CHAPTER – IV

EMERGENCE OF THE NEW WOMAN IN THE MAINSTREAM
This chapter is focused on the transformation of the female gender to the new woman identity that is a contrast to the traditional woman under a patriarchal social setup. Although traditional and patriarchal ideology has established the belief that the female as the weaker gender solely depends on the male gender, in the select texts Drabble illustrates the various ways that the male gender depends on the female. Therefore, the capability of women, and male dependency on women in a heterosexual relationship will be illustrated through the select novels and related theories. Margaret Drabble’s protagonists are women who have struggled to overcome the female conflicts pertaining to marriage, social and economic issues that submerge their individual identities. It will also attempt to analyse the identity of the new woman in the mainstream; the English middle class through the protagonists of each select text.

Through her protagonists Drabble denotes various instances of male dependence on the female gender. In *The Witch of Exmoor*, Gladys Haxby an educated woman has to resign from her teaching job because of her marriage. Drabble informs the readers that the then English law did not allow married women to teach in schools, least of all when peace prevailed in the country:

Gladys Haxby had been obliged to give up her job when she was married. That was the law in those days. Married women did not teach in schools. Or not in peacetime.

Three bored women in one small cottage, making the worst of their lives, while Ernie Haxby worked in the fields or at the farm. (TWE, 115)

The English patriarchal concept of marriage and the socio-economic notions that bind the female gender through the past centuries are important areas in order to expose the new woman identity as marriage and socio-economic notions are the factors that bind the female to her husband. The
focus of Gladys’s anger seems be in her role as a domestic worker after she resigns from her teaching job. Gladys is not willing to accept her role as a domestic worker; unpaid worker and her two educated daughters nonetheless share the same sentiment: In *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol. IV*, Margaret Jackson in “Sex, Class and Hetero-Relations” comments on the campaign launched on women’s economic independence:

> Barbara Bodichon, the main instigator of the first Married Women’s Property Bill of 1856, simultaneously launched a campaign for women’s economic independence, which incorporated a critique of marriage as an institution. (Evans 3-4).

The campaign mentioned does not seem to have much effect as the intelligent and well educated Bessie faces the same problem in *The Peppered Moth*; losing her teaching job after her marriage.

> Bessie, of course, gave up her teaching career, as married women were obliged to do in those days. She said she regretted this, but she did not say it with much conviction. She was certainly glad to get out of Breaseborough at last. Perhaps she married Joe to get out of Breaseborough. (TPM 123).

Good education in Cambridge does not liberate Bessie to maintain her job after her marriage. The conflict especially in Gladys and Bessie lies in the fact that both the educated women lost their jobs due to their marriage. Although both of them prefer to teach they are marginalised to the area of domestication as the male is dependent on the female gender to provide him his daily needs and services and to rear the children.

‘Women’s mothering is one of the few universal and enduring elements of the sexual division of labour’. (Evans 310).

Thus, married women have to resign from their work as they are expected to provide the heir to the family as early as possible. Gladys, Bessie and Frieda do not depict the traditional loving mothers that are idealized in the English male written literature. They are mothers who are wary and bored of child care and domestication. In *The Witch of Exmoor*, Frieda reacts against the traditional notion of marriage and mothering that binds the female gender to her home, children and husband. She feels that she is a contrast to the traditional English maternal figure and Frieda states:

> It was a mistake, having three children. It was a mistake having any. I can’t think why I did. I never really meant to. They just happened. I wouldn’t have called myself the maternal type. In fact I know I wasn’t. They were a problem. Think what I might have been, might have done, if I hadn’t been burdened. It’s a mystery. (TWE 247).

Frieda reflects her feelings and says that she could have been a different person had she not been ‘burdened’ by domestic work. Frieda’s expression seems to suggest that if a woman is not tied by marriage and domesticity, she might turn out to be quite someone else. Frieda is aware that marriage binds a woman to her husband and submerges her to the domestic area; a living proof in her educated mother Gladys Haxby, who has to leave her teaching job after her marriage.
Since there is no job opportunity for the educated woman; marriage binds her, Frieda toils in the fields and farm like Ernie, her father.

In *The Garrick Year*, Drabble gives an instance of an educated woman who is bound by marriage. The well educated Emma is quite naïve and she is not aware that marriage restricts a woman to her home and her husband:

‘Then you shouldn’t have married,’ said Wyndham. ‘People who get married give up the here and now for the sake of the hereafter, didn’t you know?’

‘No, I didn’t know.’

‘Well, you know now…..’ (TGY 161).

It is Wyndham who echoes the English patriarchal traditional thought on the idea of marriage that befalls the female gender. Emma’s conflict is with her husband who gives priority to his work for which Emma has to leave London and her expected BBC job. Though Emma is confident that she is capable of doing justice to her expected job, she is subjugated by David’s dominance. Michael Anthony Corey in *Male Fraud: Understanding Sexual Harassement, Date Rape, and Other Forms of Male Hostility* states:

It is in this manner that males are conditioned early on to be extremely dependent on females. Somewhere between puberty and full adulthood, this dependency is unconsciously transferred from mother to girlfriend, and then later, when the male is ready for marriage, it is transferred from girlfriend to wife. (Corey 30)

David’s dependency on Emma is manifested in the form of male domination to the extent of forbidding Emma to have a career. Although David and Emma physically live in the same house,
yet, they are separated from each other by the work that David has to perform; the male depends on the female to perform domestic chores, child care, and socialization when David has his visitors at home.

In *The Witch of Exmoor*, marriage binds Frieda and Andrew, but, marriage is quite temporal as Andrew soon deserts his wife. Frieda states:

‘That was the end between me and Andrew, as she’d meant it to be. He ran off. He was always a coward. But sometimes I think it was nothing to do with Andrew at all. He was just piggy in the middle…’ (TWE, 249).

As an intelligent woman, Frieda does not question her malady. Simultaneously, Frieda does not seem to mind the fact that Andrew has left her. The reason seems to lie in the fact that the lazy man does not provide enough provision for Frieda and her children. Although tradition and social notions elevate the idea of marriage, it may be assumed that there are many cases of unhappy marriages as the husbands do not provide the required provision for the family. Since Frieda has worked hard during her marriage her work load does not seem to get tougher after Andrew leaves her; Frieda has earlier worked like a man and she continues to work like a man. Frieda’s capability and capacity to shoulder extra workload is further manifested when Andrew finally deserts her. In *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, Heidi Hartmann in “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism” states:

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).

Thus, the passage denotes the male control of women’s labour power that is reflected in Freida, Bessie and Emma. Further, in *The Witch of Exmoor*, Patsy, the paid working mother is over weighed by her duties that are directly related to patriarchy; mothering, work, and her duty as a wife. She has to divide her attention to various matters:

> In Meeting, Patsy makes a perfunctory attempt to free her mind from its terrestrial anxieties, fails, and then settles down to them, methodically, as the silent minutes pass, as motes turn in the shafts of light that fall through the plain windows of this square familiar building. (TWE 58).

It is difficult for Patsy to distance herself from the various female activities. Unlike the male who can distance his thoughts from domestic work and child rearing, Patsy devotes her time for her children, she attends to her husband as a dutiful wife and she socializes while she must simultaneously perform her best in her work. The female is therefore over worked yet she manages to ‘methodically’ work out her plan during the meeting. In *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, Michele Barrett in “Capitalism and Women’s Liberation”:

> The liberation of women would require, first, a redivision of the labour and responsibilities of childcare. Whether privatized or collectivized, it would be mandatory that this be shared between men and women. Second, the actual or assumed dependence of women on a male wage (or capital) would need to be done away with. Third, the ideology of gender would need to be transformed. (Nicholson 127).
Through Patsy, Drabble highlights the capacity and the capability of the working mother who manages to cater to the needs at home and in her work place. Simultaneously, Drabble seems to denote the possibility of socio-economic progress for the female gender, although the female has to perform the extra work load. On the other hand, Barrett’s suggestion of sharing responsibilities between men and women would liberate women to some extent regarding domestic area and child care routine.

Due to patriarchal ideology, it has been an established notion through the past centuries that the female gender depends on the support of the male gender on various issues; physical and psychological. Yet in practical circumstances, it often seems that this ideology takes a reversal role; the female gender often supports the male gender in times of troubles. The male written literature that depicts helpless females seems to be quite the opposite in reality. In Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol. IV, Nancy Chodorow in “The Sexual Sociology of Adult Life” states:

Male denial of dependence and of attachment to women helps to guarantee both masculinity and performance in the world of work. (Evans 169).

