CHAPTER IV
MOTHERHOOD: A MILESTONE
THE MILLSTONE
At the end of *The Millstone* Rosamund Stacey, the protagonist of the novel, says, "There's nothing I can do about my nature" (172), implying that something is wrong with it. She is an intellectual, a competent and self-reliant scholar who works on Elizabethan sonnet sequences. She suffers from sexual coldness, and says that all her attempts "at anything other than my work have always been abortive" (7). It proves true in her attempts at sex with her friend Hamish. She successfully puts off sex until she spends an evening with George Matthews, a radio-announcer on the B.B.C. Ironically, her first sexual experience results in her pregnancy, which is crucial in Rosamund's secret war with her unconscious desires: it forces her, to some extent, to face up to her female identity, to the fact that she is a woman, a fact she has rather violently attempted to deny without always being aware of the intensity of this denial,"[1] and she contemplates on secret termination. But her half-hearted attempt at abortion proves ineffective and she abandons it. Although abortion is "the socially acceptable act, for an upperclass British girl,"[2] as Marion Viastos Libby observes, "Rosamund continues her pregnancy not because she consciously refuses to conform to social expectations but because she is unable to make a serious choice about
It seems to her that 'a baby might be no such bad thing, however impractical and impossible' (16), and she simply doesn't believe 'that the handicap of one small illegitimate baby would make a scrap of difference to my career' (94). Her intellectual pursuits, her devotion to studies, and her lonely life make her feel like a male chauvinist and she forgets her womanhood. She is aware of her abnormality and tries to hide it, scheming her dating with her friends Joe Hurt and Roger Anderson in such a way that each thinks that she sleeps with the other. Her pregnancy reminds her of the fact that she is a woman. She thinks, 'There was no reason why I shouldn't have one (baby) either, it would serve me right, I thought, for having been born a woman in the first place. I couldn't pretend that I wasn't a woman, could I, however much I might try from day to day to avoid the issue?' (16). She is a woman and she cannot alter it:

Oddly enough, I never thought it was a judgement upon me for that one evening with George, but rather for all those other evenings of abstinence with Hamish and his successors. I was guilty of a crime, all right, but it was a brand new, twentieth-century
crime, not the good old traditional one of lust and greed. My crime was my suspicion, my fear, my apprehensive terror of the very idea of sex. I liked men, and was forever in and out of love for years, but the thought of sex frightened the life out of me, and the more I didn't do it and the more I read and heard about how I ought to do it the more frightened I became. (17-18)

The foregoing citation shows Rosamund's obsession with sex. She considers her pregnancy a punishment for the crime she has committed. Her crime is her fear of sex and her protracted virginity seems a sin to her. She believes that she is punished not because of adultery but because of abstinence. Her nature is mostly due to the influence of her parents:

My parents did not support me at all, beyond the rent-free accommodation, though they could have afforded to do so; but they believed in independence. They had drummed the idea of self-reliance into me so thoroughly that I believed dependence to be a fatal sin. Emancipated woman, this was me: gin bottle in hand, opening my own door with my own latchkey. (9)
'My mother, you know, was a great feminist. She brought me up to be equal. She made there be no questions, no difference. I was equal. I am equal. You know what her creed was? That thing that queen Elizabeth said about thanking God that she had such qualities that if she were turned out in her petticoat in any part of Christendom, she would whatever it was that she would do. She used to quote that to us, when we were frightened about exams or going to dances. I have to live up to her, you know." (28-29)

The above citations show the influence of Rosamund's parents on her. Believing dependence to be a sin, she leads an isolated life mistaking it to be an independent life. Withdrawal from the real world kills her feminine instincts and she refuses to seek help from anyone even in times of crisis. In her attempt to live up to the expectations of her mother, Rosamund errs. The dominant feeling of feminism and her confidence in her ability to control any situation or calamity create problems to her. The second of the above passages indicates the influence of her mother on Rosamund and how she imbibes in her the qualities of equality, endurance, and fortitude in adversity. Independence teaches her
the art of keeping happiness and sorrow to herself. She does not seem to realize that man is gregarious.

George seems to melt her frigidity and rouse womanly instincts in her. She experiences love and longs for his company, but she hides her feelings in the innermost crevices of her heart. Overwhelmed by doubts about his intention and to avoid what seems intrusion on her part, she lets him go without a word about any other meeting. Too much of thinking confuses her. Her difference and her desire not to offend look like coldness and indifference to George, and he does not bother to ring her up. She analyzes every move and concludes that she has taken the "decisive move" as George expressed no liking or affection for her, but accepted her only "through kindliness or curiosity or embarrassment" (32). Reason dominates emotion, and pride restrains her from seeking George out and she resolutely avoids places of his visit. She feels compelled to see George when her pregnancy is confirmed, but she suppresses that urge and decides to face the situation singlehanded.

