CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION
The study of the select texts affirms that Margaret Drabble’s protagonists; Rosamund, Frieda, Alix, Esther, Ailsa and Faro have overcome the gender conflicts and struggles and that they have attained their individual mainstream identities; middle class identity, not by virtue of their birth, but independently, by virtue of their hard work and determination. Each of the mentioned protagonists has a career of her own or is in the process of locating a career of her choice and they are at par with their male friends. Margaret Drabble’s works embody a critique of the English culture that has placed her amongst one of the most eminent female writers. Her works occupy an important place in contemporary literary culture that encompasses an international readership. Drabble’s novels display a synthesis of the past and the current in the female discourse and she has received acclaim from both academic and broadsheet critics. Wolf Gang Iser in *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, states:

> The repertoire of a literary text does not consist solely of social and cultural norms; it also incorporates elements and, indeed, whole traditions of past literature that are mixed together with these norms, it may even be said that the proportions of this mixture form the basis of the differences between literary genres. (Iser 79).

Drabble’s novels focus on the life of women caught in their daily lives with the desire for change in the areas pertaining to tradition, patriarchy, and socio-economics concerned with the female gender. The necessity of change is central in all her novels and her protagonists are therefore, either in a process of change or they emerge from the process as new beings that are sharp contrasts to their old selves. In each of the select texts, Drabble posits a new situation for her protagonists and in “Interview of Margaret Drabble”, conducted by Barbara Milton for the *Paris Review – The Art of Fiction No. 70*, Drabble expresses:
I don’t think it’s to teach, but I don’t think it’s simply to entertain, either. It’s to explore new territory. To extend one’s knowledge of the world. And to illumine what one sees in it. That’s a fairly moral concept, isn’t it? (Milton).

Drabble’s novels are therefore sources that provide knowledge of the English culture and with each novel Drabble explores a new territory where each female protagonist is caught in a conflict against patriarchal domination, traditional bindings and socio-economic problems. Her educated and intelligent protagonists strive towards female social change to liberate their female selves.

“The Sea Lady” by Margaret Drabble” a book review by Peter J Condradi denotes:

Drabble evokes England from the distant 1940s to the present, with a witty eye for unexpected detail. (Condradi).

Condradi’s comment is true to each of Margaret Drabble’s novels as they document the English middle class female social issues; illegitimacy, divorce, separation, marriage, and remarriage, from the 1940s to the present day. Female economic dissatisfaction due to unpaid domestic work, child care and mothering that she illustrates convey an overview of the English female social and economic unrest especially since the 1940s to the present. Simultaneously, the resonance of female education in the select texts connotes the necessity and importance of female education.

Regarding the characters of the novel Drabble comments to Barbara Milton:

I think we have a very small area of free choice. (Milton).

The limitation of free choice in Drabble’s novels results in female characters; mother figures in conflict with child care and domestication, and females who are in perpetual conflict and struggle with the world they live in. Drabble’s protagonists represent the English middle class
educated females who are caught in the tedium of female activities wherein the female performs her work as the unpaid worker and from which the protagonists try to liberate themselves.

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

> These divisions are systematically embedded in the structure and texture of capitalist social relations in Britain and they play an important part in the political and ideological stability of this society. They are constitutive of our subjectivity as well as, in part, of capitalist political and cultural hegemony. They are interwoven into a fundamental relationship between the wage-labour system and the organization of domestic life and it is impossible to imagine that they could be extracted from the relations of production and reproduction of capitalism without a massive transformation of those relations taking place. (Nicholson 127).

The conflicts in Drabble’s novels are on issues pertaining to the gender division of work that is embedded in the English patriarchal structure and closely interlinked with capitalism, and the social and traditional notions that marginalizes the female gender. Each of the protagonists reacts against this patriarchal dictate that is in the form of male subordination at home and in work allocation and work areas. The protagonists struggle to overcome their conflicts that are deeply embedded in the English culture with the English middle class as the stronghold of patriarchy that monopolizes and dominates the English society.