Male dependence on women has been silenced by male writers and in the select texts Margaret Drabble illustrates instances where the male gender seeks the support of the female gender during crisis. In The Garrick Year, Wyndham who is afraid to reveal the news of the plane crash to his male colleagues discloses his fear to Emma:

“You do know about her. She was on that plane that went down in the Atlantic last night.’

“You’re not serious.’

‘Of course I’m serious.’
‘Is she dead then?’

‘I wish to God I knew. (TGY 98).

The fact that Wyndham does not inform his male colleagues about his dilemma seems to denote that he defends himself to uphold his male image. Although the female gender is assumed to be the weaker gender, Wyndham’s choice to confide in Emma shows the male dependency on the female to preserve his self esteem and confidence among his male colleagues. Wyndham faces a critical stage as Mrs von Blerke, the financial donor of Wyndham’s show, is on board the plane that has crashed. In his perplexed mood Wyndham Farrar is apprehensive and as the directing patriarch of the show he hopes that his plans would not be disrupted by Mrs von Berke’s accident. He therefore, takes emotional refuge in Emma and he reveals his emotional fear; the fear that his plans could fail. Thus, Wyndham tries to maintain his psychological balance by confiding to Emma.

In *The Sea Lady*, Drabble, further depicts how the male gender achieves psychological balance from the female gender. Ailsa’s second husband continues to adorn his home with pictures of Ailsa; posters of her shows, and shelves that contain the books that Ailsa has written. The following passage illustrates Ailsa’s second husband Martin Pope’s fascination of Ailsa even after their divorce:

There were photographs of Ailsa, continues Dame Mary relentlessly, and shelves of her books, and posters of her shows, and videos of her television programmes, and a whacking great oil painting of her, a really terrible likeness, stuck over the mantelpiece. And all along the corridor there were pictures of Ailsa with her baby on her knee. Taken by Lord Snowdon, if she remembers rightly. (TSL 307).
The passage further denotes male obsession of female beauty to feed the male ego. Martin Pope seems to draw his psychological balance from Ailsa’s pictures, while Humphrey Clark, Ailsa’s first husband is sexually obsessed by Ailsa’s beauty. Ailsa is Martin Pope’s ideal woman that Gilbert and Gubar denote in *The Madwoman in the Attic*:

> The ideal woman that male authors dream of generating is always an angel, as Norman O. Brown’s comment about Laura/poetry suggested. (Gilbert and Gubar 20).

Humphrey the intellectual gentleman illustrates the male sexual desire for the female gender. At this juncture, the sexual onslaught of the female is in the form of Humphrey’s wild imaginations:

> He would sit proudly watching her, thinking of the moment when he would have this lavishly broadcast and much duplicated and refracted woman to himself, in the flesh, alone. (TSL 183).

Humphrey’s deepest desire seems to rest in the possession of Ailsa which is both at the physical and psychological levels. In *Women’s Oppression Today*, Michele Barrett states:

> The Madonna/whore dichotomy runs through western patriarchal culture as the means whereby men have sought to ensure both the sanctity and inheritance of their families and their extra-familial sexual pleasure. (Barrett 45).

Ailsa represents both the traditional and the contemporary woman; she is beautiful with a passion to dress for the occasion and simultaneously, she is well educated and independent. Humphrey the marine biologist therefore, depends on Ailsa to affirm his maleness, although Ailsa seems to be quite unaware of it.
Further, Humphrey feels that he lacks the eloquence of speech and therefore he depends on the female gender; Dame Mary, to help him on his first meeting of his first wife Ailsa, who still has the power to make him speechless. In this instance, Humphrey; the male depends on the female for his psychological comfort:

‘Poor Humphrey,’ says Dame Mary, with an extraordinary and slightly coarse giggle lurking playfully under her words, ‘he can’t talk, he’s struck dumb with the honour, he’s appointed me his spokesperson for the evening…’ Oh, she is a comfort to him, she is his protector, this motherly woman with orange hair, he is immensely grateful to her for taking him under her wing, and she stands staunchly by his side, small but loyal, as his first wife Ailsa Kelman makes her dangerous entrance, glittering in silver sequins, sailing through the room towards him, her head held high, her carriage straight (posture, Ailsa, posture), with her silver-banged Athenian arms outstretched for him. (TSL 281).

The passage is a contrast to male written literature on the female gender. In male written literature, beautiful women are often enamored by male attributes and women are often caught speechless. Yet in the given context it is Humphrey who needs help and who is caught speechless by the sight of his beautiful, well educated and intelligent first wife. It is not the male who makes the ‘dangerous entrance’ to greet the other. It is the female in all her female self who greets Humphrey. At this juncture the role of the age old narration is reversed and the female is focused on the forefront. In Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol. IV, Nancy Chodorow in “The Sexual Sociology of Adult Life” states:
An examination of the way that gender personality is expressed in adulthood reveals how women and men create, and are often committed to creating, the interpersonal relationships which underlie and reproduce the family structure that produced them. (Evans 169).

Humphrey takes comfort in the eloquence of Dame Mary who intervenes at the right moment to soothe Humphrey. Drabble thus overturns the traditional form of male writing; the beautiful damsel in distress saved by the gallant knight is replaced by the male in distress saved by the robust Dame Mary. Further, Humphrey’s refuge in Dame Mary is akin to the mother child relationship with the mother figure as the comforter.

In *The Radiant Way*, Drabble illustrates the subordination of the female gender within marriage and the fatal doom for the female during the time of divorce. After being married for twenty years, Liz is divorced by her second husband Charles, and she is at a point where she can draw no conclusion by herself. She asks Alix to advice her and Alix in turn consults her husband Brian:

Alix, when consulted on this point by Liz, was particularly useless. She didn’t even know what she ought to think. She in turn consulted Brian, who spoke up for Liz better than she could herself. ‘Twenty years,’ he said. ‘Twenty years, she stuck it out with him, she brought up his children, she had two children with him, and she says she paid the grocery bills. Of course he ought to make her a decent settlement. What if she falls ill? What if she can’t work?’ (TRW 129).

Drabble through Brian seems to suggest that all males are not anti feminists and that there are many men who support the economic development of the female gender. Apart from the fact that
Liz has for twenty years maintained the domestic duties for Charles, Brian is annoyed that Liz has been paying the grocery bills through the twenty years of her married life. Brian is concerned that Charles should make Liz ‘a decent settlement’ that can guarantee her financial assistance even when she is faced with health problems. Marxist feminists in favour of female economic development refute to the patriarchal control of finances that ultimately results in male supremacy. In Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol. IV, Margaret Jackson in her article, “Sex, Class and Hetero-Relations” cites Frances Power Cobbe and states:

She maintained that the relationship between husband and wife was that of master and slave, that marriage was a structure created by men for men, to give them absolute power over women; and that they exercised control in two ways- by purse or stick. (Evans 4).

The preceding passage highlights Frances Power Cobbe’s argument on the issue of sexual economics of male power. The control of male economic power in the guise of Charles is magnified at the time of the couple’s divorce; a time when the woman is at a loss on the economic ground. This issue activates Brian’s anger towards Charles; the sole economic power of Charles over Liz. Brian is alert to the fact that Charles had depended on Liz for the past twenty years as a guardian angle to his children and to maintain his home. Yet at the time of divorce, male dependence on the female does not seem have much effect as the female has to bow to the whims of the male authority on the issue of financial provision. Thus, divorce makes Liz vulnerable even though Charles has made his profits during his dependence on Liz.

In The Ice Age, Anthony depends on Alison during his crisis. Although Anthony and Alison are not married, Anthony depends on Alison for moral and emotional support. Anthony is unable to control his own mood swings. Due to his economic greed Anthony will soon be
imprisoned and he is in an emotional strain. The emotional strength of the female is highlighted in the guise of Alison the protagonist:

Alison rang Anthony’s solicitors, and her own, and inquired about the dissolving of partnerships. Anthony’s behavior was so erratic that she could all too easily imagine him putting his signature to some vast new lunatic enterprise: and maybe this time no wealthy council would be there to bale him out. She was determined not to go through all that again: she had had enough. (TIA 224).

Anthony is unable to comprehend the fatality of his evil deeds and the procedure that should precede his trial. In *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol. IV*, Nancy Chodorow in “The Sexual Sociology of Adult Life” states:

Men continue to enforce the sexual division of spheres as a defense against powerlessness in the labor market. (Evans 169).

