Communal and Social Morality

Life is a process of relationship. There is no life without relationship. This is a fact. You may be a hermit, you may be a monk, you withdraw from all society, but you are related. As a human being you cannot escape from being related….Without relationship there is no existence. You are related either to the past, which is to all the tradition, to all the memories, to all the books, or you are related to some ideation about the future. So relationship is the most important thing in life. (Krishnamurti 9)

In this chapter, I will attempt to look at Margaret Drabble’s novels of the 1970s where her scrutiny of the protagonists has progressed beyond the personal issues that marked her earlier works to embrace a broader view of the whole society in which these characters are set. A moral analysis of *The Needle’s Eye* (1972), *The Realms of Gold* (1975), *The Ice Age* (1977) and *The Middle Ground* (1980) has been done to unravel the distinctive characteristics resulting in their unique appeal and popularity. It is my contention that Drabble turns more to the social scene rather than the individual self in these books. However, the other important points depicted in this part are about what concerns her at this stage, the facts about the relationship of the individual to the larger foundations of society which help in shaping that individual. She veers away from her usual techniques and widens her subjects, no longer limiting her perspectives to a female heroine and her individual expectations from the world around her. During this second phase of her writing career, her works reflect the climate of her contemporary society. Her novels in this phase paint the contemporary societies with their various social, economic and political issues. For instance, in *The Needle’s Eye* (1972), the first novel of this period, her preoccupation with the moral
values of the society comes across very clearly. This is a work which indicates the birth of a more mature stage in Drabble’s fiction, because it copes both with the domestic state of characters’ lives and the economical and moral condition of their modern life simultaneously. As a matter of fact, from this novel onward most of her later novels mirror the expanded scope of her social vision.

The other inspiring novel of this phase is *The Realms of Gold*, in which she utilizes the terms such as history and archaeology in order to demonstrate the importance of one’s past and origins in making one’s future. She depicts the lifeless and freezing icing moral condition of Britain in her next significant work, *The Ice Age*. Arguably she introduces multiple points of view and many characters in *The Middle Ground*, to complete her investigation about the social and moral state of contemporary society of England. As a matter of fact, what would be studied in this chapter is the relationship between the personal or private lives of the characters and the larger public issues that Drabble artistically weaves into this group of novels. Not surprisingly, as a moralist, she writes novels which reveal her concerns about the importance of the constitution of a family and the relationships between its members. She continues her questioning of the family in relationship with other foundations of the British society, such as educational and judicial organizations. The way she handles and describes the contemporary marital condition of the characters in the society is studied here with reference to these books. Malcolm Bradbury comments about this period which brought a different climate to British society in this way:

After the swinging Sixties, the sagging Seventies rarely has a decade acquired less obvious character, historical or stylistic, than the Seventies - a period that now seems more like a brief historical bridge between the long dying of the Sixties and the sharp and sudden coming
of the entrepreneurial Eighties . . . . In Britain the mood seemed one of
decline, especially once recession grew . . . . In particular, feminism
flourished . . . (The Modern British Novel 379-80)

Like the author herself the women in this group of novels reach maturity
while they are mostly in their thirties. These women, who have been through
motherhood in earlier novels, are currently employed in the second stage of their lives
which makes their narrow vision of life wider. I will attempt to reveal how their
families, homes and motherhood become the center of their lives in these works. The
other point to be noted in this chapter is that her modern characters have evolved
from the strong, virtuous women characters created by her forebears and from the
responsibility-driven lives of middle-class women in the nineteenth century.