In *The Garrick Year*, the educated Emma constantly grumbles and complains about her life. David asserts his male power over Emma and forbids her to work as the BBC announcer. David’s action is the result of his desire to continue his job as an actor and to move from London
to Hereford. The couple’s argument over Emma’s envisaged job is the turning point of Emma’s conflict and the male dictate submerges her to the role of the unpaid domestic worker. As a married woman Emma unwillingly submits to her role of the traditional wife since she is aware that she can have an economically productive career. “The Garrick Year – Margaret Drabble” in *Stuck in a Book* states:

> Emma is one of those miserable people who moans all the time about *everything*, but does nothing to change her life. She has no paid employment, and whines about looking after their two children – which would be fair enough, if she didn’t have a full-time, live-in nanny. Quite what she does with her day is unclear, but later she manages to fill the hours by thoughtlessly embarking on an affair with the producer of the theatre. (“The Garrick Year – Margaret Drabble,” *Stuck in a Book*)

In agreement with *Stuck in a Book*, similar assumption on Emma has been commented by Kimberly Richardson in her “Book Review – The Garrick Year by Margaret Drabble” for *The Nocturnal Aesthetic*. Kimberly Richardson states:

> As much as I liked reading The Garrick Year, I was very put off by Emma and her lack of actually making a chance in her life. It seemed as though she wanted to complain and nothing else. And, while she did have an affair, it seemed as though she merely went through the motions and said what needed to be said for the sake of expelling oxygen from her mouth. In short, I disliked Emma immensely and yet I wanted to know more about her. (Richardson).
Refuting to the two statements, this study finds that Emma’s complaints and moans are expressions of her desire to have a career. The live-in nanny that David provides Emma is only a signifier of the couple’s middle class status and it provides no satisfaction to Emma who longs to hold a career that justifies her educational qualification. She is stuck in traditional and social mire where the male gender dominates even the educated females. Emma who is still entrapped by traditional dictates under patriarchy is in a process where she can find no solution. She has to reluctantly compromise and submit herself to David who controls the financial position in the family. Her thoughtless affair with Wyndham is only a means to reduce her boredom from the tedium of being the wife in David’s constant absence from his home since his affair with the actress Sophy Brent. Emma is deeply rooted in the English tradition especially regarding marriage and she does not enjoy her elusive affair. She longs for a career and she therefore, represents the educated middle class female who longs to liberate herself from the patriarchal dictates that binds married women, and subjugates the female in the socio economic sphere. In the select texts, Emma is the sole major protagonist who is not liberated from traditional and social bindings imposed on women.

Drabble through Rosamund illustrates the English middle class morality; the English mainstream morality in The Millstone. In “Guilt Trip”, New Republic, Adelle Waldman states:

In addition to her upper-middle-class accent and her upper-middle-class manners, Rosamund’s parents instilled in her a deep reservoir of social guilt. This isn’t the ordinary class guilt known to well-heeled liberals everywhere, which can be offset easily enough by the occasional check to a favoured charity. (Waldman).
Rosamund’s conflict against the English middle class morality lies in the social taboo that she has committed; illegitimacy, that is not solely a disgrace to the middle class but to the English society on the whole. The social corrective measure for illegitimacy is advised to Rosamund by different characters in the novel. Dr. Moffatt is the first person who suggests to Rosamund the possibility of keeping the child in an adoptive home. Rosamund’s friend Joe is determined that Rosamund should not have the illegitimate child and he offers to help her:


Joe’s suggestion is to abort the child as it would maim Rosamund’s name. He further tells Rosamund:

You won’t be able to keep it, though. They won’t let you keep it. So you’ll go and get yourself all upset about nothing, the whole thing’ll be a complete waste of time and emotion. (TM 47).

On the other hand, Rosamund’s friend Roger suggests marriage. The various suggestions offered to Rosamund are the corrective measures on illegitimacy, and the means to uphold the English middle class morality that is considered exemplary for polite and intellectual society. The marriage that Roger offers is to legitimize the child with a father’s name and Roger suggests the divorce as an option after the child is born. Rosamund’s conflict is therefore a conflict on the social taboo that binds the female gender and her child in a patriarchal society. In “The Millstone – The Crucial 1960s Feminist Novel”, Tessa Hadley states:
Rosamund’s adventure is pregnancy and motherhood, and her freedom is the option, new and still tentative in the 1960s, to become a single parent without stigma. (Hadley).

Drabble’s support of the feminist issues in this novel lies in the social taboo that is directed to the female gender. The protagonist struggles to keep the baby although the stigma is attached to her and the baby. Unlike Emma, Rosamund strives to keep the baby as a single mother, and the difference in the two protagonists lies in Rosamund’s determination to be different.

Margaret Drabble’s deep social awareness unfolds as Joe further comments on illegitimacy when he visits Rosamund in the hospital:

“I [Rosamund] feel well, I said, “but it wouldn’t be worth doing it all over again just to feel well.”

“Just one more,” said Joe. “You’re allowed two, you know.”

“What do you mean, allowed two? By whom? Allowed by whom?”

“Oh, by authority. The BBC lets you have two before they sack you. So does the Civil Service. It’s the orthodox number two.”

