CHAPTER – III

WOMEN AND THE MALE ABSENCE
This chapter deals with the study of women wage earners and the struggles and conflicts imposed due to patriarchal dictates. It will discuss acceptance of the female gender by male co-workers in relation to the husband as a worker. It attempts to reveal women’s psychology, maternity and sexual encounters. Through various discourses in the select novels and related theories it will attempt to expose how words like ‘liberty’ and ‘freedom’ are used as gender binding forces.

Through the preceding centuries, the female gender has been one of the most important work-force in the English society. Yet, the female gender is given no choice in the kind of work that she would like to perform as the female child is marginalized by the subjects that she is offered and the counseling that she is given. In The Feminine Mistique, Betty Friedan states:

Sometimes a girl wanted to take a hard subject, but was advised by a guidance counselor or teacher that it was a waste of time—as, for instance, the girl in a good Eastern high school who wanted to be an architect. Her counselor strongly advised her against applying for admission anywhere in architecture, on the grounds that women are rare in that profession, and she would never get in anyhow. She stubbornly applied to two universities who give degrees in architecture; both, to her amazement, accepted her. Then her counselor told her that even though she had been accepted, there was really no future for women in architecture; she would spend her life in a drafting room. She was advised to go to a junior college where the work would be much easier than in architecture and where she would learn all she needed to know when she married. (Fridan 242).
It is clear that social perception and social values accepted and practiced by a society creates differences and hegemony soon enters to mark the differences as the favoured and the less favoured. Thus, the female is not in a position to choose and she is simultaneously advised to attend a junior college that would teach her ‘all that she needed to know when she married’. Social notions on marriage thus created by institutions manipulate and indoctrinate the female mindset for which marriage seems to be compulsory; to the female gender and to the parents. The female gender further faces subjugation in her work opportunity either from her senior male colleague or at home, from her own husband.

In the select texts, Drabble depicts married women living separate lives, life of divorcees and life of a single mother who bears an illegitimate child. The protagonists have to bear the brunt of social prejudice that stems from traditional norms and social values. In *The Ice Age*, Drabble depicts the instance of a woman who has to leave her job due to the competition that arises from her husband. Alison is not well educated yet she is a promising actress. She has to give up her career as an actress since she is a close competitor of her husband Donnell. When Alison faces the hardship of making the choice, she asks for her friend’s advice:

That evening, she rang Maureen. For advice, for sympathy. It was not in Alison’s nature to ask advice, and she was not a woman with women friends of her own age: her proud defence of Molly had isolated her, as had her beauty. No other women could like me, Alison had reasonably enough decided, at an early age: they would be sure to resent me. (As her sister Rosemary had done.) This was a realistic decision, for other women did resent Alison, but had not, in view of Molly’s existence, and Alison’s withdrawal from competition, been allowed the opportunity to express or
formulate their resentment: therefore they had resented her all the more, though they had been obliged to call her a perfect mother, a saint even, behind her back. It was not fair on them, or on her. But life is not fair. (TIA 228).

Although Alison’s decision seems to be the best for a married woman Alison is unhappy and she feels that life is not fair; she sacrifices her work to make her husband happy. It is at this juncture that the male gender takes the role of the capitalist and Donnell makes her submit to his whims, arrogance and anger, and drives Alison out of her work place. The male thus assumes the role of the benefactor and the female submerges to role of the unpaid worker at home. On the other hand, Alison’s home is peaceful in her husband’s absence, and she devotes her time to being a good mother to her daughters. At home, Alison is free from her husband’s arrogance and temperamental attitude.

Thus, hegemony arises between the two classes, in this instance the male and the female gender, whereby the proletariats; the females are controlled by the capitalists; the males. Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature* states:

Hegemony is then not only the articulate upper level of ‘ideology’, nor are its forms of control only those ordinarily seen as ‘manipulation’ or ‘indoctrination’. It is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of values – constitutive and constituting – which they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. (Williams 110).
The dictated ‘perception’ develops into ‘a lived system of values’ and a chain reaction is formed as an individual’s mental setup is affected by the conceived notions of the society to which one belongs. Although psychology is affected by conceived notions, the existence of a vast gap between the capitalist and the proletariat creates hegemony which in turn creates dependence. Simultaneously, dependence creates struggle which is a resistance against the existing hierarchy. 

*The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, Nancy Hartmann in “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism” states:

First, early Marxists, including Marx, Engels, Kautsky, and Lenin, saw capitalism drawing all women into the wage labor force, and saw this process destroying the sexual division of labor. Second, contemporary Marxists have incorporated women into an analysis of everyday life in capitalism. In this view, all aspects of our lives are seen to reproduce the capitalist system and we are all workers in the system. And third, Marxist feminists have focused on housework and its relation to capital, some arguing that housework produces surplus value and that houseworkers work directly for capitalists. (Nicholson 98-99).

In *The Garrick Year*, Drabble narrates another incident where a woman has to leave a job that she is promised in order to appease her husband. David is an actor in the theatre and Emma is an educated woman who is promised a job in the BBC. Yet, David who has a small part in a play has to move from London to Hereford and Emma has to sacrifice her job in order to be with her husband. After her marriage, Emma like Alison is dominated by her husband. Even though she craves to work in a job that she thinks will suit her, she is unable to do what she wants. The
idea of the male benefactor and male superiority is at work and David succeeds to manipulate his wife to move with him to Hereford. At Hereford Emma is discontented and she remarks:

I hardly saw David in the last day or two before the opening. *The Clandestine Marriage* was to open on the Tuesday, and *The White Devil* on the following Friday. The proximity of the dates was causing much avoidable overwork, late night panic and confusion which everyone involved seemed to need and to enjoy. (TGY 95).

All that Emma gains in Hereford is boredom panic and confusion. She has lost her job and she has not made much use of her education as she takes the subordinate role. She stoops to the role of the unpaid worker and most of the times David does not seem to acknowledge her as his wife. Emma is thus a spectator in her husband’s world. Although Emma is displeased with David, yet she is peaceful in her husband’s absence. She seems to recover her smiles when her help Pascal is around. Yet, her longing to work as a paid employee is often reflected in her conversations.

In the case of David and Donnell, they remain unaware of their wives when work dictates them. The difference seems to lie in the male factor due to which David spends late nights away from his home while Emma experiences panic and fear, and Alison is often left alone at home. In, *The Feminist e Zine*, Martha E. Gimenez in “Marxist & Materialist Feminism” states:

Landry & Mac Lean, authors of *Materialist Feminisms* (1993), tell us that theirs is a book “about feminism and Marxism” in which they examine the debates between feminism and Marxism in the US and Britain and explore the implications of those debates for literary and cultural theory…it is the conclusion that the authors, aiming to demonstrate that materialism is not
an alias for Marxism outline the difference between Marxist Feminism and Material Feminism as follows:

“Marxist feminism holds class contradictions and class analysis central, and has tried various ways of working an analysis of gender oppression around this central contradiction and contradictions within gender ideology…we are arguing that materialist feminism should recognize as material other contradictions as well. (Gimenez).