Alison’s dependability is illustrated while Anthony remains irritable. She rings Anthony’s solicitors and she proceeds with other necessary steps. In this instance, Anthony uses his irritability to force Alison to do the work for him. Since Anthony is about to face his trial, he is powerless. Alison is therefore, determined not to face the ordeal of bailing Anthony again as she has had enough.

Each of the select text is concerned with the importance of female education and reading habit. Margaret Drabble is deeply concerned with the female gender as a part of the reading public and her stress on the importance of female education is evident especially in the select texts. Each of the protagonists are well read and well educated with degrees from renowned universities. Drabble therefore seems to make a statement in her own way to suggest that reading
and good education are necessary criteria for the female gender in order to emerge as the new woman in the history of the female gender. Simultaneously, the novelist subtly suggests that the female needs to be moulded in order to achieve her necessary goal in her life’s journey.

In *The Peppered Moth*, Bessie the fore runner of the new woman at the age of nine is filled with contempt with the Motley Girls Library books. Most of the books are Sunday school prizes that have been awarded to various Victorian Cudworths and Bawtrys for chapel attendance. The following extract shows young Bessie’s contempt for the books that have been awarded to her aunts:

Most of these Bessie found as contemptible as Mr Beever’s bathetic sermon. A characteristic example was *The Dairyman’s Daughter; an Authentic Narrative from Real Life* by the late Rev. Legh Richmond, A.M., Rector of Turvey, Bedfordshire, reprinted by William Walker in Otley, which had been given to one of her Cudworth aunts, Selina, by Bessie’s grandmother in 1861. (TPM 19).

Bessie is irritated that the book has been awarded to her Great Aunt Selina as a Sunday school prize. Bessie’s contempt for the particular book lies in the fact that rustic poverty is compared to virtue:

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 the 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 20).

Bessie as an intelligent child is able to comprehend to a certain extent that poverty and virtue are not truly interrelated. This observation shows that Bessie’s intelligence is far above her age group. The trajectory of Drabble’s discourse is on the ideology of hegemony; the relatedness of poverty and virtue that has been institutionalised by the capitalist in order to gain control of the proletariat. Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature* states:

> For ‘hegemony’ is a concept which at once includes and goes beyond two powerful earlier concepts: that of ‘culture’ as a ‘whole social process’, in which men define and shape their whole lives; and that of ‘ideology’, in any of its Marxist senses, in which a system of meanings and values is the expression or projection of a particular class interest. (Williams 108).

Young Bessie is irritated with the book as the clergyman praises the humble cottages while he is overwhelmed by the mansions of the wealthy. Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature* further states:

> Cultural work and activity are not now, in any ordinary sense, a superstructure: not only because of the depth and thoroughness at which any cultural hegemony is lived, but because cultural tradition and practice are seen as much more than super structural expressions – reflections, mediations, or typifications – of a formed social and economic structure. On the contrary, they are among the basic processes of the formation itself and, further, related to a much wider area of reality than the abstractions of
‘social’ and ‘economic’ experience. People seeing themselves and each other in directly personal relationships; people seeing the natural world and themselves in it; … (Williams 111).

The book awarded to Great Aunt Selina is a representation of male dictate over the female as the male written book proposes guidelines on female moral values. Bessie is unable to identify herself with the heroine Elizabeth’s goodness. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar state:

> Of course, from the eighteenth century on, conduct books for ladies had proliferated, and joining young girls to submissiveness, modesty, selflessness; reminding all women that they should be angelic. (Gilbert and Gubar 23).

Gilbert and Gubar also denote:

> In short, like Goethe’s Makarie, Honoria has no story except a sort of anti-story of selfless innocence based on the notion that “Man must be pleased; but him to please / is woman’s pleasure. (Gilbert and Gubar 23).

Thus, it may be assumed that the female child is molded from a very young age to fit her role in the pattern that society dictates the female gender. Bessie’s irritation with the heroine, the clergyman and the social moral depicted in the book shows Bessie’s female conflict at a very young age.

Paid work is an important issue to Drabble’s female protagonists, due to which the tradition of marriage and its package of unpaid worker is a constant conflict. Reading from the formative year marks the protagonists of the select texts for which most of the female protagonists of the select texts are university educated in various streams of higher education.
Drabble’s maternal and educated skills seem to instinctively note the importance of the child’s formative years in the area of education, and the time and space required to study. The following passage from *The Peppered Moth* depicts Bessie as she prepares to sit for her Cambridge entrance:

> Did she have time enough for study? inquired Mrs Barron. Oh yes, said Bessie, her parents were very understanding. She had her own little corner, her own worktable. She had plenty of encouragement at home, said shy, hard-working, pretty, tender little Bessie Bawtry. (TPM 47-48).

Provision of the required time, space and encouragement is difficult for a working class family and this seems to be the reason that Drabble’s female protagonists hail from middle class families. Bessie’s father is an electrical engineer in Breaseborough, the coal belt of South Yorkshire. Through the protagonist Bessie, Drabble denotes the importance of time, space and encouragement in a child’s education. Since Bessie the intelligent girl is provided with the necessary time, space and encouragement by her enthusiastic parents, she matriculates with distinction in the early twentieth century and in the preceding passage she attempts to sit for her Cambridge entrance. Drabble’s protagonist Bessie is favoured with the opportunity of education by her supportive parents. The authorial conflict at this juncture is on the traditional male writers whose educational preference is bestowed on the male child; boys in the study and family library while girls are trained by their mothers in domestic work. The intelligent Bessie is therefore, in the process of being molded to be the forerunner of the new woman, a contrast to the women characters in male writings.
Marxist feminists correlate the importance of reading and social realities. In *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice*, Deborah L. Madsen in “Gender and Work: Marxist Feminism and Charlotte Perkins Gilman”, denotes:

In terms of literary theorizing, Marxist feminists focus upon the relationship between reading and social realities. Art, including literature, is seen to be prescribed by the forms of economic production. The conditions of the production of literary texts are determined by the economics of publishing and distribution, marketing and profit-making. Marxist feminists question the effect of gender on the manner in which authorship is received and canons are formed. Textual meanings are assumed to be produced by their socio-economic context and the ideology of the reader rather than existing in some transcendent apolitical realm. (Madsen 66-67).

To the Marxist feminist, social realities are more important than the idealized world. The world of the living directly indicates the necessary economic involvement of the person. Therefore, reading directly relates to the social reality of economics. Madsen’s focus on the production of literary texts directly involves economics; an area that does not involve the traditional female gender. Further, the economics involved at this level is the economics of publishing, distribution, marketing, and profit-making that are all parts of the social realities that writers have to estimate which in turn is directly related to the reading public. In order to align the female gender as a majority of the reading public, it is necessary that the female must be provided with good education so as to comprehend the meaning of what she has had read. The trajectory of this discourse lies in the importance given to female education by Margaret Drabble. Since the
archetypal women in male writings are depicted with male idea of female qualities, such female protagonists are often naïve, beautiful, dutiful and they often possess the good mother qualities, yet, often bereft of higher education and mostly dependent on marriage and marginalised to the area of child rearing and domestication.

Drabble’s female protagonists on the other hand are well educated, intelligent, efficient, psychologically strong, and they mostly favour independence. Although Bessie belongs to a middle class family, she needs financial support to help her though her university days. She therefore, applies for the County Major Scholarship. Bessie receives her scholarship, but, she has her own problems as she has to live on the meager amount of her scholarship. Drabble in the following passage illustrates the vast difference within the English middle class:

There were some anxieties and hesitations. She worried about money. Although she took care of every penny, she had at once realized—indeed, from the time of her first interview had foreknown—that she would be on a smaller allowance than most of her fellow students. Most of them were the daughters of barristers, of headmasters, of civil servants and farmers, of local government officers, of archdeacons and doctors and architects. (TPM 104).

Though Bessie’s parents have given her the moral support and encouragement towards her education, they are unable to provide her any financial assistance and she has to survive on her scholarship. Bessie is on a tight budget compared to her friends and this seems to state the fact that she does not belong to the upper middle class section of the English society. She is constantly ‘worried about money’, and she economizes on her scholarship. The economics of
financial support seems to be one of Bessie’s thrust and determination towards the completion of her university education; to have a career as paid worker after the completion of her education.