“Illegitimate ones, you mean?”

“Naturally. You can have as many as you like of the other ones, until they interfere with your efficiency.” (TM 118).

Drabble’s focus on the BBC and the Civil Service at this juncture relates to the work allotment that is gender biased and the male gender as the head of the staff who proposes and legalizes the rules. Michele Barrett in Women’s Oppression Today comments:

In most British universities, colleges and polytechnics, for instance, the principal, senior staff and technical and portering staff are male, with
female employees located in junior teaching and research positions and in secretarial, catering and cleaning work. (Barrett 144).

Thus, illegitimacy binds the female gender in two forms: as a single mother who has committed a social taboo and as a woman who is directly under the dictates of capitalism in her economic progression. Further, the unmarried mother is not permitted to receive the state provision and economic support granted to a poor but legitimate child, and the illegitimate child has to face penalization from inheritance of the family property.

Drabble’s protagonist Rosamund is not discouraged by the English middle class social norms and she struggles to overcome her conflicts by keeping the baby as a single mother, tutoring students as her financial source and completing her thesis. It is her conscious determination and zeal that marks her as an emancipated woman. Rosamund thus establishes her identity not by virtue of her birth but as a single woman with a good educational qualification who can take care of herself and her child by earning her financial income.

In an interview with Barbara Milton, Drabble comments that the newspapers provided her the main source for The Ice Age, and the Balkan state was an added fictitious place as she did not want to deal with real politics. In “Interview of Margaret Drabble” Paris Review – The Art of Fiction No. 70, Drabble informs Barbara Milton that it was her talk with her Lebanese friend that gave her the idea of projecting England’s problems in the novel:

It was talking to him that made me feel I ought to put England’s problems into some larger context. (Milton).

Although the first reading of the novel suggests a political inclination, the underlying theme that runs throughout the novels supports the present study that is focused on the female gender; female subordination and mothering. The narrator of the novel comments that when Molly the
sick child with cerebral palsy was born, Alison’s career was in progress while Donnell was not
doing too well. Alison abandons her acting in order to remove herself as Donnell’s competitor.
The Marxist feminist conflict on the issue of female economic progress is denoted by Drabble in
the husband and wife relationship. Donnell monopolizes the economic advancement both within
the family and at the work area. He subjugates his wife Alison and she has to leave her job in
order to create a congenial atmosphere at home.

Drabble further encapsulates the psychological trauma of a mother whose adolescent
daughter is imprisoned for causing accident. Alison is caught in a tight situation and she is
exasperated as she receives the news of Jane’s imprisonment. As a divorcee, Alison faces a hard
time and when she is almost settled in her new life as a single parent, she encounters the
emotional strains of Jane’s imprisonment. Drabble illustrates the problems of mothering that is
manifested through Alison as she flies to the Balkan to visit her wild teenage daughter while
Donnell the father is absorbed in spending his time and money on male necessities; entertainments.

The novelist further illustrates the female protagonist who is in sole charge of her two
children. Although Alison still helps Donnell to maintain his financial accounts, Donnell solely
depends on Alison to seek Jane in the prison. The trajectory of Drabble’s thematic lies in the
male oppression of the female gender that is denoted by the protagonist Alison. Donnell does not
offer his help for either of his children; the sick child Molly and Jane. In *Women’s Oppression
Today*, the intricate imposition of patriarchy that is interlinked to capitalism is stated by Barrett:

> Most men benefit from the material advantage of having women undertake
various servicing roles, care of relatives and so on. (Barrett 216).

Barrett further states:
An analysis that stresses state regulation of wifehood is forced into the absurdity of seeing childcare as work undertaken by the wife for the husband (the children being ‘his’ rather than hers); …to reduce the oppressive daily routine of servicing and caring for men to a supposedly essential need of capitalism, (Barrett 243).

Child care that falls under the work assigned to the female gender is objected by Donnell who refrains from it even at the most distressing time. In an undertone Drabble denotes the determination of the female gender through Alison that is magnified as she struggles to liberate herself from the conflicts that confront her. 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. 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 lie in the fact that she needs the space to think clearly. Drabble illustrates the idea that the female is able to think clearly and solve problems in the absence of others. Further, Alison does not want to be an ‘encumbrance’ to the help that the
British community of Walachia is willing to provide her. In her present situation she is unable to control her emotions and she is incapable of understanding herself.