Gimenez highlights Laundry & Mac Lean’s *Material Feminisms* that denotes that Marxist feminism has focused on many issues pertaining to class contradictions and gender oppression concerned with gender ideology. Marxist feminists therefore believe that in heterosexual relations, the oppressor takes the role of the capitalist and the one subjugated is marginalised just as the proletariat is marginalised by the capitalist.

In *The Sea Lady*, Margaret Drabble captures Ailsa Kelman as a child who grows up in a boys’ world. She has no female siblings and as her locality has no other girls of her age Ailsa has no choice but to make friends with the boys. As an intelligent child she plays and competes with her brother and his friends although she performs young girl’s chores at home while helping her mother. The intelligent Ailsa attends college and she receives her fame as an educated lady, and still pursues her further studies while she simultaneously performs in the theatre. Ailsa is able to pursue and attain her goals, yet she is like a child waiting for more:

Like a child, Ailsa Kelman still expects something new to happen every time she approaches the departure gate. She knows that the story is not over. (TSL 81).
It is a tough competition that Ailsa has to fight in order to win her fame. The competition that she endures as an adult reflects her formative years. Ailsa as a child refuses to be subjugated by her brother and his friends and this refusal towards subjugation is her deepest conflict. This conflict is directly interlinked with her social values. She tells Humphrey that she wants to give up the theatre as it is not good for her. She therefore depicts a female caught between tradition and progress. However, the toil for the female gender goes on and with every success Ailsa is aware that her story is not at an end. As a divorcee, she is free to choose her job and she exhibits her zeal in her job. Ailsa is unmatchable in her work and the audience loves her. In the absence of a male counter part, Ailsa’s female determination emerges and she captures her audience with her stage performances. Her freedom from male control may be credited as the factor that brings out the best in Ailsa.

In *The Witch of Exmoor*, Drabble narrates the incident of Frieda Haxby who is deserted by her husband. In order to make her ends meet and to feed her children, Frieda works like a man. Like Ailsa, Frieda is an intelligent and an educated woman. After her marriage, Frieda stays at home and attends to her children. When her husband finally deserts her she struggles all the more due to the presence of her mother:

Frieda had been a grim worker all her life, and she had been held in grim combat by Gladys. In Gladys’s presence, Frieda was oddly subdued, reverting to a morbid attentive unwilling servitude that suggested what she had been like as a sulky, determined, ambitious child. Gladys Haxby had been a schoolmistress, and in her demanding and irksome company Frieda became once more a pupil, a listener, although she had nothing to learn and Gladys had nothing to say. Frieda, herself no mean talker, fell silent in
her mother’s presence, as Gladys talked and talked, of nothing. Of herself, of nothing. An unchanging subjugation. (TWE 29).

The presence of her mother after her husband deserts her is no consolation for Frieda. Her determination and ambition is negated by the demanding and irritating presence of her mother to whom she remains a student. But, Frieda’s determination takes her to a level where she submerges her difficulties. Since her husband has deserted her, Frieda is unbounded by patriarchy in her home, and with her new freedom, she is at liberty to work for herself and her family. She does not ask for any financial support, and she does not talk about the man who has deserted her. Although Frieda is well educated, her life is marred by her unfaithful husband who finally deserts her. She has lost her job opportunity due to her marriage and ultimately as her husband deserts her, she has to make her ends meet. Although Frieda seems to have had no economic progress during her marriage since the husband’s financial provision remains untold by the narrator, yet, Frieda’s socio-economic problems are more transparent when her husband leaves as she freely performs all the work unhidden, and simultaneously, she starts writing her articles for publication. Without the male dominance; the husband, Frieda’s work is acknowledged due to which the misery of her socio-economic condition seems to be magnified. Feminists therefore rise against various issues under patriarchal dictates; acceptance, acknowledgement, liberation, male questionings and socio-economic development of women.

In order to reconstruct the existing gender socio-economic problems, Marxist feminists have revised the Marxist aesthetics and structuralism. Jane Freedman in *Feminism* states:

> Marxists and socialist feminists link gender inequality and women’s oppression to the capitalist system of production and the division of labour consistent with this system;…. (Freedman 5).
The reason of argument lies in the belief that the ruling and dominant class is able to dominate over the working class as they can financially impose mass consent. Marxist feminists in favour of equality strongly attack capitalism, women’s oppression, and sexual division of labour within a social construct. In The Radiant Way, Drabble gives the instance of a woman who is divorced by her second husband. Liz marries Charles who is a widower with three young boys. Yet, after twenty years of marriage Charles seeks to divorce his wife. Liz, the abject wife seeks sympathy from her friend Alix who is unable to provide her any comfort. Drabble narrates:

She might have expected more obvious sympathy from the more obviously tender-hearted Alix, but did not get it. Alix’s response to Liz’s new situation was complex, and she questioned herself about it, deciding that it was probably determined at least in part by her envy of Liz and Charles’s wealth. She herself had had a hard time, had chosen, perhaps, a hard time, and was still not exactly affluent: she still had to count the change, to stand at bus stops in the rain, the worry about the mortgage, the gas bill. (TRW 127).

Liz turns to Alix in her poignant hour, but Alix is incapable of being a sympathizer and a comforter as she still lives on a low financial budget and is over weighed by her own worries. At this juncture, Alix is more practical about economical living while Liz lives the bourgeoisie life. Though both Liz and Alix belong to the middle class, yet, the difference in the two women is marked by the life lived. Alix is tough and she is willing to work for her living while Liz takes the easy way by marrying for the second time. Liz thus enslaves herself to Charles, his three boys and her two children from Charles. She is caught unaware by Charles who wishes to divorce her. The patriarch Charles takes the role of the capitalist and submerges Liz who is quite
helpless after her twenty year’s marriage with Charles. Male dominance works at this level and Liz has to submit herself to her male benefactor to ensure that Charles provides her an allowance after the divorce. Thus, the expectation of Charles’s financial imposition makes it difficult for Liz to disobey him.

The social environment plays an important role in shaping the psychology of an individual. In *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol. II*, Jacqueline Rose in “Femininity and its Discontents”, states:

Secondly, the relationship between this rejection of psychoanalysis and a *dearth* within British intellectual culture of a Marxism which could both theorise and criticise capitalism as a social totality. The second point received the strongest criticism from within British Marxism itself, but what matters here is the fact that both Marxism and psychoanalysis were identified as forms of radical inquiry which were unassimilable to bourgeois norms. In the recent feminist discussion, however - notably in the pages of *feminist review-* Marxism and psychoanalysis tend to be posited as antagonistic; Marxism arrogating to itself the concept of political practice and social change, psychoanalysis being accused of inherent conservatism which rationalizes and perpetuates the subordination of women under capitalism, or else fails to engage with that subordination at the level of material life. (Evans 307-308).

