CHAPTER – II

MAINSTREAM GENDER CONFLICT
This chapter will deal with problems related to gender conflicts and struggles regarding the English middle class morality on issues pertaining to the social taboo of illegitimacy and divorce that subordinates the female gender. It will attempt to study the conflicts faced by the protagonists in the select texts from feminist perspective. Further, it will examine the conflicts on the issue of female economic dilemma, and the nature of the unpaid worker. It will also concentrate on the discourse of female education with special reference to the mainstream English middle class.

Margaret Drabble’s protagonists are females from the English middle class who are in conflict with various issues related to the middle class morality. Jonathan Culler in *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* states:

… Althusser maps a Marxist account of the determination of the individual by the social onto psychoanalysis. The subject is an effect constituted in the processes of the unconscious, of discourse, and of the relatively autonomous practices that organise society. (Culler 129).

Individual psychology thus shaped by individuals within a social construct moulds and shapes the individual’s ideology that further reflects on the society in order to maintain an organised social set-up. Each individual is therefore, bred, shaped and molded by the social psychology that one is born into. The English middle class that encompass a majority of the English populace is shaped and molded by the acceptable set of scruples that is reflected in the individuals belonging to the middle class.

In *The Millstone*, Rosamund seems to echo the novelist’s views on the middle class morality as the ‘English morality’:
It is a morality, all right, a well established, traditional, English morality, moreover it is my morality, whether I like it or not. But there are things in me that cannot take it, and when they have to assert themselves the result is violence, screaming, ugliness, and Lord knows what yet to come. (TM 161).

Drabble through Rosamund, the protagonist, projects her views on the cold exterior politeness of the English middle class morality. Rosamund comments on her parents’ sudden change of plan to visit India. She feels that this change of plan is to avoid the awkward situation presently imposed on them on the social front by her state of unwed pregnancy:

Such tact, such withdrawal, such avoidance. Such fear in causing pain, such willingness to receive and take pains. It is a morality, alright, a well established, traditional, English morality, moreover it is my morality, whether I like it or not. (TM 161).

Rosamund counters her middle class morality and scruples; maintenance of polite social front and the quiet withdrawal at a time when one needs a friend. Dick Protheroe who is a friend of Rosamund’s parents and the baby’s surgeon took it his duty to inform Rosamund’s parents about the baby. The result of the information is a letter from Rosamund’s father in the first week of December that tells her about their sudden change of plan to visit India. In “Guilt Trip”, Adelle Waldman states:

*The Millstone* is about liberal guilt. It is perhaps one of the most written on the subject, full of the sly profundity that is sometimes the special strength of spare, comic novels. (Waldman).
Although Rosamund is unnerved by her parents’ sudden change of plan at a time that they are about to return from Africa she determines and evaluates the logic of this change of plan and finally remarks:

They did not wish to cause me or themselves pain, embarrassment, or even mere inconvenience by their return, so they went to India instead. (TM 160).

It is clear that Rosamund is hurt by her parents’ withdrawal when she faces a deplorable situation. She perceives that her parents are more concerned about themselves and the society that binds them. The social psychology imbibed by individuals living in a society is the reason that Rosamund is for the first time afraid to meet her wedded brother and sister. Consequently, she also delays in writing any letter to her parents whom she recounts as:

[E]xtraordinary blend of socialist principles and middle class scruples. (TM 31).

Rosamund’s parents are presently attending to the socialist job of working in Africa. In “Guilt Trip”, Adelle Waldman states:

Yet Drabble’s novel is hardly a salvo against liberalism, compassion, or social conscience. It is something deeper, a wry and witty testament not only to the difficulties but, more damningly, to the absurdities of living according to principle, no matter how worthwhile the principle. (Waldman).

Unable to face the shame of their daughter who bears an illegitimate child, the visit to India is thus a welcome pretense on socialist ground for Rosamund’s parents.
Drabble seems to suggest that the polite withdrawal of Rosamund’s parents is a prevalent practice among the traditional middle class English society when an unwanted issue arises in a certain condition. The novelist also seems to suggest that under trying circumstances, every individual needs space for adjustments and recovery to which Rosamund comments:

And also I was glad that my parents went to India; “the physical comfort of their absence was greater to me than the mental disquiet of considering that they had taken so large a decision on my account”. (TM 161).

Rosamund is mentally distraught at her parents’ unexpected gesture and decision, yet, she is brave and courageous enough to face the consequences on her own. She feels that their absence is in fact reassuring as she will not have to face crude parental remarks.

Since the social notion on unwed mothers and divorcees play an important role in the English social set-up, Rosamund is uncertain about her future, but she is certain of her determination to keep her baby and to make it her very own. Though Rosamund is born to the middle class economy, she is unable to afford the advertised help due to her financial constraint. Yet, she has to meet certain demands imposed on her educational status in order to conform to the middle class society. Thus, the course of the events shapes to meet her economic needs. Drabble’s protagonist therefore goes beyond the boundary of madness and compromise:

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. (TM 89).

In the interview with Lisa Allardice for The Guardian Drabble comments:
The Millstone was my third novel and I wrote while I was expecting my third baby. Its subject not surprisingly, is maternity. There weren’t many novels about maternity in those days, but I don’t think I had any sense of entering forbidden or dangerous ground. It was about what was all around me, the daily lives of myself and my friends, the struggle to work and bring up children at the same time. (Allardice).

Although the novel partly reflects the life of the writer, it conveys the social notion on the issue of the unwed mother and her child.

In The Ice Age, Drabble reveals the tale of the protagonist Alison’s divorce at the time that Alison meets Antony:

She, like Anthony, had an unsatisfactory and feckless spouse, an actor of pathologically jealous and pathologically unfaithful temperament: like Anthony, she had been through a process of slow disillusion with her past life. (TIA 35).

From the passage it is clear that Alison experienced hardships during her marriage with her husband that compels her to divorce her husband. Further, Drabble gives insight into the ways on how women often have to abandon their career and take the subordinate role as housekeeper. In Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol. IV, Adrienne Rich in “The Kingdom of the Fathers” states:

Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division
of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is subsumed under the male. (Evans 78).

In the case of Alison, she has to give up her career so as to remove herself from the competition in the theatre with her husband Donnell:

The career she had given up had been highly promising, established, even, rather than doubtful, and most of her theatrical friends thought she was mad, though they did not like to say so to her face, because of their diffidence in the view of her very evident tragedy: also, Alison’s decision to stop acting removed a serious competitor from an overcrowded profession, and who could be unselfish enough to regret that? Nevertheless, behind her back, they speculated that it must have been some kind of guilt or self-punishment, rather than real goodness, that made her relinquish so bright a future for one of such hard and, in their eyes, unsatisfying work. (TIA 35).

Alison follows the age old traditional and social norms by submerging herself to domesticity in order to curb her husband’s vile mood at her work place. As a close competitor of Donnell, Alison gives up her promising acting career in the theatre where Donnell is also one of the promising actors. Alison’s submission to the social norms earns Donnell the name of being the bread winner and the male as the financial provider. Alison thereby aligns herself to the middle class morality as a mother and wife.

Simultaneously, Drabble gives the incident of the female who is willing to free herself from the traditional understanding of being a female. In The Ice Age, Maureen argues with her
mother who represents the male idea of traditional mother figure. Maureen’s mother advises her daughter to get married and get her life settled to which Maureen replies:

…I’m young yet, who wants to get stuck with a lot of snotty kids, like our Mavis? I want to see bit of life: I don’t want to waste myself like you did, Ma. (TIA 56).