In *The Garrick Year*, Emma and her college friend Mary talk about the past and the future that they had envisaged. The present that confronts them is a contrast to both the women:

… When we reopened conversation we talk about what we had each done since we had left school: how she had gone to London University, not that she particularly wanted to at first, but because her father had insisted, and had got a good degree in History and had then done a Diploma of Education and taught for a year or two in a good girls’ boarding school in the north of England; how I had gone to Italy, and lived in London, and done nothing at all. I did not dare to tell her about my aspirations towards glossy photographs and television screens. (TGY 75).

Emma the more intelligent of the two women had been expected by Mary to have had continued her university education; remained independent with an intellectual career, while Mary was expected to have had an early marriage and children. The present is a stark turn of events as Emma is a married woman with two children and Mary Summers is independent and has an intellectual career. Although Emma is intelligent and educated, she is bound by the traditional norms and social notions on marriage. In *Women’s Oppression Today*, Michele Barrett states:

Many Marxist feminists, on the contrary, have argued implicitly or explicitly that the labour of childcare understood in terms of capital’s long-term needs for future labour power, constitutes the more intractable aspect of women’s oppression. (Barrett 175).
Thus, Emma’s dream of independence is marginalised by her early marriage and child care, and marriage further marginalises her career option. Emma is an instance of a woman with the chance of independence and a bright prospect of a good career, but, who eventually ushers her own fall in the form of marriage.

Margaret Drabble captures variants of female characters in each of the select text and in *The Witch of Exmoor*, Frieda interestingly evokes both pity and humor. The change of Frieda’s personality after her mother’s death; her recent freedom, is a marked transformation as Frieda is at present a different person. She is no longer over shadowed by her mother’s domination and therefore, Frieda is at liberty to do what she likes:

> About two years ago Frieda, who had never smoked, or at least not to their knowledge, took up cigarettes. She was seen puffing away, and seen not only by them. She appeared, cigarette in hand, in public, on platforms, in photographs. (TWE 26).

The significant change in Frieda’s attitude is a change from traditional notions and social norms and her smoking seems to signify her reaction against the inequality between the male and the female gender. She abides by the rules of tradition till her mother’s last breath and reacts against the traditional norms with the death of her mother. To those who favour tradition, Frieda’s smoking in public places is not normal as the word normal is deeply rooted in tradition. The trajectory of Frieda’s smoking seems to be an expression of her liberty and independence. In *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol.-II*, Jacqueline Rose in “Femininity and its Discontents”, states:

> To return to the relationship between Marxism and psychoanalysis with which I started, I think it is relevant that the most systematic attack
we have had on the hierarchies and organization of the male Left gives to
gives to
women the privilege of the personal in a way which divests it (has to
divest it) of complexity at exactly this level of the conflicts and
discontinuities of psychic life. Like many feminists, the slogan ‘the
personal political’ has been central to my own political development; just
as I see the question of sexuality, as a political issue which exceeds the
province of Marxism (‘economic’, ‘ideological’ or whatever), as one of
the most important defining characteristics of feminism itself. (Evans 318-
319).

From the passage it may be assumed that the established traditional hierarchy; supremacy of the
patriarch and the supremacy of the matriarch in the absence of the patriarch are topics of conflict
for the marginalised. Hierarchy subordinates the other due to which the conflict arises. The male
and female interpellation in economic and ideological ground that is established by tradition and
social norms hinders the female to establish her own identity. It is at this point that Frieda starts
smoking in public places and asserts her identity:

She took up smoking, and she also took up the opera. In her earlier life she
had shown little interest in music, but in her last year in London she was to
be seen at the Royal Opera House, at the Coliseum, sometimes alone,
sometimes with a motley and expensive entourage. (TWE 26).

Frieda assumes a new identity in the absence of her dominating mother who has had to her last
days, maintained the patriarchal ideology of female conduct. Frieda therefore, takes up smoking
and attends the opera with the kind of friends that interests her. At this stage, she is more
independent and more determined to be a new person as the chord that has tied her to the
traditional norms and social notions can no longer obstruct her. She defies patriarchal ideology by assuming an anti traditional female attitude and she enjoys her new life. Educated and intelligent Frieda is therefore a conflict to the established traditional notion of feminine qualities as she liberates herself from traditional, patriarchal and economic norms.

In *The Millstone* and *The Radiant Way*, Drabble’s protagonists Rosamund and Alix have socialist parents of the upper middle class English society. In their later stage both Rosamund and Alix are able to sympathize and empathize with the working class. The reason seems to lie in the fact that both the protagonists are unconsciously molded in the socialist ideology that is directly linked to the working class. The following extract denotes Alix’s mentality as a child on the socialist thought:

A rum evolution, Alix had often thought, though it had not seemed strange at the time: what had then seemed strange, in her girlhood, had been her parents’ quaint socialist ideals, which had caused her such embarrassment, and, partly because of that embarrassment, had inspired in her such undeviating loyalty. ‘I say, does your Dad *really* vote labour?’ had been one of the politer questions addressed to her at elections and other periods of heightened political interest. ‘My Dad’s a Socialist,’ Alix would mumble in reply, aged eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, thinking that the word ‘Socialist’ sounded more acceptable, more intellectual, than the dreadful word ‘Labour’ with its connotations of manual toil and prison routine. (TRW 79-80).

Children of the middle class family seem to have more ideas on contemporary issues pertaining to various topics that even extend to political topics. The preceding passage illustrates young
Alix who is confronted with political questions. In her social setting, Alix is mentally molded from the age of eleven, to the idea of social acceptability and her child’s mindset forms the acceptable answers to the questions. In *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol.-II*, Jacqueline Rose “Femininity and its Discontents”, states:

> Although there are obvious differences between these two readings of psychoanalysis, they nonetheless share an emphasis on the social change of women, or the distribution of roles for women, across cultures…

(Evans 310).

Jacqueline Rose’s statement on female sexuality in connection to psychoanalysis seems to denote Alix’s capability to live her present widow life. It seems that her psyche at work during her childhood is manifested at a later stage. Although Alix is not involved in politics, the social thoughts that she encounters in the form of political questions in her childhood seems to guide her in her adult life. Since Sebastian’s death she has to adjust herself to the lower middle class category as she refuses financial aid from Sebastian’s mother. Though she lives an independent life, she is in the process of finding a suitable paid job. Alix also has to take care of her small child and she is determined to complete her university education. The following passage from *The Radiant Way* shows Alix as an adult who is able to adjust herself to her social surroundings:

> Gradually her fears of the rough and the unmannerly faded, her expectations of the world adjusted. As a child, she had always had a secret yearning to enter the other city, the unknown city beyond and within the suburbs, where nobody, middle-class folklore declared, read books or washed or cooked proper meals. She had sometimes, even as a child, wondered if it could be as fearful as its reputation. She disliked fear.
Particularly she disliked being made to feel fear of her fellow men and women. Now she lived with these people, and was no longer afraid, for they were like herself in more ways than they were unlike herself. She faded into the background. (TRW 103-104).

Alix widowed with a small child and in financial disposition braves her social surroundings as she resides among the working class. She defeats her childhood fear of the working class by living with them, and she finds that they are not as frightful as it has often been asserted by the middle class adults in her childhood. The psychological fear created to young children on the issue of the English class structure seems to rest on the socio-economic notion, and on the determination to maintain one’s own class. Alix therefore struggles to maintain her middle class status by pursuing her university education on her meager economic condition:

She had to find her own way, in the damp, in the shadows, by the light of forty-watt bulbs, in the solitary evenings. She would not visit her own family, except as a formality, and then as briefly as decency permitted.

Their pity, their concern, rubbed her raw. (TRW 99).

In her lean period, Alix prefers to struggle and lead an independent life while she prepares herself to acquire the mainstream identity; the English middle class identity as one of the new women. She thus resists visiting her family to strengthen her female psyche and to overcome their pity. Alix’s struggle and resistance for help paves her path to emerge as one of the new women in the select texts.

Margaret Drabble captures variants of female personalities in the select texts and in *The Ice Age* Drabble seems to assert the idea that the female gender is not as delicate as depicted in male written literature. Alison the divorcee is not well educated but her competency to face
trying situations is remarkable and realistic. She is in sole charge of her special child Molly and Jane; her wild teenage daughter. Though Anthony and Alison are unmarried, Anthony depends on Alison to take care of his various official problems. Alison also braves the unknown Baltic to visit Jane at the time of Jane’s imprisonment. When Alison returns to her home, she finds that the corrupt Anthony is in deeper trouble that will soon result in Anthony’s imprisonment. The supposed delicate and weak female who needs male protection; male ideology, in this instance protects Anthony, but she is thoroughly exhausted with the outcome of her work. The following extract denotes Alison’s exhaustion:

‘I don’t know what to think any more,’ said Alison, forlornly. ‘I’m thoroughly confused.’