Margaret Drabble wrote her first novel of this phase, The Needle’s Eye, when
her own marriage was failing. To demonstrate her wider concern for social issues this
novel portrays the protagonist Rose’s moral progress. In this novel Drabble tries to
find a concrete answer for her question whether one can speedily retreat from one’s
roots and turn into a new person with new ethics. Using more characters Drabble
attempts to portray more social and complicated matters related to the life of modern
people. Talking about this novel with Barbara Milton, Drabble remarks, “the point of
view [is] spread [among] various characters,” permitting her “to express the range of
[her] feeling” and also to “include some of the things she deeply cared about” (60).
This novel tells us about the life and moral values of the main character Rose Virtue
Vassiliou. She is a little girl who gets spoiled by her extremely religious governess,
Noreen. Noreen reminds Rose endlessly about her parents “wickedness in being so
rich and usury and interest rates and gambling and shares and the stock market” (85).
Drabble explains her idea behind The Needle’s Eye in “The Author Comments” thus:
“One of the themes I was trying to explore was the possibility of living, today,
without faith, a religious life” (35). What creates the necessary basis for writing this novel is the impact of a misread sermon on the gentle and sympathetic mind of an eight-year-old girl. Noreen’s misinterpretation of the needle’s eye’s parable, “about it’s being easier for camels to get through needle’s eyes than for rich people to get into the kingdom of heaven” (85) leads Rose to bestow all her inheritance in order to buy salvation.

In *The Needle’s Eye*, the title of the novel itself personifies the major theme of the book which is the relationship between monetary issues and spiritual redemption. Since this relation creates a kind of deep inner ambiguity in the minds of Drabble’s characters, Joyce Carol Oates in The New York Times Book Review writes that this adopts “a spiritual dilemma so profound that many readers – and writers – will not grasp it at all” (1). Drabble’s favorite novel *The Needle's Eye* goes beyond daily concerns of her earlier heroines to reveal both her maturity and the complex moral issues of the modern world. Born to rich parents and brought up under the care of substitute mothers, like nannies and governesses, Rose reaches adulthood without forming any attachment towards her parents.

They’re a funny couple, you know, they brought me up very oddly, I don’t know what they can have expected. My father’s father had a garage, perhaps you know all this, my father made all this money, and married my mother when they were both quite old, well, in their mid thirties, and she must have been talked into it by her family, I think. Because now they keep the house up. Not that she’s there very much, she goes abroad for most of the winter. She doesn’t really do anything. She hasn’t got any friends or anything. She’s got a companion, now. She’s a very sad person, bored all the time. My father’s quite different, he works all the time, he never stops, I can’t see what there is in it for
him now but he just can’t stop. So neither of them had much time for me—I bored her, and he wouldn’t talk to me because all he could talk about was business and I didn’t understand about it . . . . I suppose I was a disappointment to them, but on the other hand it’s hard to imagine what they could actually have wanted me to be, they never tried to make me take an interest in anything, they didn’t try to encourage me to go out or do anything.” (99)

This observation discloses without a doubt the extent of Rose’s dissatisfaction and her despair of being the child of these parents. Deprived of any affection from either one of them, the pitiful and lazy mother, and a father who tries to escape the tedious home life by immersing himself in his hectic work, Rose considers their prosperity responsible for the distance between them. As a matter of fact, their negligence to be proper and affectionate parents to her, and also the lack of communication between them create a wide gap, which worsens and widens with time. As mentioned earlier, Drabble’s own divorce makes a profound impact on theme and characterization of this book. Though here it is a divorce with a difference, for after winning her case, Rose takes her husband back, much to the disgust of feminist critics who interpret her decision as a let-down morally. She is happy after her divorce until her ex-husband brings up the custody question. Concerning Rose’s moral act of accepting her husband back, Mannheimer writes in her article, “The Needle’s Eye is a sad and defeatist novel in which the possibility of genuine self-realization seems more remote than in any of Margret Drabble’s previous works” (24).