Rose’s statement illustrates Liz and other females under patriarchy; capitalism. Although Liz is dismayed at the initial stage of her divorce, towards the end of the select text, she is illustrated as
a happy woman who spends her time with her two best friends. Liz is now unbounded by male dominance as she leads an independent life, and she is a much happier person.

The female psychology is clearly highlighted in *The Witch of Exmoor*, Drabble relates the incident of Sonia an old lady who is emotionally broken. Patsy tries to soothe the old lady and she tells Sonia to ring her. It is here that one can realize the life of a working woman. Patsy is in a hurry as she has to get back to her work and on the way she has to pick up some neighbours. Yet, she takes the time to speak to the old woman and tells her that she would further speak to her about her prisoner:

‘Ring me,’ says Patsy, squeezing the thin, blue-veined, old lady’s hand. Sonia is not old, but she seems old. She has suffered too much and it has worn her out. Her suffering is not of the body, but of the mind. ‘Ring me. I must dash. I’ve got to pick up the Partingtons. I want to speak to you about my prisoner. Keep well, Sonia.’ (TWE 59-60).

It is remarkable how Drabble inserts minute details of a woman who cares for others. Patsy in her husband’s absence is able to be herself. Although she is in a hurry, she takes her time to soothe the old woman and in her exit note asks the old woman to take care of herself. In the absence of her dominating husband Patsy’s female self is reflected; caring, comforting, and soothing others when she is needed.

Further, Alison’s strength as a woman is illustrated after her divorce with Donnell. She stands firm as a mother even when her teenage daughter Jane runs away from her home and is imprisoned. Jane and her boyfriend are imprisoned on the issue of a road accident. At this distressing moment, Alison has to divide her attention between her sulky daughter Jane and her special child Molly. It is through Alison that Drabble depicts the capacity of the female gender to
tackle the problems that lies before her. The following passage illustrates how Alison handles her problems:

The British community of Walachia, such as it was, had made various offers of half-hearted hospitality, but Alison had declined them: she preferred to be independent, she did not like to be an encumbrance, and she did not want to have to talk when she had nothing to say. (TIA 91).

Although Alison is caught in a tight situation and is distressed, yet she refuses help. The reason that she prefers to be independent may be because she needs the space to think clearly. Alison seems to project the idea that one is able to think clearly and solve problems in the absence of others and she is not willing to talk on the topic that she has nothing to say. Further, Alison does not want to be an ‘encumbrance’ to the help that the British community of Walachia is willing to provide her. Alison’s firm resolve to be independent when she is confronted by a nerve wrecking situation shows the female strength and capacity.

Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* states:

Many psychologists, including Freud, have made the mistake of assuming from observations of women who did not have the education and freedom to play their full part in the world, that it was women’s essential nature to be passive, conformist, dependent, fearful, childlike – just as Aristotle, basing his picture of human nature on his own culture and particular period of time, made the mistake of assuming that just because a man was a slave, this was his essential nature and therefore “it was good for him to be a slave”. (Friedan 449-450).
Women’s identity is then one that can easily be misunderstood and the female desire within the self is juxtaposed with the idea of the female created by social notions and determined by patriarchal ideology, just as the slave in his time is determined by the authoritative dictates of his society. The female bound by social notions is therefore at the mercy of the social order and she is thus silenced through the past centuries. She is incapacitated to express herself and this is the trajectory of feminists who believe that women must express themselves. Drabble in the select texts efficiently develops different female psychology and emotive situations. As a female writer Drabble is able to evoke empathy in the readers as she depicts various female issues that have not been described by male writers.

In *The Ice Age*, Drabble depicts the emotional plight of a young mother with a special child. Alison as a divorcee struggles to maintain her two children. The younger child Molly is a special child and needs more care while the elder child Jane is a wild teenager. Alison is shocked by the news of Jane’s accident and she has to visit her sulky daughter who is jailed. Simultaneously, Alison has to think of Molly and attend to her needs. In such a circumstance, the mother is unable to manage her charged emotion and she breaks down. Drabble depicts the emotional state of Alison and the narrator’s voice states:

She did not know to stop herself. She knew she was doing it, but she could not stop. She sat in a corner, her feet up in a large chair, alone, for Molly and Anthony had made their usual trip to the pub for juice and beer, and smoked, and worried. How could she so nag and sulk at him, and edge away from him in bed, when she had so longed to return, when she felt so tenderly towards him, with such love, such respect? (TIA 186).
In the passage, Drabble captures the essence of the female mindset who is agitated and at a losing end. Although Alison knows that Anthony is taking Molly for a walk and a treat, she is jealous of the fact that Anthony and Molly are so friendly with each other. At this point, when Alison is alone, the female self is disclosed: the female is hurt, angry, lonely, worried, and dejected and at the same time, she is passionate and aloof as she reconsiders her deplorable state.

Drabble depicts the psychology of the female child in *The Peppered Moth*, and she seems to suggest that females do have critical thinking capacity at an early stage. Bessie the intelligent child nearly dies of the Spanish flu in 1918. Drabble states that this influenza pandemic of 1918-1919 seems to be responsible for the highest mortality rate of any pandemic since the Black Death of the fourteenth century. As Bessie’s health recovers she turns to be an extensive reader and at the age of nine, she reads books from the Morley Girls Library at her leisure time. Bessie finds the books as distasteful as Mr Beever’s sermons. A particular book, *The Dairyman’s Daughter; an Authentic Narrative from Real Life*, given to one of Bessie’s aunt Selina highlights Bessie’s childhood distaste:

But the text was excessively religious, and Bessie at once saw through its condescending equation of servile rustic poverty with virtue. She could not identify with the abject piety of its heroine Elizabeth, even though they shared a name, and the clergyman-narrator’s profound self-satisfaction irritated her intensely. His praise of humble cottages seemed compromised by his delight in grand mansions and fair prospects. She could not have provided a Marxist critique of it at the age of nine, but she could and did react with honest indignation. Such stuff! She wondered what Great Aunt Selina had made of it. (TPM 19-20).
Bessie at the age of nine is most irritated by the clergyman’s ‘praise of humble cottages’ while he seems to be in admiration of the ‘grand mansions and fair prospects’ of the affluent. Although she is unable to provide a clear answer to her dislike that seems to be directly related to the Marxist criticism on the capitalist and the proletariat, yet, Bessie seems to feel that the clergyman is quite hypocritical. In the passage, the clergyman seems to take the role of the church as an institution of propagation of thoughts that controls social notions.