Although Maureen’s mother does not represent the traditional good, kind and loving mother figure, yet, she expresses the English traditional notion and the social psychology that a female should be married at a certain age. Drabble in *The Threepenny Review* on “On Marriage: Margaret Drabble” states:

I was one of the last of the Early Marriage Generation. It is hard to believe now that so many of us married so innocently, so young. We should have known better. In those days, women still married to get away from their mothers, because a career was not considered a good enough reason for leaving home. Careers were not taken seriously. Whereas a marriage, however implausible, had to be respected. (“On marriage: Margaret Drabble,” *Three Penny Review*).

The traditional and moral notion that binds Drabble on the issue of marriage is reflected in the select texts and therefore Maureen’s mother voices the English trational notion on marriage. The protagonists; Emma, Alison, Liz and Alix marry at an early age to align themselves with the prevalent tradition, and like Rosamund, Maureen’s conflict is related to the English moral code of early marriage that is voiced by the mother and objected by Maureen.

Drabble further points out the male weakness to sexually tempt the female in work places and it directly projects the male infidelity within the marriage bound. Though marriage is
honoured by the English society, the novelist indicates that infidelity does not bar the males within the social order. Regarding male infidelity she narrates the incident between Maureen and Derek:

…but their relationship made any personal remarks improper, and he had been making a few of late. About her wasting her life while Len was put away, a young woman like her, and about how his wife had started going to evening classes because she thought the children had destroyed her identity. Maureen knew where that kind of chat led, and indeed last Tuesday Derek had kissed her…and holding her against him at the same time, with a bit of pressing of the leg. (TIA 133).

Derek is a married man while Maureen is not married to Len. Yet, it is the married man Derek who persuades and entices Maureen into a sexual relationship.

Emma’s friend Mary further depicts the middle class morality as she maintains her polite conversations with Pascal:

And when Pascal arrived Mary asked her many intelligent questions about where she came from, how she found England, and how she was getting on with the English language. Pascal was very pleased, as not many of our friends had the social composure to pay her the right kind of attention, and Mary’s middle-class courtesy was exactly what she did not get enough of. (TGY 79-80).

Mary’s middle class courtesy is deeply ingrained as she is born and bred in a middle class family. Mary’s courtesy seems to be inborn compared to Emma’s other friends in Hereford, and compared to Maureen, Derek and Len. The reason may lie in the fact that the other characters of
the select texts have arrived to the middle class by virtue of their hard work and by their financial status, and they still have a long way to refine themselves, in order to achieve the English middle class courtesy as their own morality.

In *The Millstone*, the protagonist Rosamund from an English middle class family commits the mistake of being pregnant but unwed in the 1960s London. She thereby breaks the social code as she commits the social taboo of bearing the child out of wedlock. Rosamund is amazed to find that she is pregnant on her first sexual encounter:

I was sure enough, having indeed a fool-proof case in favour of George’s paternity, for he was the only man I had ever in my whole life slept with, and then only once. (TM 20).

In the interview with Lisa Allardice for *The Guardian*, Margaret Drabble states:

My publisher’s reader (a man, and middle aged) queried the plot, on the grounds that it was almost impossible to get pregnant during the first act of intercourse. (Allardice).

The passage reflects the difference of opinion in the male and the female gender with regard to pregnancy.

The English social taboo seems to restrict only the female gender while the stigma and the taboo attached to illegitimacy and divorce do not seem to bind the male gender, as it binds the female gender. “The Adoption History: Illegitimacy” states:

As a label, illegitimacy described their collective status as outcasts who were legally and socially inferior to members of legitimate families headed by married couples. Unmarried birth parents and children suffered penalties ranging from confinements in isolated maternity homes and
dangerous baby farms to parental rejection and community disapproval. Before the 1960’s, unmarried mothers were usually considered undeserving of the public benefits offered to impoverished widows and deserted wives. They were generally denied mother’s pensions, which virtually all states granted beginning in 1910, and Aid to Dependent Children, a federal program created by the Social Security Act of 1935, (Divorced women and non-white women were also excluded.) To be illegitimate was to be shamed and shunned. (“The Adoption History: Illegitimacy,” The Adoption Project).

The passage reflects on the social discrimination of the illegitimate child and the unwed mother in the US. In “Bastardy and Baby Farming in Victorian England”, Dorothy L. Haller states:

Illegitimacy had always been stigmatized in English society. Since the 17th and the 18th centuries, negative attitude towards bastards was evident in legislation which denied them assistance from the poor rates. (Haller).

Further, Haller writes:

Unwed mothers and their infants were an affront to morality. They were spurned and ostracized both by the public relief and charitable institutions. Muller’s Orphan Asylum in Bristol in 1836 refused illegitimate children; they accepted only “lawfully begotten” orphans. Children conceived in sin had no doubt inherited their parents’ lack of moral character and would contaminate the minds and morals of legitimate children in their care. (Haller).
It is clear from the passage that illegitimacy and divorce are gender specific as per the English social notion on taboo. Prior to the 1960’s England, only widows and deserted wives were allocated the English public benefits while the state neglected and refused to provide this benefit to unwed mothers. Thus illegitimate children were ‘legally and socially inferior to members of legitimate families headed by married couples’. Therefore, Margaret Drabble in the select texts seems to highlight illegitimacy, divorce and early marriage as gender specific and that too, binding only the female gender.

It may be noted that in the 1960s England, the Law of Inheritance did not favour unwed mothers and their illegitimate children to inherit their father’s properties. Regarding the inheritance of properties *The Guardian* reports of unwed mothers and their children in “Illegitimacy: The Shameful Secret”:

> Before the 20th century it was illegal for illegitimate children to inherit, so among more prosperous families you may find that a trust was set up to care for his or her welfare. Most were not so fortunate. (“Illegitimacy: The Shameful Secret,” *The Guardian*).

It may also be noted that in ‘Bastardy and Baby Farming in Victorian England’, Dorothy L. Haller gives insight to the social treatment incurred on illegitimate children and their mothers before the twentieth century in England. The Victorian principle on illegitimacy dominates the social notions of England, which is reflected even in the 1960’s that Drabble illustrates through her male characters. Gender conflict that arises due to patriarchal ideology on the issue of inheritance is illustrated in *The Millstone*. Since illegitimate children and their mothers face further problems regarding inheritance, Rosamund’s doctor Dick Protheroe, and her male friends Joe and Roger are concerned about her and have offered her some of their own suggestions.
Rosamund’s friend Roger especially offers to marry her so as to solve the problem of illegitimacy for both Rosamund and her child. Roger suggests:

We could always get divorced more or less instantly. (TM 54).

The male idea of marriage as compensation for Rosamund and the baby is voiced by Roger, whereas Rosamund feels that marriage has no compensation. Roger’s suggestion further clarifies that a child of a divorced parent is more acceptable and preferable by the English society rather than a child born out of wedlock. In *Women’s Oppression Today*, Michele Barrett states:

The legislation on sex discrimination at work contains elements that are inexplicable except in terms of state support for an ideology of the family and women’s primary allegiance to it. For example, although it is illegal for an employer in Britain to discriminate against a woman on the grounds of her being married, it is not illegal – for instance in respect of maternity leave - to discriminate against her on the grounds that she is not married. At the time when the legislation was being drafted, a case was made, and the government accepted it, that institutions might want to withhold maternity benefits from unmarried mothers. (Barrett 231-232).