If one is interested in finding out the basis of Rose’s act it is important to know that Drabble’s moral vision carries some ethical meaning which is discernable only in the underlying and depth of the things rather than in the surface level of the
actions. For what really matters in Drabble’s moral ideology is being right to one and being responsive to the other’s needs. In fact she uses flower as a symbol of love throughout the novel. However the name of the heroine of the novel, symbolized by a flower, stands for nature, which is deformed by the institution of man’s law. Conceivably since the hero of her novel, Simon, pursued law as his vocation, his character is signified by stone. In order to be able to discuss about opposing viewpoints Drabble masterfully uses the interwoven network of imagery in this novel. Rose used to collect wild flowers in her childhood but when she grows up, she is able to feel the cold and unloving conditions of her life, and starts to press them in her book. Arguably it might be a sign which shows the state of her repressed inner feelings.

The story of the needle and the camel, and Noreen’s haranguing about the wickedness of rich people, remain vividly etched in Rose’s memory. The substantial allowance given to her by her father makes her extravagant in her spending. Growing up under substitute mother figures she donates a lot of money to a political magazine which leads to her father’s anger and consequently the reduction of her allowance. Reacting to her father’s decision she embarks on regular visits to night clubs and restaurants with Christopher, the one she meets for the first time in the magazine, office, and the one to whom she finally gets married later in spite of her parent’s disapproval. This act leads to her photograph appearing in the papers with the headline “tycoon’s Red Daughter Rose with Greek Croupier” (105), provoking her father, and so he makes her a ward-of-court to stop her from marrying Christopher.

Rose’s impression that “one couldn’t get rid of money, that it would stick like a leech or a parasite, and breed and breed even if one tried to cut it out”(105) becomes a fact as she inherits a Trust fund, in part, of some thirty thousand pounds. Moreover
her words show her deep antipathy towards money. In a frenzied attempt to get rid of her cursed fortune, she gives the whole amount to an impoverished African country to build a school. But ironically this school has been demolished in the civil war after one month and all the children have been killed too. Sketching Rose’s character enables Drabble to reveal her ingrained belief that love for others can bring salvation and grace with itself for human generation. Therefore, because of her strong religious conviction that charity is for the sake of the giver, to save the soul of the giver, not the receiver, Rose donates the whole amount. Valerie Grosvenor Myer in *Puritanism and Permissiveness* declares, “Love is incompatible with meanness, spiritual or financial, and meanness is not a trait Margaret Drabble can admire. The gifts of nature and of fortune, beauty, intellect and wealth are to be used and enjoyed, not thwarted and denied, as Puritanism tries to do.” (110)

Rose is cognizant that she cannot prevent her children from inheriting the family fortune, which is their birthright. She seeks solace in utter passivity in an effort to retake the purity and guiltiness of her early childhood. As a child, she had imagined a place of “mystic and visionary loveliness, a thin aspiring castle on the brow of a green hill, a tower above the raging sea, a heavenly city” (107). But Noreen ruined her childhood dreams with the idea of the original sin. Having reached the stage of emotional and mental maturity she realizes that her moral vision is echoed in Christian’s belief of the existence of a heavenly land which is raised from Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Therefore, she attempts to actualize her ideal image of the city of God quite literally in her own living place. She tries to find her ideal God’s house on Middle Road: “I carved it out, I created it by faith, I believed in it, and then very slowly, it began to exist. And now it exists. It’s like God. It requires faith”(44). She rebuilds her ideal celestial house on the bedrock of abandonment. The new house with
its miserable condition becomes heaven in her view, the means by which she can measure the righteousness of her action. Believing that she has found the light of God in her house spiritually she feels complete satisfaction. Arguably here in this work Drabble again, in contrast to the existentialist view reveals Rose’s feeling of fulfillment in her development toward Bunyanesque moral hypothesis.