Alison leaves Molly to Anthony’s care, and on her return from the Balkans Alison finds to her dismay that her troubles are not over as Anthony is faced with a crisis that needs her help. Since it is almost Christmas, Alison thinks of her first born Jane who is still imprisoned in the Balkans. She is unable to stop the flow of her thoughts that torments her, and Alison finally recovers from her inner turmoil as she thinks of Molly who needs her special attention. Her firm resolve to be independent when she is confronted by a nerve wrecking situation shows the female strength and capacity to encounter difficulties and solve them. At the end of the novel, she is not afraid to live an independent life and she is in a process of liberation as an independent woman.

In *The Radiant Way*, Margaret Drabble shows her intellectual caliber and her knowledge and interest in varied fields. “Margaret Drabble’s *The Radiant Way*, *Frisbee: A Book Journal* denotes:

Drabble is a thorough, intellectual researcher. She has obviously read the history, political science, and sociology. Not to mention, she has had rich experiences. She obviously knows so many kinds of people. (“Margaret Drabble’s *The Radiant Way*,” *Frisbee: A book Journal*).

Drabble cites the social and political unrest of England in the 1980s and “Margaret Drabble’s *The Radiant Way*, *Frisbee: A Book Journal* further denotes:

But the novel is not just about the characters’ relationships and work: it is also about politics. Drabble documents the vicissitudes of the 1980s in England under a conservative government, the intersections of different
classes and kinship networks, demonstrates the urgent need for adult education at both at colleges and prisons, highlights Thatcher’s budget cuts and analyses their effects on unemployment and mental health, charts the downward mobility of the post-industrial society and the growing violence in London. (“Margaret Drabble’s The Radiant Way,” Frisbee: A book Journal).

Drabble reflects on Thatcher’s budget cuts through Brian who supports the Labour Party. The mild tempered man suggestively tells his wife Alix that he might soon be out of work and that he might need Alix’s support. Unlike other male genders of the select texts, Brian is not ashamed to suggest that he might have to financially depend on Alix some day:

‘I may be out of work soon myself,’ said Brian. ‘If they make many more cuts. Then you can support me.’ (TRW 129).

Brian is nonchalant about disclosing the fact to Alix, and she is also quite offhand about his statement. Brian and Alix as husband and wife seem to be quite civil and casual with each other and they seem to enjoy each other’s company. Drabble suggests through Brian and Alix, the importance of friendship between married couple, and Brian further encourages Alix to continue meeting her friends.

Margaret Drabble has not failed to depict helpful, understanding, considerate and caring male characters. The male characters of the following texts are those who do not try to possess, dominate, oppress or subjugate the female protagonists: Rosamund’s friend Roger; The Millstone, Ailsa’s first husband Humphrey; The Sea Lady, Frieda’s father Ernie; The Witch of Exmoor, Bessie’s husband Joe; The Peppered Moth, and Alix’s second husband Brian; The
Radiant Way, and they are remarkable men who respectfully treat the female gender. The narrator’s voice in The Radiant Way comments:

In 1968, Alix married Brian Bowen, one-time beater of circular saws in Northam, now lecturer in Adult Education and novelist. …she continued to see Liz and Esther regularly, having recognized the importance of friendship. Brian encouraged this: it would not have crossed his mind to do anything other. Unlike Charles Headleand, Brian was a good man, and instantly recognizable as a good man. (TRW 105).

When Alix marries Brian she has already emerged as the new woman and Brian’s goodness enables Alix to pursue her career and to be financially independent within her marriage. Further, Brian does not dominate Alix with his knowledge and male supremacy as their marriage is deeply founded on the importance of friendship and understanding. Thus, Alix efficiently maintains her new woman identity even within her married life.

In The New Criterion Vol. 6, in a review, “No Way Out: The Radiant Way by Margaret Drabble”, Donna Refkind states:

As a result, there is a patchwork quality to the narrative as it shifts from one character’s preoccupations to another’s, with no one event or idea given pre-eminence over the others. (“No Way Out: The Radiant way,” The New Criterion).

Drabble’s flexibility of moving from one incident to another without any conclusion to the prior incident denotes her skill in writing. Although Drabble’s sympathy lies with the female gender, still, she manages to focus on issues where the female provokes her own fall by exploiting her husband. In Liz’s turn of events, her friends Alix and Esther are incapable of sympathizing with
her on the issue of her divorce. The female solidarity is broken as her friends consider her to have deceived her husband on many occasions. The independent and emancipated women Alix and Esther, who have in many ways crossed the traditional and socio-economic boundaries, are in a state of shock that Liz can be so deceitful within her marriage. Alix and Esther therefore blame Liz who is still under the patriarchal order and male domination; marriage, and the two friends feel that Liz herself is the agent of her own fall. Drabble seems to suggest through Alix and Esther that if a female is married, she should abide by the rules of marriage as far as practicable.