The crux of the matter at this point lies in legitimacy and marriage that directly relates to divorce. Marriage will legitimize the baby and will enable it to bear the name of the father even after the parents’ divorce. In a patriarchal set up, naming of the child consequently elevates the male gender while the female is submerged by the male identity. In *The Routledge Companion to Critical Theory*, Rob Lapsley in “Psychoanalytic Criticism” in agreement with Lacan states:
Such naming is no mere labeling. Rather it is an interpellation, a summon to the child to assume an identity not of its choosing, an identity which necessarily incarnates an ideal. (Malpas and Wake 75).

In the Lacanian theory, naming a child involves giving the child an identity which is not of the child’s choice. The child thus has to assume his or her identity by the given name. Similarly, in the case of Rosamund, Roger wants to name her and the baby through marriage. The conflict of marriage at this point arises in the naming of the child; indicant of patriarchal dominance. Roger wants to give Rosamund and the child an identity; his identity, which will finally entrap Rosamund and the child to an identity that she and her child, may not be willing to actualize. Lapsley further states:

Such naming gives rise to a sense of alienation. Although there is no self prior to the subject’s constitution within the signifying chain, prior to the conferral of an identity with its name, the subject feels that its true self has somehow been lost and betrayed. Hence subjects often protest at the identity assigned to them. (Malpas and Wake 75).

Therefore, the intelligent, educated and emancipated middle class protagonist refuses to be bound and entrapped by marriage to Roger. In Feminist Theory and Literary Practice, Deborah L. Madsen points out:

The wife, however, finds herself in a condition akin to slavery in that she is bound by her entire person to the man she has married. (Madsen 69).

Rosamund further expresses her dislike to Roger’s marriage proposal:

I think it’s a ridiculous notion. But nice, just the same. (TM 54).
It is ‘nice’ because Roger is thoughtful about her. Rosamund’s doctor Dick Protheroe suggests the name of an adoptive home for the baby while her friend Joe suggests that he lends her financial assistance for an abortion, and her male foreign students are sorry that she is pregnant.

Although Rosamund breaks the social code, she has to maintain a social front as she is still a part of the society that she lives in. Toril Moi in *What is a Woman?* explores the woman’s will to change, which in phallocentric writing is sadly omitted. Toril Moi questions:

> Am I not imprisoning myself in traditional disciplinary thinking? Have I no need to cross and breakup generic and disciplinary boundaries? (Moi 124).

At this juncture, Drabble through the protagonist Rosamund decides to ‘breakup the generic and disciplinary boundaries’ and Rosamund decides to have the illegitimate baby, face publicity, and in the consequence she meets the harsh ordeals and reality of living. Rosamund breaks the middle class moral code by deciding to be an independent mother, and she enters into an existence that she has never known. Her struggle involves completing her university thesis, earning her living by giving tuition to foreign students and awaiting the near delivery of her baby.

Drabble’s protagonists are caught in the economic crisis that the female gender experiences under patriarchal dictates. *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* states:

> The work involved in the production of middle-class gentility…these duties and enforced compliance to acceptable bourgeois standards. While the more affluent middle-class women had working-class servants to perform the arduous physical tasks, there is some evidence that many were
nevertheless kept busy to a degree and extent that puts the lie to the popular image of the idle lady of leisure. (Eagleton 151-152).

Therefore, the ‘production of middle class gentility’ and ‘acceptable bourgeois standard’ entails middle class dependence on ‘working-class servants to perform the arduous physical tasks’. The English middle class while establishing the middle class factors, standard and criteria has invariably created the necessity to obtain the aid of ‘working-class servants’ and has simultaneously established gender and class bias within the social set up. Unyielding to the English social psychology on the discourse of illegitimacy, Rosamund progresses towards her goal; keeping the baby in her custody as a single parent, completing her thesis and finding appropriate work to boost her talent and educational qualification thereby to solve her financial needs. Rosamund in her situation opposes the middle class morality that has created sexual division of labour which is further embraced as the English middle class tradition.

In her state of pregnancy Rosamund discovers that the ‘Domestic Advertisements’ in The Times papers are filled with:


The passage seems to clearly denote the necessity to procure workforce in order to maintain the English middle class bourgeois standard. Within the social context, work or labour allocated and favoured for the female gender is the work related to the domestic area, which is a prominent mark of gender division of labour. Marxist feminists also argue that the position of women is structurally different from that of men in a given social context resulting to sexual division of labour, which in turn produces gender inequality within society. In Women’s Oppression Today, Michele Barrett states:
Consideration of empirical evidence of this kind is essential and suggests that we may usefully approach the argument that domestic labour – indeed the sexual division of labour generally – is required by ‘the logic of capitalism’ by developing an historical perspective. (Barrett 176).

During the stages of her pregnancy Rosamund discovers the facts of life and she finds that gender inequality is most prominent within class structure:

Facts of inequality, of limitation, of separation, of the impossible, heartbreaking uneven hardship of the human lot. (TM 77).

The facts of life that Rosamund discovers are much deeper than class factor. The facts are about gender inequality, gender limitation and gender separation within the class itself and about the economic hardships of females ignored by males.

Further, in the novel, gender inequality related to financial control is observed in a conversation between the protagonist Rosamund and the woman in the National Health Centre who talks about hospital restrictions. The woman states:

One doesn’t realize, she said. “The first time, I’d no idea. They wouldn’t let me in with the first child. I had to get my husband to write the letter.”

And that worked?

“Oh yes. My husband has some influence here, you see. I don’t know what one would do without a little influence.” (TM 153).

A question arises; “Why does the woman need a letter from her husband to visit her own child?” This incident reflects the prevalence of gender inequality; the male as the superior gender. Marxist feminists in favour of equal relationship consider the separation of ‘personal’ identity from ‘class’ identity as a factor of inequality in a given social construct. The inequality in the
present context refers to gender inequality with respect to socio-economic matters where the male gender controls the family finances as the paid worker. Deborah L. Madsen in *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice* states:

> It is women’s economic dependence inside marriage, the unpaid and so devalued work they perform in the home, that determines women’s subordinate social status. (Madsen 86).

Thus, male gender as the generator of finances is preferred to the female and therefore the husband has more influence in the hospital. The woman; the mother of the child is thereby marginalised by the dictates of male dominance. The incident retold by the woman at the National Health Centre indicates that the woman is bound to her husband and requires her husband’s letter as factual proof that she (the woman) is the child’s mother and wife of the person writing the letter. The woman is deprived of her autonomous existence and she is therefore, submerged in her husband’s identity just as the slave is bound to the master for ownership and identity.

Maureen’s mother in *The Ice Age* takes the traditional mother role and her mother exasperatedly retorts:

> You girls these days, its self self self, money money money.

(TIA 56).

Maureen’s mother objects to her daughter’s aspiration to work and maintain a better lifestyle. This objection seems to affirm the social psychology that a woman must reside at home and work at home while a man must work to provide for his family. It is a difficult task for the mother to understand that her daughter is moving away from the existing tradition and social norms. Maureen’s mother is unable to comprehend the logistics of Maureen being a wage earner.
Money is also secondary to the mother and she grumbles about Maureen’s ambition to generate better income.

In the *Garrick Year*, Drabble denotes in the guise of her protagonist Emma Lawrence, how marriage exploits women and subordinates them to the whims of the male gender. The heated conversation between the husband David and Emma highlights the male subordination of the female gender in a wedded life:

‘You’re not in a position to complain,’ he said. It’s my lovely self that paid for those chops and that television and that dress you’re wearing and that roof over your head.’