‘I’m sure we all are. There’s nothing so wrong with that.’

‘And I’m so tired, too. I think I must go to bed, Anthony. I’ve not been feeling well.’ She rose to her feet. ‘But I do think it’s a bit awful of you, Anthony, to knock other places down, and that nice Mr Boot from the sweet factory, and drive them out, and put up all those great blocks, and then come and sit up here in this- this Pevsner Ancient Monument, and say you like it. Of course you like it. But it just isn’t consistent of you, is it?’

(TIA 176).

Since Alison’s thoughts are continuously overrun by socially conflicting actions of her dear ones; Jane and Anthony, and her special child Molly, Alison is mentally exhausted and she is unable to think. The female is at the end of her tether and it is at this juncture that Alison questions Anthony’s credibility as a person; as a man. The conflict at this stage is that the lesser educated female struggles and tries every possible means to overcome her difficulties while the
educated but corrupt Anthony either moodily sulks or exhibits his temper in public. Drabble does not fail to capture the comic reality of the given situation when Alison tells Anthony, ‘….and say you like it.’ In The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory, Nancy C. M. Hartsock in “The Feminist Standpoint” denotes:

Women’s lives, like men’s, are structured by social relations which manifest the experience of dominant gender and class. The ability to go beneath the surface of appearances to reveal the real but concealed social relations requires both theoretical and political activity. Feminist theorists must demand that feminist theorizing be grounded in women’s material activity and must as well be a part of the political struggle necessary to develop areas of social life modeled on this activity. (Nicholson 234).

Simultaneously, Alison’s statement seems to refer to the patriarchal ideology of male supremacy and the capitalist attitude towards the proletariat in times of crisis. At this juncture, Alison is unafraid of living an independent life during Anthony’s imprisonment and it marks Alison’s journey towards being one of the new women.

Drabble’s central thrust in the select texts and in her other works lies on the credibility of the female gender that is often marginalised in male written literature and subjugated by patriarchal ideology. The protagonists in the select texts, with the exception of Emma in The Garrick Year, finally emerge as the new women by shedding the traditional woman quality ascribed to the female gender; patriarchal ideology, and taking up either independent roles or pursuing profitable careers. The protagonists overcome the female subjugation that are in the form of patriarchal dictates, matriarchal authority, traditional norms, social notions, economic status and heterosexual relationships. The emancipated protagonists who emerge as the new
women are therefore well educated university graduates who are career oriented and independent in their own way. The middle class protagonists elevate themselves in the social ladder not by virtue of their birth, but by virtue of their hard work and determination. They assume their social positions as their independent selves.

In *The Witch of Exmoor*, Drabble illustrates that it is not only patriarchy that controls and dominates the home. Frieda is in constant fear of her mother Gladys; as her school teacher and as her mother. Frieda’s father Ernie is a mild tempered and a hard working man who works in the fields and farm due to which he is mostly absent in his home. In Ernie’s absence the teacher and mother dominates the house and the focus at this juncture is Frieda’s fear of her mother. The following extract depicts Frieda’s deep dislike for her mother, sister and her husband:

> She came to dread her mother, and to hate her sister. She came to hate her husband, but that, she believes, is a common story. (TWE 135).

Frieda’s dread of her mother seems to be correlated to Adrienne Rich’s feminist discourse on patriarchal ideology. In *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol-IV*, Adrienne Rich in “The Kingdom of the Fathers” states:

> Power is a primal word and a primal relationship under patriarchy. Through control of the mother, the man assures himself of possession of his children; through control of his children he insures the disposition of his patrimony and the safe passage of his soul after death. It would seem therefore that from very ancient times the identity, the very personality, of the man depends on power, and on power in a certain, specific sense: that of *power over others*, beginning with a woman and her children. (Evans 84).
The mother’s control of her children is therefore a system of distribution of patriarchal power within the family unit. As a mild man, Ernie is free from Frieda’s focus of her fear, but, the mother Gladys, who favours her first born Everhilda and bullies Frieda, is the focus of Frieda’s fear. Further, Frieda is earlier bound by her marriage and her children and she is unable to pursue her dream; writing. When Andrew deserts Frieda she is still bound by her young children and her dominating mother. She is enslaved by domestic work, child care and her demanding mother. There seems to be no outlet for Frieda who tries to manage the family on her small income. The following passage illustrates Frieda’s freedom with the death of her mother Gladys:

Then Gladys died, and Frieda was set free. This was Gogo’s theory. It was the headiness of freedom in her sixties, the late liberation from the guilt of the tedious and armchair-bound old bloodsucker, that had sent her spinning off into space and seventeenth-century Sweden. It must have been on Gladys’s death that Frieda had started her last disastrous literary enterprise. None of them had known what she was plotting, for she never talked about her work in advance; ever a solitary worker, she had hidden her typewriter from prying children’s eyes, and in later years, when there were none to pry, she had become secretive – and, if questioned, obscure and misleading. (TWE 29).

Though Frieda is in her sixties, she enjoys her new found freedom and progressively proceeds to do the things that stimulate her physical activities and her thoughts. Since her dependants; husband and mother do not exist anymore and since her children have all grown up, she is now in a position and capacity to enjoy her time as she prefers. Although some of her children still
live with her, Frieda maintains her independence by being secretive, obscure and misleading. The following passage illustrates Frieda’s emancipated life:

Sexual passion dies, that is well known, but so do all other affections. Frieda Haxby tells herself that she does not care for her children, or her grandchildren; she has outgrown them, as years ago she grew out of her love for her mother and her sister… (TWE 155).

Thus, transformed Frieda assumes the role of the new woman as a confident and an independent person and she devotes her time to her writing. In *The Routledge Companion to Critical Theory* Susan Heckman in “Feminism” states:

In the twentieth century a number of feminists used Marx’s theories to formulate a Marxist/socialist feminism. Juliet Mitchell developed ‘dual-systems theory’: the position that women are oppressed not only by capitalism, as Engels had argued, but by patriarchy as well. Dual-systems theorists concluded that the liberation of women requires the dismantling of both of these structures. (Malpas and Wake 92).

As denoted by Juliet Mitchell’s ‘dual-systems theory’ and other Dual-systems theorists, the emancipated women who have achieved their independent status and have emerged as the new women seem to cross the patriarchal border and the capitalist domain even though they still have to live in a society that is built on capitalism and patriarchal ideology.

In *The Peppered Moth*, Drabble further seems to suggest that for the female gender it is easier to give wholehearted work participation when one is educated, intelligent and independent. Miss Heald refutes to the idea of marriage for various reasons as illustrated in the given passage:
What would she want with a man? If she married, she would have to give up her job. That was then the rule. She was happier teaching. She enjoyed the respect of a town where the members of the middle class could be numbered in named dozens. She was independent. The daughter of a Unitarian minister who had warmly supported in her career, she had a strong sense of mission and was fulfilling it. She was not lonely. She shared a home with Miss Haworth, who taught Latin, and had a First Class Honours degree from Leeds. On their joint incomes they lived comfortably and companionably. What more could they want? (TPM 33-34).

Miss Heald opposes the idea of marriage as the English law does not permit the married woman to work as paid employee. In *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol. IV*, Margaret Jackson “Sex, Class and Hetero- Relations” cites Cicely Hamilton and states:

In addition to the economic pressures which forced most women to marry there was another compelling social pressure: ‘a fear of spinsterhood with its accompaniments, scorn and confession of failure in your trade’. How many children, she wondered, were born each year merely because their mothers were afraid of being called old maids? (Evans 8).

The educated woman Miss Heald is content to be a teacher who belongs to the English middle class. Drabble seems to consent to the Marxist feminists ideology that is in favour of gainful employment for the female gender. In *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol. IV*, citing Cicely Hamilton, Margaret Jackson states:
She argued that man’s motive in concentrating all woman’s energy on the trade of marriage was to deny it any other outlet, and that his persistent refusal to allow women new spheres of activity was rooted in the knowledge that ‘economic independence would bring with it the power of refusal’. (Evans 7).


> Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason, of which it is at once the effect, the support, and one of the privileged alibis. It has been one with the phallocentric tradition. It is indeed that same self-admiring, self-stimulating, self-congratulatory phallocentrism. (Evans 115).