Alix and Esther’s resentment of Liz’s conduct towards her husband Charles seems to stem from the understanding of the workings of both the patriarchal order and the capitalist dictates. Since Liz is not a free woman she has crossed her marriage boundary by exploiting Charles, and the male gender; the patriarch and the capitalist, rebels and divorces Liz. Consequently Liz faces her economic loss as she has been a dependent of Charles for twenty years. Due to her marriage to Charles, Liz has lost her job opportunity and since she has not utilized her university degree for twenty years, there seems to be no hope for Liz but to expect that Charles provides her a decent divorce settlement; the rule of the capitalist and the patriarch, in a heterosexual relationship.

Unlike Liz and Alix, Esther completely rejects the patriarchal structure by not getting married. She remains single and she has her own career. Esther is therefore, economically independent, and she is at liberty to explore her whims as she does not have a condescending male who guards her movements. Esther is a decent, polite and a sociable person. Although Alix is married to Brian, she is economically independent as she has her own part-time career and the relationship between Alix and Brian is a friendly and a compatible one. They respect each other
and they are deeply concerned about each others friends. In *The Radiant Way* both Alix and Esther emerge as the new women although Esther remains single and Alix marries for the second time. It seems that the female is at her strongest and in her most efficient state when she leads an isolated life; Esther lives on her own and establishes her career, and Alix refuses to remarry for a long time during which she establishes herself in her career.

Geoff Wisner in “England in the Mire: Review of *The Witch of Exmoor* by Margaret Drabble”, comments:

*The Witch of Exmoor*, Margaret Drabble’s newest novel, takes place in an England marked by self-interest, hypocrisy, environmental destruction, and a general unwillingness to do anything about it. The greed and random violence that shocked the characters of Drabble’s earlier novel, *The Radiant Way*, are now accepted elements of everyday life. (Wisner).

Frieda who has struggled throughout her life tries to identify the cause of her constant conflicts and hardships. Frieda tries to locate her ancestral roots through birth and death certificates and Frieda searches for her parents’ marriage certificate. This search seems to highlight the importance of marriage that provides the facts of a person’s hereditary identity:

Her own former life lies around her in untidy profusion. She must make a thorough search, one of these days, for her parents’ marriage certificate. She is sure she had seen it once, amidst the debris she had carried with her from the cottage after her mother’s death. She had made only the most desultory attempt to trace her own ancestry through birth and death certificates at St Catherine’s House on the Aldwych…. (TWE 74).
Certificates such as marriage, birth and death certificates are tell-tale signs to Frieda who at present tries to relocate her identity that she has lost due to her marriage with Andrew. She seems to be in a flux since her mother’s death and she intends to redeem herself as a woman who is unbound by tradition. Her mother Gladys represents the English tradition; a tradition that has bound Frieda to her duties in the area of domestication and child rearing. Geoff Wisner in “England in the Mire: Review of The Witch of Exmoor by Margaret Drabble” states:

Margaret Drabble is an ambitious writer, and her novels offer such a sweeping, detailed, and convincing picture of the contemporary world that it is tempting to compare her vision of our time to one’s own. (Wisner).

Simultaneously, through Frieda, Drabble indicates her experience as a writer and her connection to various female writers. The narrator states:

The critics were delighted, and outdid one another in insults. ‘Once seen as Britain’s answer to Simone de Beauvoir, Frieda Haxby has revealed herself as the heir to Barbara Cartland, … Frieda, like George Eliot in Romola, … interesting corresponding with de Bouvoir, … She could write about what she liked. Thus, reasonably, she replied to her interviewers. Her appearance of calm and unruffled detachment did nothing to pacify them. She seemed quite unaware of the nature of the atrocity she was alleged to have committed. She had betrayed nobody. If others had false expectation, if others had waited for answers that she could not or would not give—that was their problem, not hers. They had been misreading her all along. (TWE 30-31).
Margaret Drabble’s contemporary world is a world inclusive of women writers and Frieda the eminent writer in the novel is Drabble’s symbol that focuses on the importance of female writings and publications that are economically productive. Through Frieda, Drabble reacts against the idea of writing that is attributed to the male gender, and Drabble provides a detail of eminent female writers of different literary genres. Drabble also seems to denote that all writings do not meet the assumed expectations of the writer and the readers.

In “The Witch of Exmoor, by Margaret Drabble”, Anna Mundow states:

Comic irony – what V.S. Pritchett called the “most militant and graceful gift” – is rare in contemporary fiction, perhaps because it appeals to the head, not the heart, and because it is a difficult balancing act. To succeed, it must repel sentiments without sacrificing compassion. In The Witch of Exmoor, Margaret Drabble gets the balance just right and proves herself a master of the art. (Mundow).