The actual fact is that Drabble intentionally named her heroine Rose Virtue Bryanston. In a real world she is always in the state of uncertainty between the part of her name which reflects her mother’s aristocratic Virtue family and the other part that embodies her father’s middle class, capitalist Bryanston one. Moreover, Drabble has purposefully created the other major conflict which is symbolized by her name Rose. This is a name that intertwines her nature and her virtue together. In fact, by revealing this chain of oppositions Drabble wants to show her readers that they should keep moderation in all aspects of their lives. Throughout this novel she tries to push her character towards choosing a way which is not only morally right but also in harmony with the realities of the outer world which we inhabit. The other contradictory part is made by Noreen, the one who is responsible for the suffering Rose feels inside her heart all through her life. Actually Noreen erroneously teaches her that she should sacrifice love in order to reach salvation, because in Noreen’s ideology the way to salvation is law, not love. Fertilizing this seed in the small girl she troubles her a lot for she cannot cope with the battle of law and love which is created in her heart. We can claim that the lack of effective relationship between Rose and her family created problems which can be observed in other characters of Drabble’s early novels in different degrees. Her critic Korenman in this regard declares that:

Drabble continues to explore the problems confronting contemporary women and to seek models for the future. Earlier thematic concerns – the causes and effects of bad marriages, the responsibilities and joys of
motherhood – still preoccupy her especially in the character of Rose Vassiliou. (61-62)

The critic is in the belief that Rose’s parents are the only responsible people who make Rose feel hopeless and helpless throughout her life. Even their failure to play their proper role, pushes her to rebel against her wealthy background. She prefers to live in the suburban part of London in an old and dilapidated house with her children attending the local school. It is in this condition that she alleges her illusionary satisfaction:

I’m Happy in it. It seems to me right. People are so nervous about believing anything to be right. But what else in life should one ever seek for but a sense of being right? I explain myself badly, I put it very badly, I can’t justify myself-but what I feel, now, is,‖ and she buried her face in her hands, as though embarrassed by her own declaration, “what I feel is that the things I do now, they’re part of me, they’re monotonous, yes I know, but they’re not boring, I like them, I do them all”-she hesitated, faintly-“I do them all with love. Getting up, drawing the curtains, shopping, going to bed. You know that I mean.”(107)

But it is a kind of an illusionary sense of happiness. On one occasion Rose thinks that what she is doing is right and she is satisfied with it. But later when Simon comes to her house, she laments, “It’s just so sad, that’s all life.” Or she says, “I’m so lonely…” (168). She holds her parents responsible for not having provided any firm guidelines about childrearing. Moreover, they never put any values into practice in the process of their daughter’s upbringing. They do not try to impress Rose with the responsibilities that go along with the privileges she will inherit. Being ignorant about the mental condition of her child she had to choose the ways of her life without any consultation. For example, when she talks about her loneliness at the time of leaving Christopher
she blames her parents thus, “In fact they could hardly have treated me more unwise, me being what I was, but then I wouldn’t have been what I was if they’d ever known how to handle me” (102). And again she says, “But there wasn’t much guidance. One simply doesn’t know how to behave in such a situation, one doesn’t know the rules, and I never understood the legal business, although father kept getting his solicitor in, poor fellow, to explain it to me” (103).

The other main character who, like Rose, suffers from extremist puritanical beliefs is Simon Camish. The strong sense of obligation he feels in himself, hurts him all the time. Paying no attention to what really his heart needs, he continues to do what he thinks he is obliged to do. Ignoring the emotional part of his body he suffers an endless dissatisfaction in his life. For example, “It was for her (mother), in a sense, that he had become a barrister, for her that he had married Julie, for her that he had accepted that stinking dirty money” (136). Mostly his thoughts are engaged with what his mother did for him single-handedly. Therefore, he thinks that he is responsible to make sure his mother’s dream of escape materializes. His mother “had done her best for him, wanting nothing but his escape. She had nourished dreams of escape, herself, once: she had looked forward to a brighter dawn” (132). In order to fulfill her desires he closes his eyes to the reality of his own existence. “The two major decisions of his life, his career and his marriage, had both been made through default, through guilt, through a desire to appease and placate, brought on by a lack of spontaneous love” (131). He always feels great stress resulting from forces acting in opposition to each other his acceptance of moral obligation, and morbid and abnormal sense of self-denial for others.