Miss Heald’s life seems to illustrate that independence does not result in loneliness; an objection to the idea of marriage. Further, Miss Heald shares a home with Miss Haworth; a teacher, and they live on their joint incomes; a conflict to heterosexual relationship. Comparatively, Miss Heald and Miss Haworth who live together on their joint incomes seem to stand a better chance on the economic level to that of the heterosexual relationship where the male dominates the finances.

In *The Sea Lady*, Ailsa remains single after her second divorce. She dismantles the oppression of capitalism by establishing herself in a favourable socio-economic status and she dismantles patriarchy by living independently. Ailsa emerges as a new woman but the new woman quality in her is quite different from Frieda, Alix Esther’s new woman quality. Ailsa is a woman with the capacity of multi-tasking; performing in the theater, writing a book and
completing her thesis. Drabble depicts her as an extraordinarily beautiful woman who is still fancied by both her ex-husbands. In the following passage Drabble describes the beautiful emancipated woman:

She was boldly dressed, for a woman in her sixties, but she came of a bold generation, and she seemed confident that the shadowy shoals of her cohort were gathered around her in massed support as she flaunted herself upon the podium. (TSL 1).

Drabble’s argument in this context seems to lie in the male ideology of naïve beautiful women who need male protection. In Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader, Cheri Register in “American Feminist Literary Criticism: A Bibliographical Introduction” states:

Feminists often emphasise that they are not simply seeking more room for women in the present social order. They want a new social order founded on ‘humanistic’ values, some of which are traditionally ‘female’ and not respected in contemporary society. (Eagleton 237).

Drabble through Ailsa builds ‘a new social order’ as the protagonist is neither naïve nor does she need male protection. She is independent and fends for herself. She is confident and she loves her work. Ailsa informs Humphrey her first husband that she will soon be given an honorary degree:

‘In a couple of days,’ she said, throwing him a sprat, ‘I’m going up north to get an honorary degree, at the University of Ornemouth. That’s the next excitement.’ (TSL 15).

As a confident woman Ailsa is not discouraged by Humphrey’s questions on the honorary degree that she will soon receive:
‘Do you mean why am I going, or do you mean why am I getting the honorary degree?’

‘Whichever. Both.’

‘I’m going because we used to spend our summer holidays near there, and the degree is for my contributions to culture.’

‘Culture?’

He let the word float questioningly in the air between them. A little sadly, it floated: waterlogged, submerging, a small paper boat too fragile to carry any cargo.

‘Culture,’ she repeated. (TSL 15).

At this moment, it is the male; Humphrey, who is intimidated by the female. The woman in the given context is buoyant while the male submerges in her intellect and beauty. Humphrey is further amazed to find Ailsa’s name in the programme that he is attending in Ornemouth:

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 *Percicles, 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).

Thus, Ailsa utilizes her isolation from the male gender to emerge as the confident, beautiful and efficient woman who has the unusual capacity of multi-tasking. In *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, Cheri Register in “American Feminist Literary Criticism: A Bibliographical Introduction” states:
Literature should show women involved in activities that are not traditionally ‘feminine’, to speed the dissolution of rigid sex roles. It is not enough, however, to simply place a female character in a new occupation, with no corresponding change in her personality and behavior. (Eagleton 238).

Ailsa is not the helpless female that is so often depicted in male written literature. She emerges as the new woman; an independent woman who pursues the career that she loves, and simultaneously she is a blessing to the society. Drabble depicts in Ailsa a realistic character sketch of a female with various female attributes.

Margaret Drabble’s protagonists; Frieda, Rosamund, Alix, Esther and Ailsa seem to expose their best work performances in the absence of the male gender as they lead their independent lives. This independent female life in a heterosexual society is against the patriarchal ideology and spinsters are often mocked and degraded in male written literature and in the social circle. On the other hand, Drabble’s female characters: Miss Heald in *The Peppered Moth* and Esther in *The Radiant Way*, who are spinsters have remarkable personalities with compassion to help others when the need arises. They are not the poor uncharitable spinsters that one comes across in male written literature under the patriarchal order. In the select texts female isolation marks the female transformation just as the male isolation often produces good poetry and fictions. Thus, isolation in the select texts seems to run parallel to the male isolation that produces good male written literature. In *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice*, Deborah L. Madsen in “Gender and Consciousness: Psychoanalytic Feminism and Kate Chopin”, states:

Masculinity and femininity are represented in the narrative in terms of the experience of, and attitudes towards, solitude, isolation and
death. These experiences are also charged with meaning in terms of the Oedipal stage of psychological gender development. Solitude is represented in two distinct ways: as resignation which is hostile and masculine; and solitude as defiance which is welcoming and feminine. The sea is variously described as symbolising these two aspects of solitude. (Madsen 116).

From the preceding passage it may be assumed that most of Drabble’s protagonists in the select texts favour solitude and isolation as the means of defiance against patriarchy. In the following extract from *The Witch of Exmoor*, solitude seems to be a welcome release for Frieda Haxby:

> It is raining on Exmoor. Frieda Haxby Palmer sits in one of the many derelict rooms that look towards the sea, and listens to the rain on the roof. (TWE 64).

From the commotion of her family home where her children and grandchildren depend on her; the binds of patriarchy, Exmoor is a welcome release where she rejuvenates her female self. Frieda enjoys her independent isolated life and she uses her freedom to do what she desires. Her activity in Exmoor is absent of familial control; child care and exhaustion from domestic work. The emancipated Frieda passes her time relaxing; listening to the rain and taking her daily walk, and she does not miss anybody:

> She does not miss London. She does not miss company. She has had too much company. Her early years had been too thin and clear, too static, too flat, and to escape them she had thrown herself into turbulence, as soon as her children released her- and somewhat sooner, in their view. Her middle age had been restless, it had whirled her from project to
project, from continent to continent, from bed to bed. Now she wished to be alone. (TWE 72).

Since Frieda has had too much company during her time in London, she resides in Exmoor to enjoy her independence and solitude. It is only in her old age that Frieda is able to enjoy her own space that she has needed for so long. Terry Zeally, the person who is sent to Exmoor to make Frieda sign the important document from Cate Crowe is shocked that Frieda the old woman lives all by herself in Exmoor:

Why had Mrs Haxby Palmer (he’d got that right, for a start, which was improbable) decided to settle in this part of the world? What had first brought her here? Had she intended to stay? What were her connections? (TWE 175).

Zeally’s question seems to be a universal male question on female independence and isolation. In Feminist literary Theory: A Reader, Sarah LeFanu in “In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction” states:

One of our culture’s most intense myths, the ideal of an individual who is brave and complete in isolation, is for men only. Women are grounded, enmeshed in civilization, in social connection, in family and in love (a condition a feminist culture might well define as desirable) while all our culture’s rich myths of individualism are essentially closed to them. (Eagleton 197).

But, the important thrust at this juncture is the necessity of space in a woman’s life and Frieda obtains her space by isolating herself in Exmoor. Thus, Frieda the woman who worked ‘like a man’ in her younger days lives like a man in isolation in her old age. Frieda, with the death of
her mother, gains her confidence that sets her free from her traditional bondage. The emancipated Frieda emerges as the new woman as she attains her independence, achieves economic growth, and starts publishing her books.

Drabble describes through Rosamund, the silent topic in male writings that is directly related to the human endurance of pain. Rosamund who lives an independent life does not seek the help of her friends. The helpless female of male written literature juxtaposed to Rosamund’s situation reveals that the female gender is not as fragile as she is depicted in male written literature. Through Rosamund, Drabble depicts female strength, endurance, and independence, even in case of emergency. Rosamund as an independent woman has to suffer the pains of absent relatives and friends and she has to struggle to endure her emotional pain. Rosamund is determined to have her illegitimate child in The Millstone and the following passage expresses the independent Rosamund’s endurance and capability to take care of herself even in her poignant hour.

On my last, ninth evening, however, she could not make it; she rang during the afternoon to leave message, and I thought that I would not mind, but when the visiting time came and the shuffling, silent husbands arrived, I drew my flimsy curtain and turned my head into the pillow and wept. I kept telling myself as I wept that it was nothing, just reaction, that magic excuse for all affliction, and it probably was too, but none the less painful for that. (TM 123).