It is interesting to note that through the comic irony in the novel, Margaret Drabble manages to capture the one of the most important issue of the feminist discourse; the necessity of space and the freedom to express female desire. Frieda invites her children and grand children to tea at Exmoor, and stifled by social notions on the middle class ethics, Frieda decides to wear her blue gown for tea. The narrator expresses:

The truth was that, confronted with Frieda in a ball gown, they had been disabled. She had taken the initiative. How to assess what she was upto? She had looked well, but was it natural to lose so much weight so quickly? (TWE 110).
Frieda further appalls them by smoking a cigarette, throwing it on the floor and stubbing it out on the floorboards with her high-heeled damante slippers. Frieda’s daughter Grace who is called Gogo is upset:

Gogo had recognized the dress of midnight blue. Was it madness, to wear an evening dress at tea-time? (TWE 110).

Gogo’s thoughts focus on the middle class ideal of specification of dress code that pertains to a particular time for the English middle class. Although Frieda breaks the middle class social notion on dress code, she clarifies herself and states that the expensive dress is out of fashion and that she wears it at home. Thus, Drabble wittily breaks the social notions and codifications by creating the comic irony. Further, the narrator’s voice focuses on the idea of inheritance that brings chaos:

She is sick of everything and everyone, herself included, herself above all, and she can’t see herself embarking on any new ventures after this. After this, she’ll let others inherit the chaos. (TWE 67).

Frieda’s rich middle class children are not particularly fond of their mother as she had not been the ideal mother due to the effort that she had to make to finance them during their childhood. She had neglected them, yet her efforts had paid as her publications had accumulated her wealth. Marxist feminist views on the importance of female writing and publication are embodied by Frieda and the capitalist view on the acquisition of wealth is illustrated by Frieda’s children who are curious to know how Frieda divides her property amongst them. Presently, Frieda is weary of her routine life and in her old age she decides to live an independent life in Exmoor where she plans to write her memoir.
Drabble’s novel *The Peppered Moth* illustrates another case of unhappy marriage but unlike the protagonists of *The Garrick Year* and *The Ice Age*, Bessie reacts to her subjugation with her obstinate nature and contempt that results in the couple’s unhappy marriage. It is at this point that Bessie sidelines the traditional patriarchal norms and creates the conflict in her married life. Bessie is therefore, not a traditional female figure as depicted in male writings and she represents the female desire to work as a paid employee and not as dictated to the females by either traditional patriarchal norms or by social values. Drabble’s focus is on the inability of the educated female to earn her salary as a married woman. Like the Marxist feminists in favour of economic productivity Bessie is in constant conflict with her unpaid situation. Although Joe is a kind man, yet, they adhere to the English social and traditional norms that bind them as married couple and it consequently subjugates Bessie to their home where she is thoroughly bored, and there is no choice for her. She is emotional and she feels neglected and abandoned. As an educated woman she feels that she cannot blame Joe for leaving her alone in the lonely council house.

The thrust of the mitochondrial DNA that Margaret Drabble utilizes acts as the fulcrum of the novel. As a female writer Drabble is deeply concerned to illustrate the importance of the female gender that has been marginalised and dominated by patriarchy. In the “Unnatural Selection” Daphne Merkin states:

*The Peppered Moth* is one of the more absorbing novels I have read in a long time, both for its sheer storytelling ability and for its powers of imaginative conjecture. It demonstrates a humanist’s obsession with the real-life implications of scientific concepts (Drabble’s central conceit is the notion of mitochondrial DNA or matrilineal descent),… (Merkin).
Drabble’s focus on the DNA as the matrilineal descent; a nascent theory during the time of Drabble’s writing therefore, stresses on the importance of the female towards reproduction and childcare where the male takes the latent role. From the onset of the novel, Drabble’s focus is on Bessie, Chrissie and Faro; the three generations of women. Further, as suggested by the title of the novel, *The Peppered Moth*, the transcendence of the three generations of women is like the metamorphosis of the moth that takes different stages; pupa, larva, and the moth. Similarly, in the stages of Drabble’s story, each female protagonist represents a stage, and Faro finally emerges as the emancipated woman. In the “Origin of the Species: Margaret Drabble’s *The Peppered Moth*”, Kelly McWilliams writes:

> Drabble uses the peppered moth as a lesson in natural selection as an animal that has evolved (or more precisely, appeared to evolve) over a number of years, in answer to changing physical conditions.