As a result of building his future according to others’ wants he confronts major problems in his married life with his wife. He discloses that he has not married Julie for her wealth but that he fell in love with her because of the different vision she
has for her life. He loves her because she is able to care about herself, unlike his own “cold, over-wrought, conscience-stricken and guilt-ridden childhood”(65). Seeking what he himself lacks in his personal life he finds opposite qualities in Julie, “There was in her a coarseness and a lack of discrimination that must have attracted him to her, as one is attracted, compelled, to approach one’s own doom, to live out one’s own heredity destiny” (70). He tries all his life to turn into a new person but he is successful only in outward appearance. In reality he experiences an endless feeling of loneliness and emotional emptiness. Unsatisfied with his new self he thinks that “his whole life-the clothes he wore, the car he drove, the way he spoke, the house he lived in- was an act of misrepresentation” (138). However, as a person with ethical values he always considers that it is his duty to continue his life in its pathetic condition. Thinking that “she needed him, he was indispensable to her”, so he refrains from doing anything drastic to his family. In order to stop thinking about the uncomfortable situation of his life he engages himself with over work.

He also thought that perhaps there was a natural progression, an inevitable progression, for people like himself, from his background, who had grown up amidst too much physical intimacy in houses too small, settees too narrow, bedrooms too full, kisses (like his grandparents’) too brutal and forceful- from this world they could only wish to grow apart, into the thinner air of non-touching, into larger rooms and spaces. And having reached this clear, empty space, they would wish once more to find touching, to find chosen, not accidental warmth, to find intimacy and contact. And it would no longer be possible; the world of touch would be lost forever… (52)
In the deepest part of his heart he admires his feeling of obligation towards his mother who had struggled with her life’s difficulties and made so many sacrifices in order to pull him out of the northern working-class quagmire. His mother helped him to become a pillar of the upper-middle class society and provided him with a good education. But leaving all the ties of the past behind completely he becomes alienated from those around him. Unable to make any connection with his new surroundings he loses the comfortable feeling of his earlier life in new society. Since he is forced to spend time with people he regards their company very distasteful and engaged in uninteresting activities he feels true loneliness within. Departing from all his ties the nothingness of the new world exhausts him. Extremely depressed in his new self-made life which seems empty of any affectionate relationship he becomes helpless about his life and future.

The lives of the main characters of this novel, Rose and Simon, as briefly referred, seem to be in stark contrast with each other. In fact they both decide to change their style of life from what they experienced in their childhood. On one hand Simon leaves his working-class roots and becomes a named lawyer, lives in a modern house, crowded his life with upper-middle-class people in one side. On the other hand, Rose rejects her wealthy parents and tries to live in a working-class industrial area with her children. But both suffer a lot because of the ways they choose to run their lives thoughtlessly and irrationally. While Rose bestows her inheritance to help the poor and attempts to live in the state of near bankruptcy, in a contrasting manner Simon lives in a condition yielding nothing of value as his soul is in a state of complete barrenness when he decides to marry for wealth. He finds himself suddenly in total darkness and understands that “man had been formed too low in the scale of possibility, with just enough illumination to suffer from failure, and too little spirit to
live in the light, too little strength to reach the light” (189). It is in this condition that Rose and Simon meet each other for the first time. Lacking the qualities that the other dreamed for, becomes the reason which brings them together instantly. Simon considers her as a more fortunate person when compared to himself. He feels that in her company he finds the language of God and religion which he left behind years ago. So every single act of Rose attracts him baselessly. To him her act of defiance against her parents’ values and her divorce are completely valid. When he finds that she gave away her wealth to get salvation in return, he feels that he has sold his soul in order to fulfill the materialistic part of his existence. So he says to himself, “I am embittered” (18).