Marxists believe that formal education exerts great pressure on the dynamic social practices. Institutions provide partial course that have selected choice of meanings, values and practices which comprise of the dominant ideology. Family as the smallest unit of the society teaches selective ideas and notions of the society either consciously or unconsciously, while education imparts particular selection of knowledge and skills related to learning and social relations from a wide range of choice. Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature* states:

> Institutions such as churches are explicitly incorporative. Specific communities and specific places of work, exerting powerful and immediate pressures on the conditions of living and of making a living, teach, confirm and in most cases finally enforce selected meanings, values and activities. (Williams 118).

Churches therefore, act as educational platforms and through the ‘incorporative’ ideas they impart religious, moral, social and economic thoughts and inspirations. It is the specification of selected thoughts, meanings, values and activities; ideologies of the church, that distinguishes one church from another. The notions thus indoctrinated by the church turns to a dominant ideology and these ideologies seem to be enforced within a society as a social code. Bessie is thus in conflict with the clergyman’s notions depicted in the book.
Simultaneously, marriage is one of the determinant factors that upholds and maintains the church ideologies. The female gender is then at the mercy of the dominant male; the benefactor. In the following passage Drabble in *The Radiant Way* narrates how Liz is humiliated by her separation from her first marriage:

Liz’s marriage broke up after eight months. Edgar, chivalrously, moved out of the flat they rented in New Cross, though he could hardly afford to do so, and into a large shabby house in Greenwich which he shared with several old Cambridge friends. He was much happier there. He paid her a small allowance, as she, as a married woman, was no longer eligible for the grant that had supported her at university. Liz was humiliated by this, rather than enraged, but she knew that she had to qualify in order ever to be free and accepted the conditions. (TRW 100).

Through Liz’s humiliation, Drabble seems to depict the psychological onslaught that the female experiences at the time of separation and divorce. Liz is psychologically shattered not because of her separation with Edgar, but, because of the new situation that she has to face. Prior to marrying Edgar, Liz has had the opportunity to receive the supporting educational grants from the university, yet, presently, as a separated married woman she is unqualified and therefore she is unable to avail the grants from the university. Subsequently, Liz has had to take the subordinate role and accept the ‘small allowance’ that Edgar is willing to pay her. Further, the enforced ideology on marriage, predominant as a social notion, restrains Liz and she avoids informing her mother about her separation:

She did not tell her mother that she and Edgar had separated. She continued her clinical training at St Michael’s and qualified in 1959. In
1960, while she was doing six pre-registration months as house physician at St Michael’s, she met Charles Headleand. Seven months later, after divorcing Edgar, she married Charles, a widower with three small boys. She was twenty-five, he thirty. She informed her mother after the event. (TRW 100-101).

Liz is able to complete her clinical training in the absence of the male; after her divorce. It is only after Liz divorces Edgar and marries Charles the widower that Liz is able to accept herself and that she is able to inform her mother about her second marriage. In an interview with Lydia Preovic for Believer, Margaret Drabble states:

The idea of inherited privilege is something that I think about a great deal.

And about social mobility, and the possibility of advancement. (Preovic).

Liz marries Charles the bourgeoisie to ensure the ‘inherited privilege’ that Drabble mentions. However, this marriage subjugates Liz to the role of the unpaid worker; caretaker of her three step sons with the addition of her own two sons from Charles. On the other hand, Liz’s turn of events seems to arise from the traditional notion that females must be married at a certain age, and it may also be the reason that Liz does not disclose to her mother the fact of her separation with Edgar her first husband.

On the other hand, Rosamund determines to be a single mother. The protagonist in The Millstone is taken to the hospital at the last stage of her pregnancy. It is through Rosamund that Drabble depicts the sharp sense of female perception even in one of the most painful hours. Rosamund does not fail to mentally register that she is taken to the hospital from a good address; an address that she is not ashamed to disclose:
I was glad too to be going from so good an address. I felt that by it alone I had bought a little deference and, sure enough, at the bottom of the stairs one of the men turned to Lydia and said, “Would you like to come along, Miss, to see your friend in?” (TM 107).

The passage further highlights the idea of ‘inherited privilege’ that Drabble suggests and Rosamund is content to belong to the English middle class. Although she is about to give birth to an illegitimate baby, she is proud of her address. It is at this juncture that Rosamund tactfully and unconsciously exposes the advantage of belonging to the middle class.

The fear of disrupting the prevalent social notions seems to be in itself a female psychological trauma, and in the select texts Drabble gives insights to the different natures of female psychological fears. Alix is also not at liberty to disclose the fact she has had an unhappy marriage with Sebastian. She remains silent and avoids her friends and it is only when she is emotionally strong that she discloses about her unhappy marriage to Liz:

Alix admitted what Liz already knew, that she and Sebastian had been less than happy, that the idyll had been less golden than it looked. (TRW 101).

To her dismay Alix finds that her marriage is over too soon. Unlike Liz, Alix takes her time to heal her female mindset and she completes her university education in the absence of the dominating male; her late husband Sebastian. She finds a job that can financially help her to support her and to maintain her child. In The Radiant Way, Drabble narrates:

Alix Bowen was slower in the making. She put together slowly the bricks of her new self. She reconsidered, slowly, the privileges and disadvantages of her childhood, of the three years of Cambridge, of the brief interlude of
her marriage, of the streets of Islington where she pushed her pram. She dismantled, she rebuilt. (TRW 101-102).

As a widow, Alix has a strong determination to independently maintain herself and her child. She does not accept the help that Sebastian’s mother is willing to provide. She is independent and hard working yet she experiences and shares the psychological trauma of many widows of the middle class English society. In the Paris Review- The Art of Fiction No. 70, an interview conducted by Barbara Milton, Margaret Drabble answers to the question of what makes her uneasy and she states:

What a difficult question. Money makes me uneasy. The fact that some people have more of it than others. There’s and advert in the personal column of the Times in which a man says, “Will somebody please explain to me why some people are paid more than others. Does the fact that I get no replies mean that there is no answer?” I must write to him and say that I agree: There is no answer. (Milton).

Money that makes Drabble uneasy is thus a problem to Alix and her life progresses slowly as she faces financial constrains. With her determination, Alix is able to reach her goal; complete her education and find a suitable job. On the other hand, Liz’s second marriage culminates in a divorce:

And now Liz herself was suffering, and finding her glamour transformed into humiliation, if not in the public eye, 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).
As Drabble narrates Liz’s life, she seems to suggest that wealth like marriage is temporal. The temporality of both wealth and marriage seems to be the focus of the capitalist; patriarchy, who consciously tries to maintain his dignity and superiority by consciously marginalizing and subordinating the proletariat; the female gender.