(McWilliams).

The moth therefore signifies the process of the female evolution from the traditional bindings to the emancipated woman of the present day. Therefore, the lives of the protagonists comparatively differ from each other. The liberated Faro is a sharp contrast to her grandmother Bessie and her mother Chrissie. Faro’s friend Sebastian depends on her to bring light into his dark world. Sebastian tries to emotionally entrap Faro to be with him. The narrator of the text remarks:

> He is trying to pin her down to another meeting, and she is trying to avoid one. She is straining at the leash, as usual. Seb is her clog and her dependent and she is sick to death of him. He has gone dead, like a spent match, the grey coke, like clinker. He is a dead weight, pulling at her like
an old sick dog. And he’s only twenty-nine. But Faro is strong enough for two. She’ll drag him along a bit longer. (TPM 250).

Unlike the traditional female, Faro seems to perceive what might happen to her if Sebastian ever ties her down. In fact, Faro is displeased with Sebastian, but, she knows that she is strong enough to simultaneously handle two problematic persons like Sebastian. The intelligent Faro knows that it is she who holds the leash and not Sebastian. She takes her time as she knows that she can release the leash at her own will when the need to release arises. At this juncture, Drabble reverses the role of the female gender and the male is bound by the confident female protagonist.

The following extract from _The Sea Lady_, depicts Ailsa the emancipated woman of sixty as she presents the award winning book to the audience:

The winning book was about fish, and to present it, she appeared to have dressed herself as a mermaid, in silver sequined scales. Her bodice was close-fitting, and the metallic skirt clung to her solid hips before it flared out below the knees, concealing what might once have been her tail.

(TSL 1).

Ailsa’s dress code contradicts to the dress code of the traditional English middle class woman; woman of dignity. Ailsa represents the fashionable woman of the twenty-first century in every way. In _The Guardian_, Ursula K. Le Guin in “Mermaid on Dry Land” writes:

Each of Margaret Drabble’s novels has been an accurate, honest record of its time, in the idiom of its time, and yet she has never been truly fashionable. A sharp critical intellect keeps her keenly aware of trend, and she’s never bucked it; but the qualities for which I value her fiction could
not be satisfactorily called modernist, nor are they postmodern now. (Le Guin).

As denoted by Ursula K. Le Guin, Drabble shows her keen awareness of the changing trends in the female fashion world. Therefore, Ailsa is dressed to expose her sensuousness and to capture the crowd with her intellect that is in the body of the female; a counter act on male intellect. Drabble further comments:

Her evening bag was a sensuous little folly made of a kind of fine dull pewter-coloured chain mail. Its texture of soft silky metallic links was a joy to her fingers. It was a fetish bag. She had bought it in Scarborough, and she had owned it for thirty-odd years. She had never possessed a dress that became it as well as the dress she wore this night. Her little bag was a comfort to her, in her peacefully celibate late incarnation. (TSL 6).

Ailsa’s dress seems to be a symbol of her educational qualification and intellect that befits her; the female gender. In each of the select texts Drabble illustrates the importance of female education and Ailsa is the female protagonist who has surpassed the other protagonists in her educational qualification and female liberty.

In The Guardian, Ursula K. Le Guin in “Mermaid on Dry Land” states:

A compelling narrative impetus, essentially straight forward though entertainingly subtle; a moral burden, clear though mostly unstated; acute and amusing observation of society, gender, manners, fashions; strongly individual characters, whose character is probably their destiny. (Le Guin).

Ailsa’s character sketch in every sense contradicts to the characters of the other protagonists of the select texts. Since her childhood, Ailsa has been in constant competition with her brother and
the other boys in her locality. She is sportive, intelligent and simultaneously, a woman in every sense. As commented by Ursula K. Le Guin, Ailsa’s character is shaped by her past and her character is indeed her destiny. Through Ailsa, Drabble seems to suggest that the female gender is as efficient and as capable as the male if she is given the opportunity to attempt her goal. The fish and the mermaid further seem to suggest the elusiveness of the intelligent, educated, independent and empowered female that Ailsa represents. The mainstream identity that is an area of contention for the female gender is thus achieved by determined and courageous protagonists while the less determined protagonist; Emma and Bessie remain stuck in the traditional mire dictated by patriarchy. On the other hand, Alison is in the process of emerging as a new woman as she determines to start a new way of living and live an independent life whilst Rosamund, Frieda, Faro, Alix, Esther and Ailsa achieve the mainstream identity with their earnest zeal and effort and therefore they emerge as the new women in the mainstream where their intellectual competition is at par with the male gender and they generate their own sources of incomes.

