet. Her dream was to be a homemaker and rear many children. When she meets conservative, and old-fashioned David and realizes him to be a perfect match for her they both get bonded in the relationship of marriage. They both dreamt to have many children. Everything moves on in a perfect and ideal way

unless Harriet finds herself pregnant for the fifth time with Ben. Mothers have a pleasurable feeling during their pregnancy but Harriet was uncomfortable during her fifth pregnancy. She starts fantasizing about and feeling a monstrous child, she grunted and groans in pain. It is here she starts to dislike the child before coming into this world. In this respect, Margrit Shildrick comments "Whatever the manifest outcome at birth, the pregnant female body itself is always a trope of immense power in that it speaks to an inherent capacity to problematize the boundaries of self and other" (2002, 31). With the birth of Ben, Harriet's world turned upside down. The researcher will focus on the different roles played by Harriet as a mother, guilt enforced on her, and her suffering leaving her devastated, and isolated amid a big family.

For Harriet motherhood was bliss. When asked her, "And how many kids are you planning", her reply would be "A lot" (*The Fifth Child*, 16). Harriet was extremely pleased, and cheerful during her first pregnancy. At the time of first delivery and after the birth

"The room was warm and wonderful. David wept. Dorothy wept. Harriet laughed and wept. The midwife and the doctor had a little air of festivity and triumph. They all drank champagne and poured some on little Luke's head. It was 1966. Luke was an easy baby. He slept most peaceably in the little room off the big bedroom and was contentedly breast-fed. Happiness!" (*The Fifth Child*, 19).

Breast-feeding is a sign of blissful motherhood and so for Harriet. Harriet enjoyed this pride till Luke, Jane, Helen, and Paul were born. Nursing, rearing and nurturing became a part of Harriet's life. Along with Harriet her mother Dorothy too played an active role in taking care and upbringing Harriet's children, her grandchildren. Harriet couldn't manage her all alone. After the fourth child, Paul Harriet's sister Sarah disliked only Harriet getting the help of Dorothy and so she goes to stay with Sarah. It was at this time unexpected Harriet gets pregnant for the fifth time. Managing all alone with the help of Dorothy was becoming difficult. Harriet's health was getting awful but David was least concerned about it. His concern was only to

get lots of children from the machine the so-called woman's womb and Harriet should not complain about it. "Harriet was weeping again, and he felt, knowing, of course, this was unfair, that she was breaking the rules of some contract between them: tears and misery had not ever been on their agenda!" (*The Fifth Child*, 35).

For Harriet her falling health negligence from her husband, and painful pregnancy made her dislike Ben right from the womb. At the early stage of pregnancy, "she had felt a tapping in her belly, demanding attention" (*The Fifth Child*, 35) made her "feel these demands from the new being, unlike anything she had known before" (*The Fifth Child*, 35). Harriet's physical and psychological fears about her baby, during and after her pregnancy, play a significant role in shaping her motherhood. Unable to bear the pain, she at midnight "suddenly sat up, or scrambled out of bed and went doubled up out of the room, fast, escaping from the pain" (*The Fifth Child*, 38). She starts feeling monstrous rather than a human fetus. She thinks "It was not possible that such a tiny creature could be showing such fearful strength" (*The Fifth Child*, 38). This gives the reader a sense of gothic feeling as to what Harriet is carrying in her womb. According to Nozomi UEMATSU (2014)

when the monstrosity of the child oozes through the boundary into the maternal body. In addition, the movement of evilness is not one-way from the monstrous baby to the maternal: monstrosity moves to-and-fro through the boundary, and it is this permeability that provokes terror for the readers. Through this leaky boundary, Harriet also becomes a monster [...] and Lessing makes the mother into "the other" in the eyes of her society.

To keep herself away from the trauma of pain and frightful thoughts "She would clean the kitchen, the living room, the stairs, wash windows, scrub cupboards, her whole body energetically denying the pain" (*The Fifth Child*, 39). This state shows the psychology of Harriet what she is going through and just want to get rid of pain and baby too. Her worsened state during the fifth pregnancy, the horror inside her body, the devilish thoughts made her trouble her

own herself and she started acting like a monster-

By breakfast time she might have already worked for three or four hours and looked haggard. She took David to the station, and the two older children to school, then parked the car somewhere and walked. She almost ran through streets she hardly saw, hour after hour, until she understood she was causing comment. Then she took to driving a short way out of the town, where she walked along the country lanes, fast, sometimes running. People in passing cars would turn, amazed, to see this hurrying driven woman, white-faced, hair flying, open-mouthed, panting, arms clenched across her front. If they stopped to offer help, she shook her head and ran on. (*The Fifth Child*, 39-40).