The fact is that Rose and Simon both run their lives unrealistically. In order to be right according to their puritanical beliefs they go to the extremes. Simon envies the strength of the soul he finds in Rose, and in order to escape his empty and shapeless life he yearns for her company all the time. In spite of his attempt to find tranquility of mind while engaging himself in his work he is left with the exhausting feeling of loneliness and depression. The only time he is free from disturbing thoughts is the time when he is with Rose. He finds himself in a state of immeasurable contentment when he watches her moral acts. Justifying her act of divorce he does not want her to rejoin her husband. He tries hard to prevent her from giving one more chance to her husband, Christopher who was having catastrophic consequences in her life. Elizabeth Fox – Genovese writes about this novel that:

_The Needle’s Eye_ is about parents and children, mothers and children, Rose’s determination to retain custody of her own children, the conflict between her ‘ambition’ to live as she chooses and her ability to hang on to her children, and her ultimate reconciliation with her
husband because of the children . . . about morality, moral difficulty, virtue, souls, salvations, and the potentially corrosive, corrupting nature of even professional and moral ambition. (247)

Regarding Rose and Simon’s utterly wretched and unhappy feeling, one can find how wrong religious training can affect one’s life. Commenting about the deep feeling of alienation that Drabble’s characters experience, Myer declares, “Puritanical withdrawal and isolation mean negation for Margaret Drabble. All her characters move, to greater or lesser degree, out of moralistic, self-centered isolation into involvement and love” (Puritanism and Permissiveness 111). In case of Rose it is Noreen who is responsible in ruining her innocent dreams of childhood paradise. Simon’s mother, on the other hand, poisoned his life forever with her wrong interpretation of Biblical harsh laws. Because of an unpleasant emotion his mother implanted in his heart he is always afraid of the thought that he cannot rid himself of the bitter laws of God. The spirit of both of them becomes crushed under the fear of Biblical references such as, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” Therefore they find themselves caught in the cage of their doomed destiny where there is no way to escape to a brighter world. Mrs. Camish, who once suffered from the same feeling, tried to help the dream of escape come true for her son. She herself wished to be able to elude her gloomy heredity: “She had nourished dreams of escape herself, once she had looked forward to a brighter dawn” (118). Unable to reach her Utopia she attempted to change her son’s future.

But even when he escapes from his dark world by means of marriage he finds himself again trapped. Being in state of an endless fear and frustration he says to Christ that he can’t go on denying his nature. To bring happiness into his life he tries to make money, like his wife’s father. He detaches himself from all the old ties and
tries to make an entirely new life, but at bottom of his heart he still thinks that something is missing. Although he wishes to be able to free his soul from the strong obligations he feels for the others yet his efforts seems futile. So after sometime he feels that his heart changed to a piece of stone. He admits that, “It is precious to me, this dull and ordinary stone. It is always there. It is called resolution” (13). He wonders about the relationship between one’s past and the psychological and emotional relief it provides in one’s life. Therefore he remarks: “What does it have to do with roots; he wanted to know - a cutting of roots, a planting of old roots, a discovery of roots?” (24). Longing for his past he finally finds the cause of his dissatisfaction in his complete departure from his childhood origins. Concerning the positive effects of being in touch with the inner part of one’s self, Christopher Lasch rightly points out, “This historical discovery reinforces the psychological resource in maturity, and that those who cannot fall back on the memory of loving relations in the past suffer terrible torments as a result.” (The Culture of Narcissism 24-5)

Finding a solution for her characters’ disturbed state of feeling and in order to show her affinity towards her forerunners, such as Wordsworth, Drabble creates a scene where Simon visits his frozen garden: “A perpetual winter was what he expected.” But he discovers in the garden “a ghostly white crumpled bud of a rose… frozen into an everlasting flower, never to open, never to die, a witness, a signal, and a heroic pledge.” (86) After he meets Rose he tries to save his life from being drowned in the sea of nothingness. In his view, she seems to be a confident woman whose way of living is admirable. In fact, he looks at her as the extension of himself. To him she is respectable because she does what she wants to do. Therefore, in her company he feels a kind of rejuvenation in his nature. And yet, he continues to believe that she has bestowed upon him a special light, a special favor. The rose bud of the garden reminds him of the continuity of life. The flower also reminds him of God’s promise for a bright and
pleasant spring. He also decides to re-establish his ties with nature, so he finds Easter a good opportunity to take his family to the seashore. There he intertwines his spirit with the purity of the nature which is symbolized by the sea.