‘ah well, said I, getting to my feet, perhaps that’s why I’m so keen on getting myself an independent income, so I can throw all this rubbish back on your charming face.’ (TGY 17).

Emma’s husband David Evans, an actor, is given a theatre job in Hereford and he tries to manipulate Emma to move with him from London to Hereford. The passage shows how the male benefactor controls the female and how the female is tied to the male in a married life. Emma is angry as she has to leave London and further decline the job that she has been promised two months earlier. Emma states:

I had been promised a couple of months before a very pleasant job as a news reader and announcer by a television company which had decided, as such companies will, to have another attempt at the equality of the sexes by allowing women to announce serious events as well as forthcoming programmes: I was to have been a pioneer in this field, and I fully expected to succeed where others had failed. (TGY 10).
The argument between David and Emma arises due to male dominance: David the husband and the head of the family.

The job opportunity that Emma has eagerly awaited in London is sidelined by her husband as he is also presently offered a new job to act in a play in Hereford. In *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol. IV*, Margaret Jackson in her critical essay, “Sex, Class and Hetero-Relations” comments on Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a leading American feminist and a major feminist theorist:

Gilman argued that the relationship between the sexes was primarily an economic one, and that the basis of that relation was ‘sex attraction’. She regarded marriage as the most degraded relationship in the animal kingdom. (Evans 7).

The woman therefore ceases to exist as an individual from the moment that she is married as she is tied to her husband whose identity is more important in a patriarchal society. In order to feed his male ego, maintain his superiority and dominance David decides to move to Hereford. Simultaneously, Emma and the children have to comply with the demands of David, and Emma’s job opportunity remains subordinate to David’s job opportunity.

Further, in *The Ice Age*, Margaret Drabble reveals how the male gender exploits the female gender in the work areas through the protagonist Alison Murray and one of her female characters Maureen Kirby who represent the 1960’s. She depicts how females are exploited in work through Alison Murray who assumes a subordinate role and gives up her acting career in order to avoid the competition with her husband in the theatre:
She had done it because she did not want to compete with her husband Donnell. Competition had made him angry. So she had withdrawn, and he had still been angry. One cannot win.

(TIA 108).

Drabble further narrates:

She was an actress, but had abandoned the stage on the birth of her second daughter, who suffered quite seriously from cerebral palsy: she started to work for the Foundation of the Disabled Children, and devoted herself to fund-raising, appealing, visiting, talking on radio, television, to the press. She was sufficiently well known to be able to do this with some impact.

(TIA 35).

The two passages from *The Ice Age* on Alison Murray show how women often give in to male whims that in turn nourish the male ego that attributes patriarchal dictates. Thus Alison, taking the subordinate role of the traditional female helps the Foundation of the Disabled Children and withdraws from the career of her choice.

Drabble illustrates the female need to upgrade her economic status and through Maureen, she unfolds how the lesser educated females pursue salaried jobs in offices. The following passage reveals Maureen’s early life:

So at the age of twenty she took a secretarial course. Secretaries were glamorous, thought Maureen. She had seen many sexy advertisements for them, and had read stories in which they married the boss, and had even seen rude pictures of them being groped by the boss….so she left boyfriend and saloon, learned shorthand and typing, started work in a
seedy solicitor’s office, and found herself, somewhat to her own surprise, very good at the job. (TIA 54).

Maureen takes the secretarial training in order to work in an office that would provide her better salary. She is surprised by her own competency level and her good work. At this juncture, Drabble seems to project her view on female competency and at the same time she seems to expose male infidelity in work areas. In “Fiction, History and Philosophy: The Work of Margaret Drabble”, Jane Duran states:

*The Ice Age* is remarkable for Drabble’s refusal to acknowledge any one view of any class of Britons as paramount. Rather, she moves from class to class and individual to give us an account of how history is created by its participants. (Duran).

Though Maureen and her mother do not belong to the middle class Maureen’s need to elevate her economic status signifies the female desire to have a career and a vertical growth in the social ladder. The office is thus, a training ground for Maureen as denoted:

She didn’t stay long with the seedy solicitor, who sealed his own fate by groping her…but she recognized that if he did that, just like in the pictures, then so might someone better. So she worked hard, and after a couple of years’ experience found herself with a very good post, as a secretary to a director of a company that sold air conditioners and ventilation… The pay was good, the work was interesting and involved quite a bit of travel and staying in smart hotels for sales conferences. It also involved quite a bit of groping, and much of the lighter side of business, for Stan, as he willingly admitted, was a dirty old man, who
didn’t mind a little harmless fun, and didn’t mind putting it in the way of his clients, either. (TIA 54-55).

Although Maureen is initially dismayed at this unexpected encounter, she takes this opportunity to upgrade her economic status. In two years’ time she leaves the office with the experience to work as a secretary to the director of a company. Even in her new office Maureen finds that she has to bear the physical exploitation of Stan the director. Deborah L. Madsen in *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice* states:

> In order to emphasise that it is the economic dependence of women as sexual class and not the circumstances, moral, personal and social, of particular women that causes them to turn to prostitution, of one sort or another, Goldman points to the diverse reasons why women become prostitutes: financial need, escape from an abusive home, physical disablement that excludes them from other forms of labour. (Madsen 68).

In this incident, Drabble’s focus lies on gender exploitation on economic ground; Maureen’s need to retain her job that provides her good pay. The female therefore succumbs to the needs of the male who dictates her and who is in a position to find a replacement if she quits her job. Thus Maureen remains quiet to keep her job, to get her pay and thereby, she has to submit to the sexual desires of the male who dictates her.

The novelist gives another instance of the male dominance of the female with respect to motherhood. In *The Millstone*, the exchange between Rosamund and the woman at the hospital reveals that the woman has to produce a letter from her husband in order to visit her child in the hospital. Rosamund is shocked to hear this strange confession from the woman as it is only when the husband’s letter is produced at the gate that the woman is free to visit her child. Thus, being a
husband and having a husband creates the required influence in the hospital environment. Since Rosamund is unwed, she is unable to provide the required letter. This poses a problem for her and she starts having hysterics that enables her to visit her baby. In *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, Juliet Mitchell in “Feminity, Narrative and Psychoanalysis” states:

> Hysteria is the woman’s simultaneous acceptance and refusal to the organization of sexuality under patriarchal capitalism. It is simultaneously what a woman can do both to the feminine and to refuse feminity, within patriarchal discourse. (Eagleton 155).

Rosamund’s concern therefore lies in what happens to those without influence and those who do not dare to have hysterics as she has done, but, at the same time who would like to visit their ailing children. The woman’s non-committal reply is:

> …. “My concerns are my concerns, and that’s where it ends, I haven’t the energy to go worrying about other people’s children. They’re nothing to do with me. I only have enough time to worry about myself. If I didn’t put myself and mine first, they wouldn’t survive. So I put them first and the others can look after themselves.” (TM 156).

The woman’s reply reflects an institutionalised capitalist view of extracting the best for oneself from others while neglecting others’ needs. Marxist feminists in favour of equality strongly attack capitalism, women’s oppression and sexual division of labour within a social construct. Jane Freedman in *Feminism* further argues that:

> …Following from this it can be argued that feminists must tackle the problems of economic and of social policy as inextricably linked- it is no use if women achieve equal pay in the labour market if at the same time
they are still carrying out the role of unpaid carers at home; similarly, merely rewarding women’s caring work in the home (usually through the provision of state benefits) will not be sufficient if inequalities persist in paid employment. Yet again we see the need underlined by feminists to rethink the boundaries between the public and the private and to reassess women’s work across these boundaries. (Freedman 53).