To get rid of the pain she starts taking sedatives with the suggestion of her doctor. Unable to bear the agony without the consultation of a doctor she starts taking an extra sedative. This extra sedative might have been the cause of disabled or monstrous Ben. Finally, Lovatts' happy family gets disturbed and devastated after the birth of Ben and the equality of child-rearing gets burdened on Harriet as a mother. When Ben was born Harriet was unable to hold him with motherly affection, embrace him there was no recognition when she took him in her arms. She could see the abnormality in Ben as doesn't hesitate to call him a troll or a goblin but still she cuddled him showering her motherhood. But this love could not last long. Ben failed to get love and affection from his parents as his elder siblings were blessed. David neither had any liking for Ben nor did he shower his fatherly love for him. David started distancing with Harriet as if she has committed some gruesome crime. Harriet is held responsible for destroying the happiness of the family by giving birth to a monster-like creature. Finally, she is forbidden from happiness as she failed to contribute happiness to her family, community, and overall nation too. She is blamed and made to feel guilty for giving birth to a monstrous child. The Free Dictionary

defines blame as "to consider responsible for a misdeed, failure, or undesirable outcome; to find a fault or to criticize; to place responsibility for (something)". Harriet is blamed for her failure to give birth to a normal child and she is solely responsible for the disability of Ben. Cambridge Dictionary defines guilt as "a feeling of worry or unhappiness that you have because you have done something wrong, such as causing harm to another person". Here Harriet is made to feel guilty for destroying the happiness of the family, giving birth to a monstrous child, and above all having done wrong to Lovatts' family, society, and nation. What concerns this novel is the result of a mother taking care of the unwanted and unloved child by her family.

Ben has always been in the picture by his family and relatives. He is not only viewed as a monster but he acts like a monster. He hurts people around him, his siblings, pets, and destroys everything he can. Getting worried about the actions of Ben, Dorothy says Harriet "People are going to think twice about coming again" (*The Fifth Child*, 58). Harriet's concern for Ben made her lock him in the room so that others do not get panicked as his nightmarish act was progressing. When locked -

He spent most of the night standing on his window-sill, staring into the garden, and if Harriet looked in on him, he would turn and give her a long stare, alien, chilling: in the half-dark of the room he did look like a little troll or a hobgoblin crouching there. If he was locked in during the day, he screamed and bellowed so that the whole house resounded with it, and they were all afraid the police would arrive. (*The Fifth Child*, 58).

Taking care of Ben as a mother was a challenging task. "One day, she ran a mile or more after him, seeing only that stubby squat little figure going through traffic lights, ignoring cars that hooted and people who screamed warnings at him" (*The Fifth Child*, 58). A motherly heart starts beating "She was weeping, panting, half-crazed, desperate to get to him before something terrible happened" (*The Fifth Child*, 58). Harriet is caught in the dilemma of like-dislike, acceptance-nonacceptance, normal-abnormal. For Ben's abnormality, she needs

confirmation from the medical professional but was said that Ben is a normal healthy baby, hyperactive child, and nothing was wrong with him. Ben is treated without any love, tenderness, or affection. Ben's disastrous activity finally made family members for sending Ben to the institution which Harriet refuted. Eventually, he was sent away to a dreadful institution where he would be drugged to death. After a few days against the will of David Harriet gets Ben back at home. This brings Harriet on the verge that it is difficult to justify motherhood. On one hand, she wants to fulfill the duty and responsibility of mother where Ben is considered but on the other hand she is moving away from all her elder four kids. Ben's return from the institution makes the family atmosphere strenuous. In saving Ben, Harriet has made all her other children lose their childhood. They longed for the love and affectionate of their mother and were felt isolated and lonely in the presence of their mother. Harriet's motherhood falls apart between Ben and her other four children. Luke, Helen, and Jane decide to go to boarding school and spend their holidays, vacations with their grandparents. Paul who is young has a hatred feeling for Ben because he is the most neglected child after Ben arrives in this world. He is very often seen visiting a psychiatrist's home to overcome the absence and negligence of his mother. At this time Ben has already joined his school gang. Being a mother of five children she is left only with one abnormal, monstrous child.