The idealized fairy tale happy hardworking mothers are absent in Drabble’s works as they are replaced by realistic mothers who are often agitated by real life events: runaway daughter, illegitimate child, separated wives and divorcees. Margaret Drabble also depicts other female worries and agitations such as child birth, maternity, motherhood and various works that the female has to perform in the absence of the male gender.

The female gender is left to take sole charge of the household chores and to maintain her child rearing regime in the absence of the male patriarch. Although the work in the home ground is maintained by the female gender, yet she is silenced and marginalized in the presence of the male even in her restricted area; her home. The female is excluded to work in jobs that pay better income. In *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, Heidi Hartmann in “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism” states:

The material base upon which patriarchy rests lies most fundamentally in men’s control over women’s labor power. Men maintain this control by excluding women from access to some essential productive resources (in capitalist societies, for example, jobs that pay living wages) and by restricting women’s sexuality. Monogamous heterosexual marriage is one relatively recent and efficient form that seems to allow men to control both these areas. Controlling women’s access to resources and their sexuality, in turn, allows men to control women’s labor power, both
for the purpose of serving men in many personal and sexual ways and for the purpose of rearing children. (Nicholson 101).

Male dominance over the female is therefore prominent even in the smallest unit of the society; the family, that begins with marriage. Child bearing thus turns to a controlling factor of the male dominance and supremacy as it disables the female to work for her wage during child bearing and child rearing. In the select texts, most of the female protagonists have to leave their education and jobs due to child bearing and child rearing. Further, child bearing and child rearing also turn into a process that restricts the female sexuality due to which the female submerges into her female self. Thus, weakened by childbirth and child rearing the female is side lined by the dominant male; the patriarch. The female is thus controlled by marriage that ultimately results in child birth and motherhood. Marxist feminist issue of equal opportunity is therefore conditioned and controlled by the dominant male in a patriarchal society through the female body.

Similarly, as commented by Hartmann, in *The Peppered Moth*, Bessie leaves her job with her first pregnancy. Drabble in this instance highlights the fact that within the marriage bound the female has to struggle in many ways during child bearing. Simultaneously, Drabble seems to denote that child bearing does not assure the birth of a child as in the case of Bessie:

We would not be asking these questions had all turned out well for Joe and Bessie. But all did not turn out well. We do not know the details of what went wrong.

Joe and Bessie married, and moved to Northam. Bessie had two miscarriages before being delivered of a healthy son, Robert. Three years later, war broke out. (TPM 123).
The preceding passage denotes how Bessie has to endure two miscarriages that also illustrates that Bessie’s body has suffered immensely during her child bearing. It is only on her third child bearing that Bessie succeeds in delivering a baby boy. Although the female has to endure all the physical pains in the absence of the male gender towards the reproduction of manpower, she has to take the subservient role and submerge in the marginalized area of her home. Thus the pain of child bearing, child birth and child rearing is mostly the silent topic in male writings and it reflects traditional thinking and social values indoctrinated by the capitalist and patriarchal ideology.

_The Millstone_ is the only novel in which Margaret Drabble gives a detailed description on pregnancy and child birth. In _A Literature of Their Own: From Charlotte Bronte to Doris Lessing_, Elaine Showalter states:

> It is difficult to guess precisely how the female tradition will continue to develop in the English novel; Mortimer, Lessing, Drabble, Byatt and Spark all seem to be moving into new phases in their writing. Feminine realism, feminist protest and female self-analysis are combining in the context of twentieth-century social and political concern. (Showalter 249).

Showalter’s discourse of ‘female realism, feminist protests and female self-analysis’ are illustrated by Drabble in this novel and in her other novels. In this novel, Drabble illustrates the female trauma and fear experienced before and after child birth. Though the protagonist Rosamund is unable to express her fears and trauma, she recaptures the essence:

> I suppose the end of anyone’s first pregnancy is frightening. I cannot quite remember how frightened I was, because it is one of the horrible tricks of nature to make one forget instantly after childbirth all that one had feared
and suffered, presumably so that one will carry on gaily with the next. (TM 102).

Rosamund is unable to recall her fears and the pains, yet the passage seems to denote that whatever fear and pain that she has felt is the felt experience of every female before child birth and one that is also experienced by Bessie during her two miscarriages and at the birth of her son.

The hospital ordeals that the exhausted pregnant female has to endure before child birth, is recollected by Rosamund in the following passage:

Then they took me off to another room and took away all my clothes and put me in a hospital nightgown and asked me how often my contractions were. When I told them, they said Nonsense, but when they investigated they naturally enough found me to be right. Then they did various other unpleasant and compulsory things, found me my book when I asked for it, and left me to it, telling me to ring if I wanted anything. I lay there on this hard high bed for half an hour, trying to read, and then I rang the bell and asked if they couldn’t do something about it. Not yet, they said, and off they went. (TM 109-110).

At this poignant hour Rosamund is oppressed by her female body for the reproduction of another human body. It is her body that suffers the most and her body seeks to liberate the body that is within her; the baby that oppresses her. Germaine Greer in The Whole Woman, writes:

The battlefield where she fights for liberation. It is through her body that oppression works, reifying her. Her physicality a medium for others to work on; her job is to act as their viceroy, presenting her body for their
ministrations, and applying to her body the treatment that have been ordained. (Greer 106).

Thus, the female body that is ordained for child birth seeks its liberation either by miscarriage or by giving birth. Hence miscarriage turns to be a futile reproduction, and delivering a baby, preferably a male baby, ensures the continuity of patriarchy and the submergence of the female gender.

Margaret Drabble further cites the pain that the female has to endure before child birth. Rosamund in The Millstone states:

A quarter of an hour later about five nurses arrived with the pethidine, which they administered; ….(TM 110).

The pain reliever that Rosamund is given, lasts only for a short while and Rosamund recalls to have said:

“I think this drug thing must be wearing off,” I said mildly, “because it seems to be getting worse and worse, can you give me something else please, quick?”

“Oh no!” they said, “not yet, you’ve a long time to go yet, we have to leave something to give you later on.”

“Oh,” I said feebly, “what a pity.”

“Never mind,” they said, “you’re coming along nicely,” and they turned and went back to their row of seats outside and had just resumed their conversation, though in more muffled tones, when I heard myself start to moan rather violently, and they all came rushing back and within five minutes my child was born. (TM 112-113).
It is at this stage that Margaret Drabble encapsulates the procedure of child birth and the female experiences during child birth. Drabble’s narration of child birth is realistic and she efficiently captures the nurses’ performance during child birth. On the other hand, male authors marginalize the topic of child birth and the pains that women have to suffer during pregnancy. Patriarchal notion seems to take it for granted that females must suffer during pregnancy and child birth. The ordeals of pregnancy and child birth are therefore the unwritten topic in male writings. However, if the male authors were to write on such topics, it would fail to provide the essence of pregnancy and child birth as the male gender is inexperienced in this area. Further, the male is the absent gender during child birth since the maternity ward is attended by female attendants; the nurses.