Since Rosamund is an emancipated woman, she is unable to comprehend the depth of tradition and patriarchy that permeates within the society. At this point, the woman at the hospital represents a person influenced by tradition while Rosamund represents a female who distances herself from tradition.

Although in The Ice Age, money is secondary to Maureen’s mother and she grumbles about Maureen’s ambition to generate better income, it is for her financial benefit that Maureen works for Stan as his secretary and later for Len Wincobank. As Maureen works for Len, she moves into Len’s flat to live with him although she does not marry him. It is probable that Maureen is living with Len in his flat so as to save her economic income while she can simultaneously enjoy her position as Len’s secretary, have a shelter and spend her free time with Len. Adult male and female living together without being married to each other seem to be one of the growing trends in the early 1960s England, and the narrator in the fiction comments:

Nobody minded that kind of irregularity, in the swinging sixties.

(TIA 57).

Drabble thus projects the issue of the English youth of the 1960s who have distanced their notion from the age old tradition of marriage and have opted for live-in partners while searching for the
kind of job that suits them. This change in the idea of marriage is depicted by both Maureen and Len.

In Maureen and Len, Drabble depicts the sentiment of the 1960s youth to move up the social ladder and to acquire the middle class status:

Those were the days when it seemed that Len couldn’t go wrong. Money for jam, money for old rope. He worked hard enough, and so did Maureen, but they were still surprised by their good luck. It’s a joke, isn’t it, Len would say, as deal succeeded deal. And it was. That was why they got on so well: born from the same kind of background, motivated by the same wish to get on, they understood one another perfectly, and they agreed that their success was, really, a bit of a giggle….over the joke of finding themselves drinking large drinks in four-star hotels, and driving a large car, and bouncing about in a large soft bed. (TIA 57-58).

Both Maureen and Len are willing to perform different kinds of work in order to enhance and generate their economic income and both of them work hard to reach their goal. From the extract, one can appreciate the hard work that pays to promote the social status of the two characters; an indication of the two characters’ upward mobility in the social rung. In an interview for the Believer, Drabble comments to Lydia Perovic:

When I wrote The Ice Age, I thought it would all get better again. And then comes the nineties, and I realize that it isn’t going to get better. It will get worse. Since I wrote that book, things have gotten worse, socio-economically. (Perovic).
Further, Drabble also seems to depict how the people of contemporary England in the 1960s go against tradition in the area of its economics. Drabble remarks on the British expansionist policy and comments on the British economy through the economist in the fiction and she narrates:

An economist who had just received a salary increase …. Man needs a prospect of increase. Only static, stagnant, hopeless communities can live without it. The poor must get rich, the rich must get richer.

(TIA 62-63).

The desire to acquire economic gains in the 1960s was a sentiment shared by different classes of the English society. The poor wanted to get rich and the rich wanted to get richer. The sentiment and desire to acquire economic gains was also strongly felt by the English female gender, especially by those that were educationally awakened on the issue of the female as paid workers, further motivated by feminist activists who demanded equal pay with the males. Through Alison, Drabble illustrates the female need for economic growth and the consequential participation in corrupt dealings:

Until she had met Anthony, she had never thought much about making money…. There had been nothing much that she had wanted: she ate well, she dressed well, what more could one want? She had never understood what it was that drove people on to want more: had not understood, that is, until she had met Anthony, and his new friends. And then, suddenly, the glamour of the whole business had enraptured her, as it had enraptured Anthony. She too had been thrilled, corrupted, by the prospect of large risks, large profits. The victor’s crown of gold. How on earth had she and
Anthony, two perfectly unambitious, ordinary, middle-of-the-road people, got themselves caught up in such a ludicrous world? (TIA 111-112).

Alison is unable to comprehend the cause of her desire for the acquisition of wealth, and she is astonished at the turn of events in her life. Alison remains unaware of the reason for her desire to acquire more wealth and she remains a stunned spectator to the changing events in her life. Although it is probable that Alison too is caught by the economic sentiment of the age for which she wants to enhance her economic status, yet, Drabble seems to suggest that the desire for economic expansion lies more prominent in the male gender than in the female gender. Drabble further reveals Anthony’s greed in *The Ice Age* and how he is later imprisoned for his evil deeds. As Maureen cuts Anthony’s hair with a pair of kitchen scissors in order to make him look more presentable, she reveals the true Anthony and exposes him with all his latent desires:

She had shorn away his disguise: he had been pretending successfully, for years, to be a charming new man of the seventies, pleasant, informal, easy-going, but underneath all the time there had been this man of iron purpose, with a head like a rock, and a lowering brow. (TIA 115).

Further, Maureen uncovers Anthony’s hidden looks that signifies male greed:

All he said was, ‘it’s a prison haircut you’ve given me in advance, duck.’ And had poured himself another drink, and returned to the subject of the wickedness and folly of those bloody small-time fools who think they can make money out of shares without running risks, without imagination, without suffering for it, without sweating for it. (TIA 115-116).

At this juncture, Anthony seems to represent the capitalist’s desire to acquire more wealth for economic growth. He describes himself as one of the ‘bloody small time fools who think they
can make money out of shares without running risks, without imagination, without suffering for it, without sweating for it.’

Margaret Drabble in *The Radiant Way* illustrates male economic control between the husband and the wife. Liz’s marriage with Edgar breaks up after eight months. Drabble indicates the complication of university education that confronts Liz, the divorcee. Although Liz continues her university education as a married woman, she is unable to receive the university educational grants. The female is directly controlled by patriarchal dictates on her economic grants, and Liz has to be satisfied with the meager amount that Edgar is willing to give her. The female situation on the economic criteria that is opposed by Marxist feminists is reflected on Liz’s married life, and furthermore, after her separation with Edgar. Since there is no economic progress for the female within her marriage, Liz has to be satisfied with the meager allowance that Edgar provides her from his educational grants. Thus, Liz is bound by marriage in many ways and therefore, marriage does not seem to be the ultimate answer to solve the problem of the female gender as it is often idealized and projected by traditional beliefs and social norms. In *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol. IV*, Stephen Lawler in “Getting Out and Getting Away”, comments on her research of the working-class females who had elevated themselves to the middle class through marriage:

However, I was struck, during the course of research, by the centrality of class to these women’s lives, and by their expressions of anxiety, insecurity and pain around class.

The women traced their trajectories to the middle-class position through two main routes: education, and marriage to a middle class man.

(Evans 320-321)
From the passage it is clear that the female can acquire her class by birth and by marriage while all along the female is subordinated to the working class. Marriage also positions the female to the status of the wife; the unpaid labourer. Lawler illustrates the acquisition of social class of the female gender; working class to middle class, yet she claims that the upward class mobility is, ‘what might be claimed as cultural artefacts of class’, and that the women participants for her research felt that the cultural artefacts were ‘not necessarily linked with the possession of capital’. On the other hand, Drabble illustrates the dilemma of Liz the middle class woman married to a bourgeois man who is once more reduced to the working class when Charles her second husband divorces her. Liz the middle class female who has been elevated to the bourgeoisie class for twenty years by her second marriage finds that she is economically reduced by her divorce. The narrator’s voice states:

And now Liz herself was suffering, and finding her glamour transformed into humiliation, if not in the public eye, then in her own. And it was true that all her riches, all her past investments, appeared not to avail her now: indeed, it appeared that some of them were not as solid as they had seemed, and might prove, like her marriage, illusory.

(TRW 129).