Since Rosamund is in the process of emerging as the new woman she is still unable to control her emotions. Rosamund’s transformation as the new woman is amazing and she remarks:
And here I must make clear that had I not been who I am, and born and reared as I was, I would probably never have dared: I only thought I could get away with it, to put it briefly, because those ambulance men collected me from a good address, and not from a bed-sister in Tottenham or from a basement in ever-weeping Paddington. So, in a way, I was cashing in on the foibles of a society which I have always distrusted; by pretending to be above its strictures, I was merely turning its anomalies to my own use.

(TM 124).

From Rosamund’s suggestion it may be assumed that in order to evolve as the new woman, the female must be daring enough to do what she wants, and to achieve her goal she must belong to a certain class in the social structure. Rosamund seems to suggest the middle class as a class that is qualified to provide the required courage to the female gender in order to pursue her interest.

Gender division that is prominent in the English society is a practice of the patriarchal ideology within the society and more strictures are levied on the mother and the child. A single mother is not availed the State provision and welfare benefits. *The Guardian*, regarding the illegitimate child, in “Illegitimacy: The Shameful Secret” states:

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. (“Illegitimacy: The Shameful Secret,” *The Guardian*).

Rosamund’s illegitimate child bearing and child birth are social taboos and the child care that she provides to her child, instead of giving up the child to a baby home or placing the baby for adoption, is further a counteract against the English social norms; female oppression under
patriarchy. The *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*: “Bastardy – Levels of Illegitimacy, Legal Status, Population Policies” states:

In many European countries, particularly Catholic ones, illegitimate births were first and foremost a matter for the church. The church and charitable institutions established several large ORPHANAGES in major cities, especially in southern Europe. (“Bastardy – Levels of Illegitimacy, Legal Status, Population Policies,” *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society*).

Presently, Rosamund feels that she is privileged to belong to the middle class and she asserts that she has utilized the social privilege of the middle class that she has earlier disapproved. She also restates the fact that the middle class is an advantage to her, especially in connection to her illegitimate child bearing:

I would not recommend my course of action to anyone with a shade less advantage in the world than myself. Though recommendation in such cases is luckily likely to have no effect whatsoever. (TM 124).

Thus, Rosamund dares to have the illegitimate child and she is not ashamed to mention her address to the ambulance men. She also seems to comparatively suggest that Tottenham and Paddington where the working class abound would have been a less suitable address for the ambulance men to collect her from. In “The Truth About Lies: The Millstone”, Jim Murdoch comments:

Clare Tomalin wrote that Drabble “is one of the few modern novelists who has actually changed government policy, by what she wrote in The Millstone about visiting children in hospital”. Now thanks in part to
Drabble, mothers will never have to scream like Rosamund in order to see their babies. (Murdoch).

Rosamund is determined to keep her child and maintain her middle class identity and she continues writing her thesis even after she has her baby. Rosamund who has been striving and struggling to maintain a single parent identity emerges as one of the new women as she is independent, courageous, confident and determined to keep her baby as a refute to the English patriarchal ideology and social notions. She also generates her financial provision by giving tuition to foreign students.

Margaret Drabble seems to disagree with the existing patriarchal ideology of male access to knowledge, autonomy, separation and distance. Her female protagonists are therefore, intelligent and educated and they maintain their autonomy, distance and separation. The following extract from *The Radiant Way* illustrates Esther’s independent life:

> Esther, unmarried, appeared happy. She pursued her studies. She planned a thesis on the works of Carlo Crivelli, so briefly mentioned in 1894 by Berenson, so little mentioned since. She did not expect to see much of Liz and Alix, who had married and made their own lives after another pattern. She had a flat in Camden Town. She continued to go out to dinner with academics, to receive the hard-drinking architect. (TRW 100).

The female living in isolation; independent, seems to develop more growth in her female self. As depicted by Margaret Drabble, the independent female Esther is happy in her unmarried status and she emerges as the new woman as she is independent and educated and she has a good job to finance her. Regarding the male autonomy Toril Moi in *What is a Woman?* states:
Having divided the world, patriarchal ideology genders the two halves. Nature, objectified and oppressed, is female, whereas knowledge is characterized as male:

…the characterization of both the scientific mind and its modes of access to knowledge as masculine is indeed significant. Masculine here connotes, as it so often does, autonomy, separation and distance. It connotes a radical rejection of any commingling of subject and object, which are, it now appears, quite consistently identified as male and female. (Moi 349).

The conflict in Drabble’s protagonists arises due to female oppression and marginalization. Although oppressed, Drabble’s protagonists struggle for their liberation in various ways. Unlike Frieda of The Witch of Exmoor who disapproves visitors in her independent life, Esther continues to meet her academic friends for dinner. Although Esther loves company, she distances herself from her close friends Liz and Alix as they are married and are dominated by the male gender.

Independent life is the turning point in Alix’s life. Alix, a previous resident of Leeds, Sussex, Cambridge, Provence and Tuscany; where the English middle class abounds, presently resides in Islington among the working class with her tight budget; marking exam papers:

At the end of Alix’s road was a little patch of grass, on the corner in front of the launderette and the pub. A small patch, smelling of dog shit, in a heavily built-up area. On it was a bench, and on the bench sat, in fair weather and sometimes in foul, a row of strange-complexioned men, not all… ‘Come and sit down for a minute, darling,’ they would wheedle. And
sometimes Alix sat down with them, in the feeble London sunshine, to pass the time of day. ‘It’s a grand day,’ they would say, when it was. She would agree. Idle, derelict, washed-up, full, as often as not, with a deep, deep sentimentality, a strange despairing optimistic emotion, which would flow from them… They rarely seemed drunk to Alix. They were past drunkenness, washed up on some far beach of harmless universal being, ground down to the bedrock of being, unstruggling, undemanding, unresentful. Dirty, ragged, high-smelling, communing with the Lord. They told her not to worry, the worst would not happen. (TRW 104-105).

In Alix’s childhood, the middle class declared that in Islington people neither washed clothes nor cooked proper meals and that nobody read books. The vast difference between the English middle class and the working class is a glaring contrast and the notion projected to the child of the middle class family that causes the child to abhor the working class, seems to be the capitalist propaganda of maintaining the class structure. As Alix starts living with the folks in Islington, she finds that she has more similarities with the people of Islington and she overcomes her fear of the working class. These folks are friendly and they often console her. They represent people who are not bound by the English middle class morality. As Alix sits and spends her time with the street folks of Islington she gradually understands them. Thus, it is Alex’s independent life that gives her empathy for the working class as she lives in their locality on her tight budget and interacts with them.

Alix, the middle class woman with her low economic budget, financially assumes the working class limitation and therefore she is the link between the middle class and the working
class. Alix conquers her fear of the unknown; life of the working class and since she has conquered her fear, she stays with the working class and simultaneously maintains her rapport with her middle class friends:

She made more acceptable friends among her colleagues at the College of Further Education. (TRW 105).

Alix evolves as one of the new women in the select texts as she conquers her fear, completes her university education, lives independently, and finally overcomes her financial crisis by teaching in a women’s prison. Living with the working class enables her to understand human hardships and she is able to empathize with the poverty of the working class. Alix later marries Brian, and the compatibility between the couple seems to be exemplary as their marriage is based on friendship and respect of equality.

In the select texts, Alix and Brian are the sole married couple who are compatible and exemplary as the male does not dominate the female, and the relationship is based on equal status as both of them belong to the English middle class and both Alix and Brian generate their own financial incomes. Marriage such as Alix and Brian’s is unique as marriage within the English society is based on patriarchal ideology.

As the protagonists of the select texts, excepting Emma of *The Garrick Year*, finally emerge with their new women identities, and Alison of *The Ice Age* is in the process of being a new woman, Margaret Drabble seems to posit her reaction on the patriarchal ideology of writing that is ascribed to the male gender. Simultaneously, she seems to consent to the idea of female writing and publication. In *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies, Vol-IV*, Helene Cixous in “The Laugh of the Medusa” states:
Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason, of which it is at once the effect, the support, and one of the privileged alibis. It has been one with the phallocentric tradition. It is indeed that same self-admiring, self-stimulating, self-congratulatory phallocentrism. (Evans 115).

Thus, writing is a male tradition, due to which female writers of the past have had to assume male pseudonyms in order to publish their written works. Margaret Drabble’s female protagonists are therefore in the process of writing: Rosamund, Ailsa, Esther and Alix are in the process of writing their thesis, Faro writes for a famous magazine and Frieda who is already an established writer and who has published some of her works is still in the process of writing her memoirs for publication. Marxist feminists focus on the relation between reading and other social constructions; Women’s Studies Programmes, Cooperatives, bookstores, libraries, film boards, political groups, community groups and feminist activist orientation programmes have been established as a result of Marxist feminist reactions.