Drabble highlights the consoling and soothing effect of the female gender when one is in pain. Rosamund who at this crucial moment experiences the most painful physical event of her life is comforted and encouraged by the nurse. Drabble through Rosamund further comments on the gravity and panic at child birth:

“That’s all right,” she kept saying, “that’s fine, you’re coming along fine. Oh, do try not to push.” (TM 113).

Although the nurse comforts and encourages Rosamund during the delivery of her baby, the protagonist is able to determine the anxiety in the nurse’s voice. At this juncture, Drabble conveys through the nurse’s anxiety the fatality that might ensue at child birth; the child and the mother, who are at the risk of losing their lives. Rosamund further recalls:

There was more panic in her smooth tones than in me; I felt all right now, I felt fine. The child was born in a great rush and hurry, quite uncontrolled and undelivered; they told me afterwards that they only just
caught her, and I felt her fall from me and instantly sat up and opened my eyes, and they said, “It’s a girl, it’s a lovely little girl.” (TM 113).

After the birth of her baby, Rosamund is to an extent liberated as the child that has earlier oppressed her within her body, falls free from her. The sufferings of giving birth exhaust her and the nurses ask her to lie down. As she rests, Rosamund experiences a female emotion towards her child:

They told me to lie down again, and I lay down, asking if the baby was alright, expecting suddenly I don’t know what, missing arms and fingers, and they said she was alright; so I lay there, happy that it was over, not expecting that they would let me see her, a strange loud sobbing cry. (TM 113).

Although the protagonist is exhausted, yet, she is curious to know if the child has any physical flaw. This seems to be the first initiative that Rosamund takes as the mother of the baby. Drabble through Rosamund further comments on the physical change of the female gender after child birth:

After the birth, the muscles of my belly snapped back into place without a mark, but some of the women looked as big as they had looked before. I am haunted even now by a memory of the way they walked, large and tied into shapeless dressing gowns, padding softly and stiffly, careful not to disturb the pain that still lay between the legs. (TM 122).

Rosamund is lucky that her enlarged belly recovers its normal size in a short while. As Rosamund recalls the female physical change after her baby is born, she recalls the sight of many women whose bodies do not recover their initial figure. The female body is therefore, as
Germaine Greer suggests in *The Whole Woman*, ‘the battlefield where she fights for liberation’. Rosamund suffers the pain of bearing an illegitimate child during her pregnancy and her problems are not over with the birth of her child. As a matter of fact, her problems are multiplied after her child is born as social focus is directed on both the mother and the child.

Drabble’s discourse in her works relates to motherhood and in *The Millstone* she explores and depicts with clarity, the processes that the female gender encounters and experiences during pregnancy and child birth and furthermore, the other select texts are informative of female experiences of motherhood. As a child bearer and as a mother, the female is unable to lead an autonomous life. It is therefore, that she assumes the role of the unfavoured gender and she is diminished to the margin while the male is focused at the center. Toril Moi in *What is a Woman?* comments and states of Nancy Chodorow’s assumption on patriarchy:

Male science is structured on the male experience of separation and autonomy, which not only severs it from true communion with nature, but also leads it to adopt a language of conquest, power, and domination in its dealings with the world. This situation makes it harder for women to become scientists or intellectuals, since they will have to do violence to their female nature, their need for contact and communion, if they are to follow the paths of male science or male philosophy. The feminist solution is to work for a transformation of male science by demanding that the female virtues of empathy and understanding, often called ‘female modes of knowing’, be included in the scientific enterprise. Such an inclusion would also put an end to science as a domineering, power-mongering
enterprise. True science or true philosophy re-creates the lost unity
between the knower and the known. (Moi 350-351).

The ‘female modes of knowing’ seems to be the very essence of motherhood. In the select texts, Drabble unfailingly provides illustrations of these female ‘virtues of empathy and understanding’ that seems to be absent in the male gender. In *The Millstone*, the young mother Rosamund is filled with passion for her new born baby:

> She put her in my arms and I sat there looking at her, and her great wide blue eyes looked at me with seeming recognition, and what I felt it is pointless to try to describe. Love, I suppose one might call it, and the first of my life. (TM 114).

Rosamund as a mother is filled with love for her baby as she holds the baby for the first time. In *A Literature of Their Own: From Charlotte Bronte to Doris Lessing*, Elaine Showalter states:

> Drabble is the novelist of maternity, as Charlotte was the novelist of the schoolroom. The interaction between mother and child, the love that comes unbidden like the operations of grace, is for Drabble the most instructive and surprising human relationship.

(Showalter 250).

As denoted by Showalter, Drabble depicts the bond between the mother and the child and Rosamund’s life as a mother begins, and in a short while she nurtures the infant as informed by the nurses. Societal notion on illegitimacy does not much seem to bother her as she feeds the baby. Rosamund follows the traditional child care routine and she is afraid to disturb the sleeping baby:
I had been taught to get her out only at the correct intervals, and although I knew this method to be outdated, I did not like to break the rules. Also, the baby was asleep, and I did not see why I should wake her for my own comfort. (TM 123).

The mother is therefore, unable to separate herself from her baby to have an autonomous existence. Autonomy lies in the patriarch of the family and it is this autonomy that provides the male gender his superiority over the female gender. Although Rosamund does not have an autonomous existence yet she is unlike the traditional mother in the fact that she is a paid worker as she has to provide for herself and the baby. In her own means, Rosamund is liberated and free to make her own choice. Unlike the other protagonists of the select texts, she is at liberty to struggle against her conflicts. Simultaneously, she is also a scholar and a single mother who nurtures her baby. Rosamund therefore, breaks the traditional code as a single mother and as a financial provider. Thus, she is an independent woman unlike the dependent woman Emma, Bessie and Liz.

In *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, Michele Barrett in her article, “Capitalism and Women’s Liberation” states:

> The discussion throughout this book has emphasized the importance of ideology in the construction and reproduction of women’s oppression. A particular household organization and an ideology of familialism are central dimensions of women’s oppression in capitalism and it is only through an analysis of ideology that we can grasp the oppressive myth of an idealized natural ‘family’ to which all women must conform. (Nicholson 125).
In assuming an independent female status, Rosamund in her own terms, seems to break the chain of ‘women’s oppression’ to some extent as she has no dominant male gender in the family that she has created; a single mother with her baby. She therefore, does not conform to the traditional notion of a natural ‘family’ due to the fact that the dominating male factor is absent in her life. Similarly, in *The Radiant Way*, Alix moves away from the traditional ‘family’ bind after the death of her husband Sebastian. Like Rosamund, Alix is an intelligent university educated woman and she finds that her financial provision has ended with the death of her husband Sebastian. To her dismay she realizes that she is without a job, and her problem is doubled as she has to take care of her young child. It is at this stage that the capitalist ideology intervenes in the guise of Sebastian’s mother Deborah:

Sebastian’s mother, Deborah, was the only person who seemed to suspect the disarray of Alix’s emotions. She made friendly overtures, invited her to stay in their large, warm, scenic, colourful, untidy house in Sussex, told Alix to live for herself and look to the future, offered to look after the baby whenever Alix needed a break. She would willingly have engulfed the baby. Alix suspected this, and clung on to him the more tightly, rejecting Deborah’s support, rejecting everything except a little money ‘to see her through’. She was too fragile to form an alliance with large, strong, fully made Deborah. (TRW 99).