The passage illustrates Liz at the time of her divorce. She is humiliated as she has to step down from her pedestal of the bourgeoisie class to the working class whereby Liz is bereft of her wealth and glamour outside her marriage. In this instance, the female like the proletariat is under the subordination of the capitalist; the patriarch. Both Lawler and Drabble denote the temporal nature of class acquired by marriage and that the female is identified as a working class by her unpaid work.
Further, “Margaret Drabble’s *The Radiant Way*” by *Frisbee: A Book Journal* denotes:

Drabble explains that *The Radiant Way* was “A series that demonstrated eloquently, movingly, the evils that flow from a divisive class system from early selection from Britain’s unfortunate heritage of public schools and philistinism” (“Margaret Drabble’s *The Radiant Way,*” *Frisbee: A Book Journal*).

The novel affirms Drabble’s comment on the decisive class system for which Liz has married Charles, the established bourgeoisie. Drabble indicates marriage as a factor that subjugates the female of her career opportunity that could have established her in the middle class category independently. With her marriage Liz sinks to the working class as she assumes the role of the unpaid worker; domestication, reproduction and child care while Charles maintains his autonomy and distance. The patriarchal ideology that conditions the English social norm falls on Liz at the time of her divorce, and she has to patiently expect that Charles will make a decent divorce settlement. Liz represents the traditional female who depends on the male gender to provide her economic needs. Therefore, Liz is unable to envisage her future without Charles’s financial support. At this juncture, Liz fails to emerge as one of the new women as she submits to Charles to make her a decent settlement.

Margaret Drabble’s concern is focused on the the female education that is illustrated by her works. The female protagonist in *The Ice Age*, Alison Murray is in a way a combination of both the traditional and the contemporary female as she exposes the two qualities:

For Alison Murray, beauty had for years been her identity. She had no other. How could she ever make another, for the second half of her necessary life? (TIA 95).
Alison is worried about what she would do in five years’ time when she has grown older. She is afraid that she will not be able to look at herself in the mirror. Drabble further remarks:

Alison Murray was not a very well-educated person, so she looked for the striking objects on display, rather than those of historical importance…

(TIA 110).

On the other hand, Rosamund is determined to remain a single parent to the baby and she is undaunted by the English social psychology on the issue of illegitimate babies. As she has a commendable educational qualification and confidence in her talent Rosamund states:

Also, although I am different about the particulars of my qualifications I suppose I must have a rock-like confidence in my own talent, for I simply did not believe that the handicap of one small illegitimate baby would make a scrap of difference to my career: I was in such a strong position by nature that were a situation to arise in which there were any choice to make between me and another, I would win, through the evident superiority of my mind. (TM 125).

In The Millstone, the protagonist Rosamund who is in the process of completing her thesis is confident of her talent and comments that she would win if there was a contest between her and another person. Simultaneously, she is confident that her baby would not create any difference in her career. Rosamund’s comments and confidence reveals the progression of the female gender towards emancipation. Maureen Kirby in The Ice Age is also determined to change her social status, but, unlike Rosamund, she belongs to the lower rung of the English society:

Maureen Kirby had been born in Attercliffe, Sheffield, in 1946, nine months after her father was demobbed. She was the youngest of six, and
slept three to a bed through most of her childhood. Her first idea of bettering herself was via hairdressing, the glamour of which appealed to her and most of her school friends, so she started cutting hair at the age of fifteen. She was quite happy for two or three years, cutting, shampooing, back combing,… in her cheap smart two-piece suits, with her brown bouffant hair. (TIA 54).

Although Maureen chooses to leave her education at the age of fifteen to work in a hair dressing saloon, in a couple of years she finds that the glamour as a hairdresser fades and further, she finds that her career does not give her the required fame that she has hoped to attain. The following passage focuses on Maureen’s dejected state:

But even she could see she wasn’t going to get anywhere, from the back saloon of Suzanne’s. The area was going downhill, too,… But she could see there was no future in Suzanne’s. The glamour was fading. (TIA 54).

The passage depicts the plight of young girls of the 1960s England who work at an early age in places that need female assistances and who in a few years time find that they are not able to reach their envisaged goals. In *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s*, Stephanie Spencer states:

The vast majority of girls left school at 15 and, after, at most, a brief training period, entered employment only to leave once married.

(Spencer).

The reason seems to lie in the fact that work and early marriage in the English society is gender constructed due to which the female soon leaves her education. The wage where the female work
force is concentrated is quite minimal in comparison to the wage that the male earns. In *Women’s Oppression Today*, Michele Barrett states:

> The distribution of women across particular occupations is extremely uneven: women comprise 64.8% of the education, health and welfare labour force, 73.4% of the clerical, 58.6% of selling, 75.5% of personal services (catering, hairdressing and so on). Furthermore, over 60% of the entire female workforce is concentrated in only ten occupations. (Barrett 156).

Thus, the glamour of hairdressing fades for Maureen and she attends the secretarial training.

Rosamund and Maureen denote the vast difference of educational qualifications between the middle class and the lower class English female gender. While Rosamund of *The Mill Stone* is in the process of completing her university thesis, Maureen Kirby of *The Ice Age* at the age of fifteen leaves her education to work as a hairdresser. Thus, the opinions of the two female characters differ; Maureen chooses the glamour and Rosamund opts for the academic work that is illustrated by the tuitions that she gives to her varied students and the thesis that she is about to complete. In “Women and Schooling – Spartacus Educational on Women and Schooling”, John Simkin writes:

> In her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* Mary Wollstonecraft attacked the educational restrictions that kept women in a “state of ignorance and dependent on men”. Feminists in the 1880’s agreed with Wollstonecraft that girls should have the same educational opportunities as boys. However this was very difficult as there were many schools in the country that provided a good academic education for girls. (Simkin).
Simkin further states that the first of the feminists in the 1880s who tried to improve girls’ and women’s educations were Marie Corbett, Louisa Martindale, Mary Francis Buss and Dorothea Beale. Education is gender specific and therefore work is gender constructed. Although many schools in England provided ‘good academic education for girls’, yet, it should be noted that all girls were not in a condition to attend such schools, as in the case of Maureen who belongs to the lower rung of the society, and that education was not free before the 1960s in England. Further, Richard Brown in “Looking at History: Educating Girls 1870-1914” illustrates the female literacy rates and the quality of female education in 1851 in England:

Female literacy rates in 1851 were still only 55% compared to nearly 70% for men. …

The education of women was class-based as that of boys. Well to do girls were educated at home or in small academies in 1830. The academic content was low and, with the transformation of grammar schools, girls found themselves excluded from establishments they had attended in the eighteenth century. (Brown).

Margaret Drabble’s views on female intelligence and the importance of female education are clearly depicted in the form of her protagonists. From the select texts, it is found that all her protagonists are educated and intelligent females belonging to the middle class English society. Through her female protagonists Drabble projects the female urge to elevate oneself in the realm of education and to hold a career that can procure class and salary to the female worker. Although most of her minor female characters belong to the working class, yet, these minor characters are females who are intelligent and ones who can tackle their jobs as per requisite.
Drabble’s focus in *The Radiant Way*, is on the life of the three women who has attended university education, and the changes undergone by the women after their university education.

Drabble in the novel narrates about the female protagonists:

Liz, Alix and Esther all obtained places at the college of their choice, in Cambridge, and they were reunited, to gossip there and elsewhere over subsequent decades for their fortuitous friendship. (TRW 86).