Harriet tries her level best to give Ben a normal life and is being accepted by society. She sends him to school, teaches him at home trying to make him like others who are accepted in society. But unfortunately all in vain. When Ben grew up he joined a rogue gang of his school. Most of the time he is out with his gang. At this time "the local newspapers were full of news of muggings, holdups, break-ins. Sometimes this gang, Ben among them, did not come into the Lovatts' house for a whole day, two days, three" (*The Fifth Child*, 112). So finally, nothing was achieved by Harriet. She risked her family for the sake of Ben but in the end, she couldn't make him the one she wished – normal like others accepted by society. She feels a destroyer of her own family, first by giving birth to Ben and secondly by bringing

Ben back home from the institution. Disheartened David says to Harriet "We have no children, Harriet. Or, rather, I have no children. You have one child." (*The Fifth Child*, 114). With the offer of David selling the house, she finally agrees to do so as she believes that by separating from the house she would be able to separate herself from the burden and guilt of her past. As per the child-rearing manual of the mid-twentieth century, an ideal mother is not the one who is held responsible for child-rearing but "she was [also] supposed to find her fulfillment in raising them," and do not feel fulfilled was, as a result, a sign of her being abnormal" (Thurer 1994, 246&256). In the end, Harriet's sacrifice is not valued and understood by her family, and society and finally, she is left alone devastated, and isolated with not a single child around her.

5. Conclusion

Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* shows the disintegration of England society of the 1960s-1980s. The novel revolves around the characters David, Harriet, and their monstrous child Ben. The novel focuses on the ideology of a perfect and happy family of its time and the sense of social affiliation. Getting distracted from the existing norms was not accepted by society. Thus, Ben was not accepted by society. Lessing's portrayal of Ben, its exclusion from society is viewed as the physical, and psychological cruelty enforced by the society with a patriarchal system. This system allows adopting cruelty for the one who stands as 'other' in society. David being a father adhered to the same patriarchal system. His non-acceptance of Ben is a symbol of it. He even refuses to accept Ben as his child. He showers all his love, care, and warmth to his elder four children, it is only Ben who is deprived of fatherly love. Being the head of the family, a breadwinner he solely takes decisions and expects everyone to cling to it. His decision to have lots of children, his wife to be traditional taking care of the house, and his children, sending Ben to the institution against Harriet's will are all the embodiment of the patriarchal system. Lessing's novel emphasizes power relations in the male-dominated society. This can be seen in the way David has control over his family which further leads to the abuse of

Harriet and Ben. Harriet's decision of getting back Ben at home from the institution is taken a question mark by David driving his masculinity and breaking the patriarchal norm of the family and the society. This makes him distanced from his wife. It's the patriarchal system responsible for the downfall of the Lovatt family.

Ben who is born with abnormalities and monstrous features has to suffer at the hands of his parents, siblings, relatives, and society at large. His abnormality has less to do with his body, but he feels alienated and treated as a criminal. His parents are shocked and terrified by his birth. Humiliation at the hands of his parents leads Ben to be depressed and aggressive. To overcome it he starts hurting people and animals. The social institution where he is admitted to take care of treats him like animals and has to suffer at the hands of so-called care-taking people. Ben challenges ignorance and torture leveled on him to make friends in the neighborhood and school and becomes their boss. Here one can see Ben as a strong character trying to turn rejection into a positive, happy-going life. Ben is a symbol of a self-motivated identity who knows how to overcome abnormal, and painful situations in life.

Harriet is the victim of mother blame and mother guilt. She bears the same in the hands of his own family who she is supposed to be supportive of her. Her isolation is the result of her step taken for Ben to give him the right place in the family and society. She is the victim of the standards set for the ideal motherhood in society. As long this standard is practiced, and mothers accept the traditional role of being the homemaker, mothers can never be free from the guilt and blame imposed on them. Lessing in *The Fifth Child* suggests that the destructions cannot be overcome unless society embraces the culture of multiplicity, give space to the disabled, abnormal, and accept mothers after bringing the unexpected child into the world. The novel highlights and raises the issue of motherhood and the mother's subjectivity. For Lessing motherhood is the only source of true reflection and acceptance of reality in the society for which Harriet has been targeted and left desolated and isolated.

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