In Alix’s emotive stage, Deborah persuades her to live with them in their large house and offers to help Alix. At this juncture Deborah seems to take the role of the female gender who works for the capitalist while Alix takes the role of the proletariat who is unable to provide for herself and
the baby. Alix is physically, emotionally and financially at her weakest, and like the proletariat she is uncertain of her future.

On the other hand, Deborah is physically, emotionally and financially on a strong position. Like the capitalist who persuades the proletariat with his financial influence Deborah persuades Alix to stay with them in the large house. Simultaneously, Deborah also seems to work for the continuity of patriarchy. In Feminism: *Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol IV*, Adrienne Rich in “The Kingdom of the Fathers” states:

Patriarchy depends on the mother to act as a conservative influence, imprinting future adults with patriarchal values even those early years when the mother-child relationship might seem most individual and private; it has also assured through ritual and tradition that the mother shall cease, at a certain point, to hold the child – in particular the son – in her orbit. Certainly it has created images of the archetypal Mother which reinforce the conservatism of motherhood and convert it to an energy for the renewal of male power. (Evans 82).

Had Alix not provided the male child, the story might have taken a different turn. But, like Rosamund, Alix is determined not to be caught in the traditional trap and she opts to lead an independent life. At the same time, she accepts the small provision from Deborah in order to maintain herself and her baby at the initial stage of her independent life. Alix at this point liberates herself from the patriarchal dictates by opting to live an independent life. Both Rosamund and Alix are yet unable to maintain their middle class requisite as they are independent of extra help; nanny, for their babies, due to their financial constrains.
In *The Garrick Year*, David provides Emma a home help who stays with them. Emma is able to maintain her middle class status with Pascal to help her at home and to look after the children. Emma does not face the problems that Rosamund and Alix have to encounter. She leads a different life and she is enslaved by David who feels that his job is more important than Emma’s awaited BBC job as a news reader. Emma’s freedom to make her choice is subjugated by her husband. The unhappy mother is thus entrapped by her marriage and she has to submit herself to her husband. In *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, Raman Selden et al. in “Feminist Theories”, state:

Socialist/Marxist feminism was a powerful stand of the second wave during the late 1960s and 1970s, in Britain in particular. It sought to extend Marxism’s analysis of class into a women’s history of their material and economic oppression, and especially of how the family and women’s domestic labour are constructed by and reproduce the sexual division of labour. Like other ‘male’ forms of history, Marxism had ignored much of women’s experience and activity (one of Sheila Rowbotham’s most influential books is entitled *Hidden from History*), and Marxist feminism’s primary task was to open up the complex relations between gender and the economy. (Selden et al. 135).

As highlighted, David the patriarch of the family assumes the superior role and submerges Emma’s job opportunity as the husband. Thus, the male controls his wife and in the outcome the female is subjugated to the margin with David at the center. Emma is under David’s control due to her state of motherhood. David therefore takes the financial control of the family. David is
benevolent in his own way and allows her to keep Pascal as her home help and thereby, they unconsciously maintain their middle class necessity; the home help.

The idea of female sexuality is an area of interest for both the male and the female writers. In her works, Drabble provides insight to the female problems of sexuality within the English society. In *The Garrick Year*, the novelist clearly illustrates in Wyndham Farrar, that the acquisition of the middle class economical condition does not provide the middle class morality. Although Wyndham Farrar is financially in the middle class status; the stage manager of the theatre, his approach to the female gender seems to lack the middle class courtesy. Instead of politely asking Emma for the drawing pins that she has arranged on the notice board, he approaches her furtively from behind and he says:

‘Do you think I might disarrange your nice little pattern and have a couple of pins?’ and I turned round and saw that it was Wyndham Farrar with a piece of paper that he wanted to pin up.

‘I suppose so,’ I said, unpicking two and offering them to him.

‘They are hardly mine to withhold.’

‘No, I didn’t think they would be,’ he said, taking the pins, but not doing anything more about it. (TGY 64).

Wyndham Farrar also exposes his male superiority and retorts to override Emma’s reply, and thereafter he flirts with Emma even though she reveals that she is David’s wife. The incident of Emma thus enticed by Wyndham in her husband’s absence seems to suggest that the female gender is always a prey to the male gender. Catharine A Mackinnon’s article, “Sexuality” in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, states:
A theory of sexuality becomes feminist methodologically, meaning feminists in the post-marxist sense, to the extent it treats sexuality as a social construct of male power: defined by man, forced on women, and constitutive of the meaning of gender. Such an approach centers feminism on the perspective of the subordination of women to men as it identifies sex— that is the sexuality of dominance and submission— as crucial, as fundamental, as on some level definitive, in that process. (Nicholson 159).

Mackinnon theorizes that the theory of sexuality is the ‘sexuality of dominance and submission’. Wyndham’s retort to Emma in *The Garrick Year* therefore, subjects her to a subordinate role while he takes the dominant role. Wyndham forces his male sexuality on Emma and he further flirts with her:

You’re not in my company, are you? I can hardly have engaged an actress looking like you without having noticed it.’ (TGY 64).

It is at this point that the male gender entices the female by crediting her beauty. But, the female who is bound to her husband is not easily persuaded and Emma remarks:

‘David Evans, my husband.’

‘Oh,’ he said. ‘Oh yes. Really. David Evans. I didn’t know he was married. He doesn’t seem to be particularly married. Was I introduced to you? Come to think of it, I did know about David, he told me some long story about having a wife and a lot of kids to support when the subject of salary came up. But I didn’t know he was married to anyone like you.’ (TGY 65).
Emma reveals her identity as David’s wife to which Wyndham comments that David does not seem to be ‘particularly married’. Wyndham’s comment once more reflects the notion that the male gender is not bound by his marriage while the female is bound by marriage and dominated by her husband.

In *The Radiant Way*, Liz divorces Edgar and later marries Charles to whom she is sexually attracted. Liz in her second marriage is bound to her husband and her three step sons. It is her sexuality that compels her to marry Charles. Consequently, her sexuality is an agent that interrupts her further studies:

Her second marriage somewhat disrupted her postgraduate career.

(TRW 101).