Simon likes Rose as a good friend, and says that even if he was deceived, he was “willingly deceived” (164). He not only looks at her as if she is her own creator but also envies her perfect ideal visions, the quality which he himself lacks, “He was no idealist, no visionary, no revolutionary” (199). As is evident from the novel the incompatibility between Rose and Christopher’s moral opinions and principals is the reason for their divorce, not financial problems. Rose believes that her action for donating her money is right but in contrast her husband thinks that she is wrong. It is obvious that her husband is keen about “power, and motivation, and emotion, and love” (231-32). Simon who admires every action in Rose tries to keep her away from her husband. Hence he as her lawyer accepts to defend her rights. “He acquitted her, he credited her, and he preferred to blame the man he did not know, the absent father” (179).

Disappointed in not being able to persuade Rose to give him a second chance, Christopher kidnaps his children. He is fully aware that Rose’s motherly instinct does not let her to stay away from them. His dream comes true because when he takes the children to Bryanston via Grimes Graves, Rose follows them. Arguably after a long period of separation he is able to bring all the family together. Getting together happens in the rose garden, so nature offers Rose the idea of the continuity of life, “the meeting seemed to go on forever, in that exposed spot: or wave after wave of it occurred and reoccurred, as though time had broadened endlessly to describe it. The high green hedges froze in a crest, about to break: the smell of trodden grass surged and rose and surged again” (300). Employing the technique of the nineteenth century writers, Drabble uses nature as a powerful source to create the major moral theme of the novel the importance of family and the healthy relationship between its members.
Lacking the valuable authority of competent parents who could give a proper shape to their thoughts, both Rose and Simon feel uneasy in managing their relations with others. The shapelessness of their expectations from life makes them unable to find satisfaction out of love, work and any other emotional or physical engagements. They surround themselves with a series of manufactured fantasies of total gratifications and illusions; for example, Rose undermines her family while attempting to rescue it. Having lost the actual grace, she is searching for grace in other wrong ways. She suffers from deep confusion and is unable to take an appropriate decision, whether in relation with her parents, her children or her husband. After her reconciliation with Christopher she is tormented between what her real nature wants and the moral way she chooses:

She saw no way out. She had taken him back because she could not bear to keep the children from him: why should she be so silenced, so compromised, by her own act? And it was not only in silence that she suffered. Her whole nature was being corrupted by her deep resistance to Christopher, by the endless, sickening struggle to preserve something of her own. (377-8)

Drabble, as a moral writer, depicts her characters seeking deep spiritual fulfillment. At the end of the novel Rose thinks that it is Christopher who has brought them all together, and he deserves to get one more chance. Drabble insists in “The Author Comments” that, in reuniting her family, Rose is fulfilling “an image of love and community” (37), and lets Christopher enters her life once again, a decision which makes feminist reviewers quiet disappointed. Rose takes this step, “for the sake of charity and love.” As a heroine who is responsible to convey her creator’s message of
love and care for others, “She had done it in the dry light of arid generosity; she had done it for others. Her duty that was what she had done. For others. For him, for the children”(365). However Patricia Spacks declares:

In Drabble’s *The Needle’s Eye*, the central female character, Rose Vassiliou, has inaugurated her adult life by giving away, in one grand and futile gesture, her fortune. She wants to achieve moral purity by constructive relinquishment; in fact, at the novel’s end, she reaches qualified moral success only by accepting impurity and compromise, abandoning some of her cherished divestitures. (16)

Drabble reveals her moral vision when she gives her answer to feminists who look at this work pessimistically. According to her the only way to reach true salvation is through love, reunion and relationship, not by abandoning and isolating oneself in the cage of self-fulfillment. In this novel she asks her heroine to forgive, to cope and to endeavor for the sake of her family. Therefore she declares clearly in “The Author Comments:”

*The Needle’s Eye* is not a defeatist or a depressing novel, because it shows people in a state of continual effort, rather than in a state of despair. I do not find the spectacle of effort depressing. Perhaps there are people who believe that it is masochistic and neurotic deliberately to choose the difficult path, but that is certainly not the way I look at it (35-37).