In an interview Drabble says,

...if your heart is dried up, your spirit is dried up: then, you can
sink yourself into your grave and it profits you not at all. You have to be in touch with your emotional center, your spiritual center. The emotional life, even though it might be more tragic, is more satisfying than the conscious intellectual life. The conscious intellectual life is dry. This is one of the things that Rosamund suffers from. She suffers from dryness of the spirit because she's so clever. She doesn't allow herself to feel. And that is a tragedy for her. But she does find happiness in the very basic emotion, love for her children. 

As Joe says, she is "a very unwomanly woman" (40). Pity or kindness even from her friend is intolerable to her. Soon after telling Joe of her pregnancy, she wants to get rid of him "before he sensed my poverty, because Joe was capable of pity and of kindness" (43). When Roger expresses his concern and tells her that she can approach him for help, she pretends as though she is above it.

No one knows — no one is allowed to know — her financial status. Her parents' flat in which she lives misrepresents her status. If people know the truth, she says, "they would have classed me on the
starvation line, and would have ceased to make remarks about the extreme oldness of my shoes" (9). Cut off from the rest of the world, she lives in her incomplete world. When she chooses to become an unwed mother, Joe pleads against it, saying "it is an utterly ridiculous romantic stupid nonsensical idea. I think you are out of mind" (40). Her novelist friend Lydia says, "I must be crazy to be having the baby, ruining my life, and all the old junk" (63). She rejects outright Joe's statement that she has "a secret yearning for maternal fulfilment" and expresses her anger at his implication that some unknown authority would interfere with her decisions by removing the "hypothetical child" (42).

Like Rosamund, her sister Beatrice was "educated to be independent and to consider herself the equal of anyone alive" (76), but she begins to take the line of "realistic compromise all along, and to frown slightly on our parents' singleness of mind" (77). Considering Rosamund's pregnancy the most dreadful mistake that would be frightful for both the mother and the child, she warns her of the problems of raising an illegitimate child. Full of practical wisdom, she writes,
"Through no fault of its own it (the child) would have to have the slur of illegitimacy all its life and I can't tell you how odiously cruel and vicious children can be to each other, once they get hold of something like that. A baby is not just something you can have just because you feel you ought. Because you oughtn't and that's that" (78). She suggests the solution of adoption and counsels her not to get herself involved with it, saying, "It's a quite meaningless kind of involvement at that age and you will be the only one to suffer" (79). Indignant and annoyed at her advice, Rosamund feels that nobody has the faintest right to offer her any advice about her own child; and it reveals to her the depth of her determination to keep the baby:

The determination at this stage cannot have been based, as it later was, on love, for I felt no love and little hope of feeling it: it was based rather on an extraordinary confidence in myself, in a conviction, quite irrational, that no adoptive parents could ever be as excellent as I myself would be. At the same time, the prospect of motherhood frightened me; I experienced the usual doubts about whether my child would like me,
whether I would like my child, and so on, but simultaneously with these doubts I experienced absolute certainty. I knew for a fact that the child would be mine and that I would have it. Whatever Beatrice said, I would have felt it a cowardly betrayal to abandon it to the unknown, well-meaning ignorance of anyone else in Britain. (79)

The above citation makes clear the reason behind Rosamund's decision to keep the baby to herself. She rejects her sister's advice, resents the indifference of her parents and brother, and decides in favour of the child. Her over-confidence and ignorance of reality make her take such a step. She is filled with apprehensions about her love for the child and the child's love for her but she is sure that the child would be hers. The conflict indicates her motherly instinct. Though she says, "I felt no love" (74), her love for the unborn is evident. Come what may, she decides to bring it up. Rosamund's ignorance and innocence are due to lack of exposure to the real world. Her unexpected pregnancy drags her out of the ivory tower into reality. The sheer embarrassment and absurdity of the situation prove too much for her to bear at times, but she nobly braves it and refuses to pretend that she
is Mrs Stacey. Calamity does not deter her from work. As an industrious and equipped person, she works very well during her pregnancy, completes her thesis, and gets a job.