Liz’s sexuality is further controlled by Charles who exerts his power over his wife Liz. As a married woman she has to obey and submit to her husband. Liz is not free to act on her own as her liberty is conditioned and dominated by her husband. In *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, Heidi Hartmann in her article “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism” writes:

The wage differential, then, will become increasingly necessary in perpetuating patriarchy, the male control of women’s labor power. The wage differential will aid in defining women’s work as secondary to men’s at the same time it necessitates women’s actual continued economic dependence on men. The sexual division of labor in the labor market and elsewhere should be understood as a manifestation of patriarchy which serves to perpetuate it. (Nicholson 108-109).
Charles controls Liz’s sexuality and forces her to depend on him. It is this economic dependence within her marriage and within a patriarchal set up that interrupts Liz’s education. Her education is secondary and therefore it is marginalized and consequently, Liz is marginalized to the domestic area. The sexual division of work within marriage binds Liz to the home ground. Thus, sexuality is an area where the female submits and the male dominates. Liz’s total economic dependence on Charles is appalling and it is revealed when Charles divorces her. In Paris Review- The Art of Fiction No. 70, Margaret Drabble informs Barbara Milton:

And other people’s misery makes me very uneasy. The injustices of life: that some people have such a terrible time- not necessarily even in material things, not even physically- but just psychologically, or in their personal lives. (Milton).

Drabble’s deep concern with the female psychology is revealed in all the select texts and her protagonists Emma, Gladys, Frieda and Bessie reveal the female regret of losing their job. In The Garrick Year, Emma like Liz marries at an early age, and years later, when she meets her friend Mary Summers she is unable to think why she did not continue to pursue her education instead of marrying David. Emma narrates:

But I could not take it upon myself to explain why I had not bothered to go. It did cross my mind as we talked that our lives had turned out quite neatly upside down: she was to have had the early marriage and the children, I was to have had the independent and faintly intellectual career. I wondered what had turned us over: ourselves, the world, or accident. (TGY 76).
Like the other intelligent female protagonists, Emma is talented, well educated and she has a fair chance of pursuing an intellectual career. But, her female sexuality overrides her intellectuality and therefore she submerges to the background as the wife of David. In *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol. IV*, Nancy Chodorow “The Sexual Sociology of Adult Life” states:

> The wife, accordingly, is viewed as deriving her status and class position mainly from her husband, even if she also is in the labour force and contributes to the maintenance of the family’s life style. She is seen as a representative of her family whereas husband is seen as an independent individual. (Evans 159).

As a married woman she is dominated by the male sexuality that marginalizes her female self. Liberty is out of the question for Emma as marriage submerges her.

In *The Guardian*, Lisa Allardice in “A Life in Writing: Margaret Drabble” comments on Drabble and states:

> As with her novels, over the years, the characters get steadily older, each story capturing a different stage in a woman’s life, from youthful uncertainty, through the intensities of infidelity and marital disillusionment, to the freedom and regrets of maturity. “People age,” she says, “I’ve always been interested in what is happening to my contemporaries and what is still happening.”

(Allardice).

Margaret Drabble’s protagonist Ailsa in *The Sea Lady* is a marked contrast to Alison, Emma, Alix and Bessie. Ailsa the emancipated independent woman at sixty is still sexually attracted to
her ex-husband Humphrey Clark. In this novel, it is Ailsa who tempts and entices Humphrey. She lures Humphrey and he submits himself to Ailsa on occasions, but, Ailsa knows her position in the social structure, and if she is once more willing to have Humphrey as her husband, she would have to follow the social code of submission to the male gender. In *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol. IV*, Nancy Chodorow in “The Sexual Sociology of Adult Life” states:

> Women’s work in the labor force tends to extend their housewife, wife, or mother roles and their concern with personal, affective ties (as secretaries, service workers, private household workers, nurses, teachers). (Evans 160).

In the following passage, Ailsa tries to win Humphrey’s affection by revealing that she is leaving her theatrical work:

> ‘I told you I was giving up the theatre, last time we met,’ she said.

> ‘And now I’m saying it to you again. This really is my last season.’

> ‘So, what next?’ he asked.

> ‘No,’ she said, as though he had contradicted her assertion. ‘That’s it. It’s bad for me, this show-biz lark. It’s exhibitionism. It’s bad for my character. Let’s not talk about it. What next for you? Are you still spending most of your time underwater?’ (TSL 176).

Although at this stage Ailsa is not controlled by Humphrey, who is still attracted to her, yet, the intelligent and educated woman is quite aware of her traditional notions and social values. In *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol. IV*, Nancy Chodorow states:
Women are located first in the sex-gender system, men first in the organization of production. (Evans 158).

Therefore, Ailsa also discloses to Humphrey that her present work is ‘bad’ for her character. She knows that she has to leave her exhibitionist show business, and in order to submit to the social order in the male-female relationship, the female’s work is secondary to the male’s work. The following passage exposes Ailsa’s sexuality:

Posture, Ailsa, posture, said Ailsa Kelman to herself, as she straightened her shoulders, drew in another deep breath, and, upon cue, began to speak. Her strong, hoarse and husky voice, magnified to a trembling and intimate timbre of vibration by the microphone, loudly addressed the gathering. The audience relaxed, in comfortable (if in some quarters condescending) familiarity: they knew where they were going when they were led onwards by this siren-speaker. They felt safe with her expertise….. She summoned up bacteria and eubacteria ancient filaments from the Archaean age, and presented her audience with the accelerating intersexuality of fish. (TSL 3).

Drabble introduces Ailsa as a beautiful and intelligent woman dressed as a mermaid. She is appreciated by the audience who are awed by her beauty and talent. On stage, Ailsa is in her own element and she uses her female sexuality to provide sensuousness to the crowd. At the same time, she will have to control her sexuality if she marries Humphrey; submerge herself in Humphrey’s identity, as the social value and traditional norms rest on patriarchy. Yet, it should be noted that Ailsa is at her strongest when she is on her own; in the absence of male dominance.
Margaret Drabble has illustrated many attributes of female qualities in the absence of their male counterparts, and her female protagonists are mostly intelligent and educated females who belong to the English middle class family. Drabble depicts the female physical and psychological strength in the absence of the male gender especially highlighting maternity and motherhood. Except for Rosamund who can make her own decision, the other protagonists are not at liberty to pursue their interests. Since they are presently bound by patriarchal dictates, the female protagonists are not free and they have to submerge under the male dictates. Drabble therefore, centers her focus on female independence; male absence, in the select texts. Her female protagonists like Rosamund, Alison, Bessie, Alix, and Ailsa are strong enough to lead their independent lives and they are strong enough to be emotional in their poignant hours. Drabble’s female protagonists are caricatures of females that one might meet on the road while taking a walk and the life-like images that she depicts seems to confirm her varied interest in the female discourse.