Margaret Drabble’s select novels and her other novels are etched in the 19th century Victorianism and the 20th century feminist waves and Nicci Gerrard in “Drabble and Strife” states:

Her heart seems to lie with the past. As early as 1967, she was saying: ‘I’d rather be at the end of a dying tradition, which I admire, than at the beginning of a tradition which I deplore’. (Gerrard).

Drabble’s thematics in the select novels that lie in gender conflict and struggle due to gender inequality still persist in the 21st century feminist issue although in a wider perspective. “Gender Inequality in the Domestic and Occupational Divisions of Labor” states:
Equal status for women of all races, classes, sexualities and abilities – in the 21st century these feminist claims for equality are generally accepted as reasonable principles in western society; yet the contradiction between this principle of equality and the demonstrable inequalities between the sexes that still exist exposes the continuing dominance of male privilege and values throughout society (patriarchy). (“Gender Inequality in the Domestic and Occupational Divisions of Labor”).

Although the new women amongst the protagonists of the select texts have overcome their barriers of conflicts in their struggles as they establish their personal identities in the middle class representing the new women in the existing English society, yet a majority of the females of the 21st century English middle class still seem to be bound by the unseen thread of patriarchal dictates like the protagonists who fail to acquire the new woman identity. In Dialnet, Celia M. Wallhead, in “Changes in Ideology in Margaret Drabble’s Fiction” states:

The great scope covered by Drabble’s fictional works enables us to appreciate how the roles of women have changed, and how the middle-class educated women has pondered her situation and shifted in order to locate herself in a correct and comfortable position not only on a national but a global scale. (Wallhead).

Further, in agreement with Wallhead, gender conflict and struggle does not solely exist in the English middle class society as it is a global experience of women of each class within patriarchal social context.

In conclusion, the research that is focused on gender conflict and struggle toward mainstream identity resonates in each of the select texts, and the mainstream identity is achieved
by the new women protagonists that connotes that Margaret Drabble favours the socio-economic progress of the female gender. Each of the new women dissolves her conflicts and struggles through determination and conscious effort whereby she achieves the mainstream identity: elevating herself in the area of educational qualification and generating her own income. Drabble’s novels depict the female trauma of illegitimacy and explores the problems that ensues illegitimacy. Through her novels, Drabble reflects on the importance of mothers and the link between the mother and the child as a bond that cannot be distanced by the mother. Motherhood plays an important role in each of the select texts for which few of the protagonists are unable to achieve their goal and they sink to male subordination. Drabble portrays the problems of sexuality and male dependency that hinders the female life towards her progress.

The study ascertains that each of Drabble’s intelligent and educated protagonists achieve the new woman identity by the character’s reaction to her situational conflicts and struggles that confronts her. It also ascertains that the select texts remarkably denote the female caliber on multitasking as each of the new women protagonists are in the process of working on more than two differing tasks, for instance, Rosamund the single parent nurtures her baby, gives tuition and works towards the completion of her thesis. The research confirms that the new woman is more adaptable to new situations and that she is more capable to deal with matters that need immediate attention. It thereby proves that the female needs her own space to think in order to develop her female identity. Marxist feminist issue on the economic progress of the female gender and the importance of female education for female economic productivity is deeply embedded throughout the select texts. Consequently, each protagonist evolves from her former identity and crosses the female boundary; male supremacy and dominance, female subordination and marginalization that predominates Drabble’s works. The study also reflects that the mainstream
identity of each protagonist lies within the individual female self as it is not an identity that she acquires by virtue of her birth or by her marriage, but it is achieved by virtue of hard work, determination and zeal. It will therefore, be an identity that will remain with the protagonist; the female gender, throughout her lifetime.

The research therefore finds that the new woman can act as a bridge between the upper class and the lower class as she is in a position to empathize with the working class due to her lived life during her struggle: a middle class woman as a working class woman under patriarchal dictate: unpaid worker, and later as a divorcee; Alison of The Ice Age, Liz of The Radiant Way, and as a widow; Alix of The Radiant Way, who are bereft of financial sources of incomes due to their marriages that have submerged them to the level of wives and domestication. Since they have physically and psychologically experienced the life of the working class in order to elevate and emancipate their female selves, and as each of them has finally evolved as the new woman by establishing herself in the upper middle class status, it is expected that such a woman can act as a negotiator between the upper class and the working class in order to promote the female struggle towards a comprehensive female development in terms of economics and education. In conclusion, it is ascertained that the select texts and other works of Margaret Drabble definitely provide an excellent collection of varied perspectives for future research.