Rosamund does not consider her pregnancy totally the product of malevolence: "I did not feel, as Hardy felt for Tess, that events had conspired maliciously against my innocence. Perhaps I did not wish to feel this, for it was a view dangerous to my dignity and difficult to live with for the years which were to come" (66). Hardy ends his novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* with the statement "the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess." He asserts the supremacy of fate over innocent and helpless victims like Tess. He makes man an insignificant part of the world, struggling against powers greater than himself. But Drabble seems to have great faith in the individual's power to shape his or her own world. She says,

... we certainly do live in a world of chance, there's no disputing that. The duty of the human will is to seek to make sense of it and to resist being swamped by the arbitrary and saying
because it's arbitrary there's nothing you can do. You have to endeavour in the face of the impossible. That's what we were put on this earth to do: to endeavor in the face of the impossible.  

Rosamund does not consider herself either innocent or a victim of the conspiracy of malicious events. She holds herself responsible for what has happened and she is ready to face the consequences. She is not prepared to relinquish her dignity at any cost. Somehow she feels that her pregnancy, "however haphazard and unexpected and unasked," is "connected to some sequence, to some significant development of my life" (67).

Rosamund feels, "At times I had a vague and complicated sense that this pregnancy had been sent to me in order to reveal to me a scheme of things totally different from the scheme which I inhabited, totally removed from academic enthusiasms, social consciousness, etiolated undefined emotional connections, and the exercise of free will" (67). She is not aware of the bond that links man to man till she becomes pregnant. For the first time she holds the baby of a stranger for a while upon her lap in the hospital and feels that "a sense of the infant crept through me, its small
warmness, its wide soft cheeks, and above all its quiet, snuffly breathing. I held it tighter and closed my arms around it" (70).

Rosamund is not devoid of romantic imagination. At times she pictures to herself scenes in which George would arrive and greet her "with phrases like 'Rosamund, I've tried to live without you and I can't' or 'Rosamund, I've loved you ever since I set eyes on you' ... I would go through the whole romantic paraphernalia of meetings at the ends of long corridors, of embraces at the top of wide staircases, of passionate encounters at Oxford circus" (72-73).

Whenever Rosamund feels the need for a little adult affection, she craves for the company of George. When she becomes pregnant, she feels compelled to see George as she "had an excuse, now, for seeing him" (34). Second thoughts make her decide against it. Denying the pleasure of his company to herself, she switches on the radio

... to listen to his voice announcing this and that: I still could not believe that I was going to get through it without telling him, but I could not see that I was going to tell him either. I would have the odd two minutes when I would
think of him, and such grief and regret 
and love would pour down my spine that 
I tried not to think. (61)

After the turmoil, Rosamund experiences the 
bliss of love — a deeply spiritual human experience — 
for the first time when she sees her child: "I lay 
awake for two hours, unable to get over my happiness. 
I was not much used to feeling happiness; satisfaction, 
perhaps, or triumph, and at times excitement and exhilaration. But happiness was something I had not gone in 
for a long time, and it was very nice, too nice to 
waste in sleep" (103). Rosamund, who believes in 
keeping sorrow and happiness to herself, finds a 
remarkable change in herself. She goes in raptures 
explaining her happiness to Joe. Her attempt to share 
her happiness gets thwarted as Joe pungently remarks, 
"What you're talking about ... is one of the most 
boring commonplaces of the female experience. All 
women feel exactly that, it's nothing to be proud of, 
it isn't even worth thinking about" (103). She finds 
some justification in her pride as it is the only 
instance wherein she has shared the feeling of all 
other women. She withstands various irritations in 
the hospital like the label with the initial U (unmarried) and the feeble jokes of medical students.
She forgets everything in the "uncritical love" (115) of her child, Octavia, a "small living extension of myself" (123), and she gradually realizes "that she liked me, that she had no option to liking me, and that unless I took great pains to alienate her, she would go on liking me" (115). Octavia's sudden illness — her congenital heart disease — throws her from unknown bliss to undefined sorrow. She feels like sharing her anxiety with George but she resists from doing so. Tears become a regular feature and she realizes that she is "vulnerable, tender, naked, an easy target for the malice of chance" (120):

I could not rid myself of the notion that if Octavia were to die, this would be a vengeance upon my sin. The innocent shall suffer for the guilty. What my sin had been I found difficult to determine, for I could not convince myself that sleeping with George had been a sin; on the contrary, in certain moods I tended to look on it as the only virtuous action of my life. A sense of retribution nevertheless hung heavily over me and what I tried to preserve that night was faith not in God but in the laws of chance. (127)
The above citation brings to the fore the repressed and restrained feelings of Rosamund. The seriousness of the situation makes her anticipate the worst. On the one hand, she regards it as a retribution for the sin she has committed, and on the other, she considers sleeping with George not a sin but a virtue. Then what is her sin? The next morning she concludes that her sin lies in her love for Octavia. Maybe her sin lies in keeping George in dark about their child.