Drabble’s writings seem to incorporate the Marxist feminist ideology on the importance of writing and publishing that is directly related to the socio-economics of a society. The following passage from *The Sea Lady* highlights Ailsa as a writer:

Ailsa Kelman, scholar and feminist, is celebrated for her pioneering studies of gender and for her gift for lucid and dramatic exposition. Born in Bonsett, County Durham, she is renowned around the world for her courageous explorations of women’s achievements, ambitions and limitations. Her classic works include her ground-breaking study of the artist Eloise van Dieman and her analysis of the Bohemian
space occupied by the artist’s model (both male and female) in fact and in fiction, but she is known to a much wider public for her television presentations of the paradoxes and mixed messages of everyday domestic life and sexual deviance. The University of Ornemouth is proud to recognize her unique achievements as a cultural historian in an area that she has made her own, but into which she has welcomed many of her admirers. (TSL 258).

The new woman Ailsa is a contrast to the male depiction of the female gender. She is deeply conscious of the world’s events: events that have shaped her new life and her published writings are related to the nascent and current topics. Ailsa also presents television shows that are quite paradoxical ranging from ‘domestic life to sexual deviance’. She thereby, contributes to the socio-economic area through her published works and her television shows. Ailsa is therefore a contradiction to the naïve, speechless and beautiful female that is often depicted in male written literature. Juxtaposed to the male ideology of the female gender Ailsa is efficient and she delivers her speech flawlessly. Humphrey, Ailsa’s first husband is still mesmerized by Ailsa’s beauty and her personality, and his attention is focused on the new Ailsa:

He had seen her thinking. He had seen her struggle, and then he had seen her thoughts dart free from her, like silver minnows. Her thoughts were free and fast and fluid, and found their own way into the current of the mainstream. (TSL 256).

At this juncture, Drabble seems to depict female consciousness that seems to cover a wide range in a single moment. The fluidity of Ailsa’s thoughts seems to directly lead her mind to issues that are related to contemporary issues in the mainstream. Ailsa the protagonist is independent and
she achieves the mainstream identity; the middle class identity on the socio-economic level, and she is at par with the male gender.

Margaret Drabble deals with the issue of publication that is denied to the female by the male writers. Through her protagonists in *The Sea Lady* and *The Witch of Exmoor*, Drabble focuses on the importance of publishing written texts and in each of the select texts she cites instances of both fictitious and historical female writers who have published their writings. She seems to support the Marxist feminists who are concerned with production and its economics and who consider the production of texts and publishing industries as factors of socio-economic development. In *A Hand Book of Critical Approaches to Literature*, Guerin et al. states:

> The establishment of so many women’s studies programs, cooperatives, bookstores, libraries, filmboards, political caucuses, and community groups attests to the activist orientation of feminism. (Guerin et al. 234).

Further, Drabble seems to highlight the fact that a writer’s work does not always meet the writer’s and the reader’s expectations. In *The Witch of Exmoor*, prior to her publication, Frieda is aware that her present work does not measure to the level of her first work:

> She had, before publication, conceded that she had departed from her usual arena to write a historical novel - but that statement, surprising enough in itself, had prepared nobody for the vast, incoherent over-researched baroque monstrosity of her *Queen Christina*. Her children had found it almost embarrassingly unreadable (although Gogo declared it had some good passages), and the reviews had been appalled and appalling. How could Frieda Haxby, social analyst, prophet, sage and sybil, and
author of that perennial and influential classic *The Matriarchy of War*
how could Frieda Haxby have written such tosh? (TWE 29-30).
Since Frieda’s first publication was appreciated by the reading public her children are ashamed
of her second publication that is overtly criticized by the critics. But, Frieda is resolute as she
believes that she has not betrayed anybody in her writings. Frieda’s book *The Matriarchy of War*
written at a younger age seems to be more relevant to the current issue while *Queen Christina*,
written as Frieda almost reaches the age of sixty seems to be outdated. According to *The
Eagleton Reader*, time factor manifests itself in two ways; the time of literary work and the time
of human body. *The Eagleton Reader*, further states:

> Texts persist as well as mutate, strike correspondences as well as enforce
differences, constellate distinct historical moments as well as measure
their mutual estrangement. (Reagan 252).

Although the two time factors do not correspond as human life is limited to a short span of time
yet the current writer is able to ‘strike correspondences’ and perceive the ‘differences’ with the
texts of the past era. This may be the reason that Frieda’s children and the reading public are
unable to appreciate *Queen Christina* as it correlates to a particular time in history to which
Frieda is able to interact as a writer. Further, in her old age Frieda attempts to write her memoirs
and in the process she tries to retrieve her parents’ marriage certificate; a proof of her ancestral
identity. The following passage depicts Frieda in the process of writing her memoirs:

> Of course she is writing her memoirs. All her friends are writing their
memoirs. At her age there is nothing much left to write, or so she might
tell herself…. She is here to summon her mother, her father, her sister, her
husband from their graves and from their hiding places. As the Witch
Endor raised Samuel to terrify Saul, so she, the Witch of Exmoor, will raise Gladys Haxby, Ernest Haxby, Hilda Haxby, Andrew Palmer. (TWE 66).

Frieda who emerges as a new woman is not ashamed to write her memoirs that will appropriately narrate the truth of her family lineage; an edict to which she is not the creator but the producer of the book. In *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, Showalter in “Toward a Feminist Poetic” states:

> Marxist aesthetics offers a “science of the text,” in which the author becomes not the creator but the producer of a text whose components are historically and economically determined. (Showalter 139).

Marxist feminist opine that the production of the text is thus historically and economically determined. Taking Showalter a bit further, it may be assumed that the protagonists of the select texts are themselves the texts and that they are not the creators of their persons; their body, but, the producers of who they finally are; their social status. Thus it may further be assumed that Frieda is determined to retrieve her parents’ marriage certificate as a historical proof, in order to write her memoirs and she is also determined to enclose all her family details in her memoirs in order to establish her present female identity. However, the following passage from *The Witch of Exmoor* suggests that Frieda’s memoirs will meet her children’s disapproval:

> Her nice clean ambitious well-educated offspring will be appalled by their hideous ancestry. (TWE 66).

Through Frieda, Drabble focuses her discourse on the English middle class morality that discriminates the working class; Frieda’s working class lineage with historical evidence of her convict ancestors. Her children who are bound by the middle class morality will be shocked at
their ancestry that has for a long time been silenced. Since Frieda has conquered her fear of the public opinion during her lean days when she worked like a man in the fields, she is ready to face any form of criticism. Frieda therefore emerges as a new woman who is independent, unafraid, and economically blest by her publication. She also finally contests to the patriarchal ideology of male autonomy, separation and distance as she distances herself from her family circle and resides in the secluded area of Exmoor where she proceeds to write her memoirs and enjoy her freedom.

Drabble’s female protagonists Rosamund; *The Millstone*, Frieda; *The Witch of Exmoor*, Ailsa; *The Sea Lady*, Faro; *The Peppered Moth*, Alix and Esther; *The Radiant Way*, thus emerge as the new women not by virtue of their birth or marriage, but, by virtue of their hard work, struggles and determination. They have acquired their individual middle class identity; the mainstream identity and in the process the protagonists have overcome various gender conflicts pertaining to patriarchal ideology, traditional beliefs, social values and economic norms. The protagonists with the exception of Frieda have established themselves in the middle class by virtue of their education that has enabled them to establish themselves as university academicians; Alix and Esther, university researchers; Faro, Rosamund and Ailsa, while Frieda is an established writer who is renowned for her publication.

Drabble’s protagonists are economically independent as they generate their own sources of incomes; paid working women and writers. Since they have struggled for their economic survival their empathy lies with the working class from which they have emerged as the new women. The new women are not dependent females who can easily lose their identities and sink to the working class; death of their husbands, male separations or divorces, as in the case of Liz Headleand. The new woman identity will remain with each of the new woman protagonist as
each protagonist has independently achieved and acquired her identity that will not be annulled by death, separation or divorce. Thus, the middle class; the mainstream identity is the issue of conflict and struggle for the female gender in order to be acknowledged as an independent individual. Drabble through her protagonists seems to suggest that these struggles and conflicts should not be the end of the feminine self.