The narrator comments:

Liz Ablewhite was offered, and graciously accepted, the Alethea Ward Scholarship in Natural Sciences (an annual college award specifically designated by Dr Ward, 1853-1935, for female students of medicine from the county of Yorkshire, her own home county), the goal towards which her mother had been directing her for the past ten years. (TRW 86).

The narrator further informs about Alix:

Alix was offered places at both colleges of her choice. In fact, she was offered a better deal (let us not go into too many historic technicalities) in Oxford, but she chose Cambridge because of Flora Piercy’s eye-shadow, and because of Dr Leavis. (TRW 87).

And the narrator comments on the third protagonist of the novel:

Esther was also offered places at both universities, and chose Cambridge because it offered her a scholarship, and because her brother had been at King’s, and because she heard an owl hoot thrice in the college garden when she retired to her narrow bed after the glass of wine with Flors
Piercy. This last explanation for her choice is the one she most frequently proffered. (TRW 87).

The three characters of *The Radiant Way* Liz, Alix and Esther, though they belong to the upper middle class by their birth, make their mark in the upper middle class English society through their education. Liz and Alix further seal their upper middle class status by their marriages to men belonging to the upper middle class. On the other hand, Esther seals her upper middle class status by working in a university.

The novelist also denotes that the emerging ideology on the female education was supported by many parents of intelligent female children. Bessie Bawtry, an intelligent girl in *The Peppered Moth* is keen on her education. Yet, her education is disrupted by the influenza pandemic as illustrated:

> The influenza pandemic of 1918-1919 was responsible we are told for the highest mortality rate of any pandemic since the Black Death of the fourteenth century. (TPM 22).

Bessie’s parents support their daughter’s intelligence by paying attention to her education. With the help of one of Bessie’s efficient school teacher Miss Heald, her parents hope that their daughter will one day have a place in higher education. Drabble’s favour for good educational formative years for the female child is illustrated in Bessie’s childhood education:

> She had been introduced to English Language and Literature, Reading and Recitation, History, Geography, French, Arithmetic Algebra, Science, Scripture, Art, Needlework and Nature Study. Riches of learning spread themselves before her. (The subjects of Music and Laundry, although
listed as options upon her terminal report, do not seem to have engaged
her scholarly attention….) (TPM 21).

After the influenza pandemic, as Bessie’s health recovers, she returns to her books and studies
for her examination and earns a Cambridge scholarship. Bessie Bawtry is ambitious and she is
glad to leave her family and her small Yorkshire town in order to study in London. In Women’s
Oppression Today, Michele Barrett states:

Schools take children and drill them in the ruling ideology. Around the
age of sixteen a huge mass are ejected, as workers or peasants; others
continue to become the petty bourgeoisie; others proceed further to
emerge as agents of exploitation, agents of repression or professional
ideologists. (Barrett 116).

Bessie’s move from Yorkshire to London on receiving her scholarship marks the transformation
of a female from a small town girl to a city girl as she prepares herself to study her degree in
Cambridge. Yet the elevation from a studious and an intelligent country girl to a city girl in
Cambridge is but a tasking incident for young Bessie as she has to be thoroughly prepared in the
subjects that deal with the following topics:

Bessie swots and revises. Shakespeare, Browning, and Keats,
French verbs, Lamartine, Verlaine, General knowledge, The League of
Nations, Universal Suffrage and the women’s Vote. John Struat Mill on
Liberty, Ruskin on Manufacturing. Miss Heald ponders: perhaps a touch
of the moderns? May one admit to reading D. H. Lawrence, Edith Sitwell.
(TPM 71).
Bessie takes her degree, leaves Cambridge and she returns to Breaseborough in Yorkshire as it was difficult in her days to find jobs. Through her protagonists, Drabble cites incidents of the early twentieth century pertaining to female education and the particular work that is enforced on them. Michele Barrett in *Women’s Oppression Today* states:

Furthermore, the girl who does decide to proceed to university in, say, an engineering subject, will find herself in a department dominated by men and an ethos of masculinity. Much of the pattern of subject stereotyping by sex, which results in girls going into arts and social science subjects and boys into science and technology, is established very firmly in terms of the teaching staff. (Barrett 144).

In *The Peppered Moth*, Bessie works as a teacher of Literature and it wins her an award that is recorded in the “Breaseborough Times”:

The *Breaseborough Times* had reproduced it in full, with the headline ‘High Literary Quality: Breaseborough Teacher Wins Award’, and a photograph of pretty twenty-three-year-old Miss Bawtry. (TPM 12).

It is only a century later that Bessie is re-introduced in the novel, in the form of her emancipated granddaughter Faro; intelligent and well educated journalist who travels to Yorkshire.

In the *Witch of Exmoor*, Drabble’s focus is on Frieda a well educated and an eminent writer. In order to pursue her writing Frieda isolates herself from her grown up children and grandchildren. Thus, Frieda resides in a remote broken down hotel by the sea to nurture her identity as a writer. She does not own a phone and does not want visitors to disturb her peaceful life. In the following passage, Gogo, one of Frieda’s children describes Frieda’s present state:
‘A society without human beings’, says Gogo, breaking her silence, is exactly what she seems to have designed for herself.’ (TWE 9).

Gogo questions Rosemary who has earlier visited her mother Frieda and the exchange between Gogo and Rosemary confirms the fact that Frieda indeed does not want any disturbance from her family members. Gogo asks Rosemary if their mother had wanted her (Rosemary) to enter the house to which Rosemary replies:

‘Not really. She kept out there in this terrible overgrown court-yard. Nettles everywhere. And it was pissing with rain. She had her back to the door as though she was guarding something. I had to say I was dying for a pee before she’d let me in. And then she said, why didn’t you stop a bit earlier and pee in the hedge?’ (TWE 10).

From the passage it is quite clear that Frieda does not want anyone to intrude into her life, not even anyone from her family. To Rosemary’s remarks Daniel comments that maybe Frieda does not want to see any of them and Rosemary replies:

‘Well,’ says Rosemary, with gravitas, ‘that would seem to be the message. She says she doesn’t want to see anyone. She says she’s too busy. I said busy doing what, and she said she was busy being a recluse. She said it was a full-time job.’ (TWE 11).

Frieda’s children who are adults with children of their own are unable to comprehend Frieda’s need to reside in isolation. Although Frieda claims that she has not been a good mother to her children, yet, as she grows older she feels the necessity to be alone. The idea of living in isolation seems to stem from the unpaid work that she has to voluntarily perform in the family home to satisfy her children and her grandchildren. Living in isolation also provides Frieda the
necessary time and space required for writing. In *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, Virginia Woolf in “A Room of One’s Own” Mary Eagleton illustrates:

If a woman wrote, she would have to write in the common sitting-room.
And, as Miss Nightingale was so vehemently to complain, - ‘women never have an half hour...that they call their own’ – she was always interrupted.
Still it would be easier to write prose and fiction there than to write poetry or a play. Less concentration is required. Jane Austin wrote like that to the end of her days. (Eagleton 145-146).

Contrary to the situation of the home where Frieda is the mother and the grandmother, living in isolation provides her the freedom to be herself; to express her thoughts in her writing, to eat and work at her own whims, and to have her own time for leisure. Through the protagonist Frieda, Drabble seems to suggest the necessity of utilizing education in the area of writing as suggested by Helene Cixous and various feminists. In *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, Mary Eagleton in “Women and Literary Production” states:

The catalogue of material problems is long – inequalities is in the educational system, lack of privacy, responsibilities of child-bearing and rearing, domestic obligations – but equally decisive are the restrictions of family and social expectations. (Eagleton 66).