Though denial of self is the dominant characteristic of Rosamund, she learns to deal with reality to protect her daughter. When the nurse insists on her not seeing Octavia after the successful surgery, she feels that "I would not be the only one to lose; somewhere Octavia was lying around and waiting for me. It was no longer a question of what I wanted: this time there was someone else involved. Life would never be a simple question of self-denial again" (132). She insists on her rights and screams hysterically till she is permitted to see the baby. Forgetting her intellectual sophistication, she behaves like an innocent mother. The turmoil she undergoes in the hospital changes her attitude towards life: "I knew something now of the quality of life, and anything in
the way of happiness that I should hereafter receive would be based on fact and not on hope" (142). She becomes aware of the "facts of inequality, of limitation, of separation, of the impossible, heart-breaking uneven hardship of the human lot. I had always felt for others in theory and pitied the blows of fate and circumstance under which they suffered; but now, myself no longer free, myself suffering, I may say that I felt it in my heart" (68). She comes up against a world which, she is aware, goes on without her and she realizes that her particularly distorted view was because of her own background:

I did not realize the dreadful facts of life. I did not know that a pattern forms before we are aware of it, and that what we think we make becomes a rigid prison making us. In ignorance and innocence I built my own confines, and by the time I was old enough to know what I had done, there was no longer time to undo it. (7)

The foregoing citation shows the mental growth of Rosamund. She seems to feel sad for her ignorance in allowing a pattern to form. Having grown wise, she realizes that it is impossible to change the pattern
and she accepts "both the justice of her fate and its inevitability." 

Rosamund's weakness seems to be her failure to act at the right time. She indulges in too much of thinking. During her sexual encounter with George, she sees him "through the eyes of love" (29), cries out of happiness, and longs for his company, but fails to express any of her feelings with the doubt "In case I am not wanted. In case I am tedious" (31). Suppressing her passions, she silently watches him leave the house. It is her diffidence, coldness, and indifference that keep them apart, but she justifies her actions attributing the same feelings to George. The thought that it is she who had taken the "decisive move" which led to the irreversible step stops her from contacting George. She finds the urge to share the truth, her feelings, and her life with George when her pregnancy is confirmed and when she feels tense and anxious about the welfare of her ailing daughter. But some thought or other stops her and she fails to reach out to him. Thinking of her parents, she says that they have "Such tact, such withdrawal, such avoidance. Such fear of causing pain, such willingness to receive and take pains. It is a morality, all right, a
well-established, traditional, English morality, moreover it is my morality, whether I like it or not" (145). This middleclass morality stops her at a distance from George, whatever her wishes may be.

The last visit of George reminds her of what she did earlier:

I remembered how often I had reached for the phone, in those first months, to ring Broadcasting House and ask for George; how consciously I had restrained myself from going to the pub to see him, from walking the streets he might walk; how I had lain in bed at the hospital and listened through my institution earphones for his voice, how I had wept and lain awake and wished to share the misery of my child's affliction and the joy of her joy, how I had endured and survived and spared him so much sorrow, and I thought that now I did not see how I could go back on what I had done. (169)

The above passage indicates the internal conflict in Rosamund. In the struggle between Rosamund the woman and Rosamund the self-reliant and highly independent female chauvinist, the latter wins. She wants to see George, to ring him up, to share her agony with him but she curbs her desires.
Knowing full well that this is the last chance for her to unravel her heart before George, she thinks of taking the initiative: "If one of us did not move towards the other, then we could only move apart. Like two fish, embalmed in the living frozen river, we eyed each other in silence through the solid resistant intervening air, and did not move" (168). She struggles to come out with her true feelings: "I felt myself on the verge of tears and noise, and I held hard onto the arms of my chair to prevent myself from throwing myself on my knees in front of him, to beseech from him his affection, his tolerance, his pity, anything that would keep him there with me, and save me from being so much alone" (170). Though her mind is filled with thoughts of love for George, she restrains herself from revealing them. She thinks only of the sorrow that she alone endured and spared George but not of the joy that she has deprived him of. Even without knowing that he is the father of the child, he invites Rosamund into his life along with the baby. They fail to reach out to each other. The ambivalence in her is evident especially in her last encounter with George. George's unexpected presence at the chemist's stupefies her and she struggles, unable to express the truth and her feelings and longings.
She desires to detain him but misleads him lying about the age of the child. Very soon she regains her composure and presents herself to George in her old role as "the girl with alternating lovers, the girl with stray babies, the girl who does what she wants and does not suffer for it" (163).

In her introduction to *The Millstone* she wrote in 1970, Drabble says that she admired the way some writers can show "characters undergoing a process of change — developing, growing, softening, hardening." The *Millstone* seems to show that process. The protagonist remains indifferent to the surrounding world for quite sometime. Research is the reality for her. Dick's words "One never can tell with you. You lead such a secret life" (10) indicate the barriers she constructs around her. She is averse to help of any kind and she never puts up with any form of domestic assistance. She confronts reality when she becomes pregnant. She gets initiated into the real world in the hospital, with the realization that she has to seek the help of even strangers in course of time. Rosamund plays the role of an emancipated woman to Joe and Roger; a modern independent female who does not need a husband to George; and a very wealthy woman
to others; but steps down from the false pretensions to lead the life of an unwed mother. Octavia's birth widens her narrow world. Even her pregnancy makes her realize that she is "trapped in a human limit for the first time in my life, and I was going to learn to live inside it" (58). Though she feels her independence threatened in the beginning, she feels more in common with others in course of time. As Nancy S.Hardin observes, "As a result of Rosamund's commitment to her pregnancy and subsequently to Octavia, she achieves a true synthesis both within herself and with the outside world." She adds,

In a number of respects The Millstone presents a twentieth-century version of a moral fable. It is contemporary in its reliance on existential themes and on the burdens of chance falling on the individual. Yet it resembles the earlier moral fable in that it can serve as an object lesson for young women of the present time — a lesson in freedom as possibility.

Rosamund's experience makes her say,

As so often in life, it was impossible to choose, even theoretically, between advantage and disadvantage, between advantage and disadvantage, between
profit and loss: I was up quite unmistakably against No Choice. So the best one could do was to put a good face on it, and to avoid adding to the large and largely discussed number of sad warnings that abounded in the part of the world that I knew. I managed very well, and the general verdict was, Extraordinary Rosamund, she really seems happy, she must have really wanted one after all. (115)

As she says, she faces a "No Choice" situation and accepts it. Readers may find a moral in The Millstone though time and again Drabble says that she is not a preacher but an explorer.

The concepts of self-reliance, independence, and equality drilled into her by her mother make Rosamund a highly educated, competent, and self-reliant person. Her independent life — her aversion to any kind of help or pity from anyone — keeps her aloof. She imprisons herself in her ivory tower and sees that no one has access to it. Her fear of or indifference to sex, which has stirred critics like Susan Spitzer to come out with their critical outburst, forces her to remain a virgin for long. Leading almost a man's life, she develops some sort of aversion to
everything that is womanly, which is evident in her reference to pregnant women as "bloated human people" (59). She associates women with mere bodies and considers them inferior mindless beings. Her unexpected pregnancy alters her way of thinking. As Susan Spitzer points out, "The pregnancy is crucial in Rosamund's secret war with her unconscious desires; it forces her, to some extent, to face up to her female identity, to the fact that she is a woman, a fact she has rather violently attempted to deny without always being aware of the intensity of this denial." Her pregnancy strips her of her total self-sufficiency and makes her seek the aid of others. She achieves "initiation into reality" (45), feels "trapped in a human limit for the first time in life" (65), and experiences "the bond that links man to man" (77). Ellen Cronan Rose says, "Rosamund discovers her womanhood at the end of The Millstone, which is both her achievement and the measure of her superiority over the father of the illegitimate child." She achieves an honest assessment of herself.

Emma, in The Garrick Year, says that motherhood has "infinite compensations" (10). When she is bored with her marital life, her unexpected pregnancy and the imminent motherhood save her from depression.
She says, "What I had dreaded as the blight of my life turned out to be one of its greatest joys" (27). Drabble's interviews and works are interspersed with her acclaim of motherhood. She says, "Having children is very good for me, really." Her love for children is revealed in her statement "I certainly feel the mother-child relationship is a great salvation and an image of unselfish love." Motherhood is a milestone, a landmark in the life of any woman. It gives the greatest joy and even Rosamund experiences it, though she transgresses the socially accepted codes of behaviour, ignoring marriage, a pre-condition imposed by society. As an unwed mother, she seems to feel it to be a millstone, though she is prepared to face it. In Rosamund's case "The child was both a millstone and also a salvation because once it became obvious to Rosamund that she couldn't suffer any more harm from the child, the millstone was lifted from her." In conclusion we can say that in The Millstone, Drabble explores the life of an unwed mother, presents the agony she faces and the ecstasy she feels on becoming a mother, and leaves the rest to the readers' imagination.
REFERENCES


7. Marion Vlastos Libby, "Fate and Feminism in the Novels of Margaret Drabble," *Contemporary Literature* 16.2 (Summer 1975): 180.