Further, Drabble’s focus on the importance of publishing the writings; economically productive, is in agreement with the Marxist feminist concern of production and its economics. In *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, Geurin et al states:

Perhaps the most significant source of constructivist feminism is Marxism, especially its focus upon the relations between reading and other social
constructions. The establishment of so many women’s study programs, cooperatives, bookstores, libraries, film boards, political caucuses and community groups attests to the activist orientation of feminism. (Guerin et al. 234).

Marxist feminists focus on the relation between reading and other social constructions and they consider the production of texts and publishing industries as factors of socio economic development.

The focus on *The Sea Lady* seems to lie in the capacity of the female gender to submerge herself in the kind of work that she loves. Drabble seems to take a detour in selecting her female protagonist. Drabble’s choice of the tomboy Ailsa as the protagonist marks the difference of the novel from the other select texts and the reader is instantly aware that Ailsa is in constant competition with the boys during her childhood in order to assert her competency. Ailsa is an educated and an intellectual woman who is an academician, an actress and a social worker. The thrust of the argument at this point is the difference of character that shapes a female child during her childhood. In her childhood, Ailsa’s close friends are her brother Tommy and the boys in her neighbourhood. She is therefore, a child who constantly competes with boys in different children’s games, and at the same time she is accustomed to do the girlish chores to help her mother at home. The following extract depicts Ailsa as a child:

Ailsa Kelman, as a child, had played the old childhood games. She had joined the dots, and found the hidden shapes and faces. She had played Fives and Conkers and Battle Ships and Hangman. A combative child, she had liked competitive cut-throat games, and she liked to win. She had tried to beat her brother Tommy for years, and occasionally she
had succeeded. But she had also played girlish games, silly soppy shameful giggling girlish games. She had peeled the hard green cooking apple, and thrown the peel over her shoulder to see if it formed the initial letter of a sweetheart’s name. (TSL 97).

Since Drabble in *The Sea Lady*, seems to highlight the female transition period in the English female education, her female protagonist Ailsa is also a character with transitional stages. Ailsa the intelligent girl child develops many male characteristics since she has only her brother Tommy and his friends as her childhood friends. Yet, this tomboy emerges as a beautiful intelligent woman who is well educated and one who is in the process of writing her thesis on social biology. The protagonist is the one who lives the stages of transition; who does not take teaching as her profession but diverts her skill on acting in the theatre in order to stay in the limelight for a while. Carol Dyhouse in *Policy Papers: History and Policy* states:

> In 1939 women constituted less than a quarter of the university student population, a proportion which remained fairly stable until the late 1960s, when it began slowly to rise. The real turning point came in the 1970s, after which the growth in female participation seemed inexorable, although it has steadied in recent years. (Dyhouse).

In this educational transition period, many interested females continued their education in Cambridge and Oxford and Carol Dyhouse further states:

> By 1963 nearly 70% of students were receiving grants almost wholly from public funds. Under these conditions the experience of ‘going to university’ was reshaped in important ways, not least because more young people could afford to choose universities away from home. Students at
Oxford and Cambridge secured what was in effect a double subsidy from public funds, since both university and their college fees were paid for them. (Dyhouse).

Ailsa is fortunate because in her time the educational changes further opened avenues and women could choose their preferences in various subjects that seemed to be experimented on the female gender. Drabble’s protagonist thus prefers to study Sociobiology in lieu of the subjects offered to her female predecessors. Humphrey the male protagonist, in his old age reflects the changes in the field of education during his time; as a student and as a prominent marine biologist, and he recollects:

He thought of the incoming tide, and of the ebb and flow of schools and disciplines and reputations. He was old now, and he had seen them come and go. He had heard the complaints at High Table. The resisted rise of sociobiology, the waning of Belles-lettres and of literary criticism, the rise of deconstruction, the rise of literary theory, the decline of the Germanic languages, the spread of the Hispanic languages, the death of easel art, the fad for installations, the rise of women’s studies, the rise of media studies, and of business studies, and of sports science, and of political correctness, and of academic servitude. He had been witness to the snapping and the snipping, the gossip and the grievances. He had seen it all, he had followed it all. (TSL, 149).

Through Humphrey, Drabble illustrates the changes in the field of education in England. She clearly remarks on her perspective of the female education that still lacks the subjects concerned with science.
Ailsa who is introduced as a mermaid to the reader in the beginning of the select text seems to be a notably famous person:

Ailsa’s name was listed as a member of the company. There was a brief biography of each member, in alphabetical order. Ailsa Kelman in the travelling repertory, appeared as Marina in Pericles, Prince of Tyre, and as the Mermaid Princess in an adaptation of Hans Andersen’s The Little Mermaid, a work advertised as ‘not suitable for young children’. (TSL 156).

While drinking in the bar after her performance, Ailsa in her second round of her drinks gives a clue about her other work to Sonia who tries to decry her in a concealed way:

Ailsa confided that she too had been writing a dissertation, when the roles of Marina and the Princess had beckoned her: she would return to it, she asserted, as soon as the season was over, and as soon as she could re-organise her funding. And what had been her subject, enquired Sonia with a very slight tone of patronage. Expressionist drama in France and Belgium, retorted Ailsa with panache. (TSL 158).

When the third round of drinks purchased by Ailsa follows, it reveals another side of Ailsa:

This round revealed that Ailsa had studied modern languages at Edinburgh, and had then spent a year or so of further post graduate study in Paris attached to the Institut Des Arts Dramatiques, where she had unfortunately made the acquaintance of Martin Pope. (TSL 159).
In *The Sea Lady*, it is through the undaunted Ailsa that Drabble depicts the various qualities embedded in a woman, and the female impulse to manifest those qualities at different stages of a woman’s life. Michele Barrett in *Women’s Oppression Today* states:

> This area represents the primary site of relations between men and women, of the construction of gendered individuals, and is closely related to the organization of social production. The structure and ideology of the family in contemporary capitalism is surely the most salient issue for any Marxist feminist approach to address. (Barrett 186).

Drabble therefore, suggests that in order to amplify and actualize the female qualities, the female needs good education and intelligence in order to understand her own female nature, and to replace her female fears the female must be supported with intellectual strength and boldness thereby to gain her position in her competition with the male gender.

It is interesting to note that the female protagonist of each select text is an educated and an intelligent female character, yet, each female character differs from the others in the way that she utilizes her education and intelligence. The similarity in each female character lies in the need to change herself towards a better self thereby to enhance her female identity and maintain her own economic stability. It may further be noted that each protagonist and the minor female characters of the select texts are willing to undergo changes even if it affects the routine life of the females deemed by social notions. Thus, it may be concluded that in the select texts Margaret Drabble highlights patriarchy as one of the dominant factors that leads to the marginalization of women within a social context, and this subjugation in turn leads to female subordination in the area of female financial gains and female education.
Marxist Feminists who believe patriarchy and capitalism to be interchangeably related are of the opinion that the economic condition which is the main determinant of class and gender situate the males as the dominant gender and the females as the subordinate gender. Therefore, illegitimate children and their unwed mothers are the unfavoured class of the English society as the paternity that is supposed to dictate them is absent to the child and the unwed mother. The dominant male gender of the society dictates over this group and thus, prior to the late 1960s, the state benefits are not provided to the illegitimate children and their unwed mothers while widows and deserted wives are provided the state benefits in England. Further, the female education, social and economic depictions in the select texts prove that texts are records of the female conflicts and struggles in the 1960s England.