This novel seems to advocate too much adjustment and self-denial. Drabble shows several times that she values and appreciates moral behavior, such as accepting one’s responsibility towards the others. Her aim as a moral writer is to create a kind of reconciliation between old concepts of righteousness and integrity while keeping one’s demands of self-fulfillment and self-realization intact.
Drabble brought out her next societal novel *The Realms of Gold* in the same year that she divorced her first husband. This situation enabled her to find more knowledge about this aspect of life too. In this novel Drabble brilliantly mixes the traditional style of writing with the modern one. Giving a detailed account of the houses and landscapes, she portrays the sociological, historical and cultural atmosphere of the time more clearly and accurately. Talking about this work in an interview with Joanne V. Creighton, she says that it was her narrator who mainly managed and controlled the plot of the novel. “That’s true, partly because it’s the only one of my books that I would describe as a comedy, and you’re allowed to plot in comedies”(21). As a matter of fact, it is in the second phase of her writing that Drabble started changing the first-person style of her earlier novels to third-person. Using this technique facilitated her to write more easily about the predicaments that the main character of the novel confront which are basically more communal than personal ones. Here we have a character who is approaching middle-age like her author. Entering the second phase of their lives Drabble’s new characters are expected to tackle their social problems more wisely and logically. These characters reveal social concerns and also moral decisions that they take regarding these problems in most parts. Arguably, divorce, violent, depression, suicide, and other modern socially problematic areas are the main topics that Drabble deals with in this stage of her writing.

Drabble is a writer who believes in keeping one’s ties with one’s origins and past. In this novel she portrays the importance of one’s inheritance and one’s need towards one’s roots and community very obviously. Although very successful in her job as an archaeologist, Frances Wingate, the protagonist of the novel, is suffering from a sense of loneliness. She is one of Drabble’s contemporary women who, like so
many other characters, feels herself caught in a situation that be termed as mid-life identity crisis. In fact, while in her forties she is asking herself what is going to happen for her in future. Even the octopus which forms the opening scene of the novels shows the uncomfortable state of the heroine's mind, because “the female octopus died, invariably, after giving birth. Unlike the octopus, she seemed resolved on a course to defy nature. Maybe that was why she felt so bad?” (5-6). The other point which makes her more scared is when she sees that the male octopus surviving in a Perspex box, withdrawing from any more contact. She finds herself in the same condition, isolated and away from any close relationship.

The other major theme which is going to be discussed in this novel is the relationship between the protagonist and her mother and their inability to make satisfactory contact with each other. France is an archeologist who excavates underground to find about the history of man. In the process she becomes closer to her own past. We are introduced to her mother, Lady Ollerenshaw, who is a gynecologist. She is a self-opinionated woman with her commanding opinions about her unusual vision of sexual matters. Although she presents herself as an ardent feminist yet in reality she does not practice what she preaches. She gives long lectures about the urgent need for women’s liberation from those traditional bonds pertaining to home and family, but she never does anything significant about the women who are waiting for her help. In spite of what she demonstrates and being fully aware of her appealing face she tries to arouse the sexual interest of the men who are in contact with her.

Lacking moral values, her extreme eagerness to have relationship with her daughter’s friends annoys Frances immeasurably. Therefore, she feels intense dislike and also a strong aversion towards her mother. Considering her mother’s behavior to be shameful she tries to keep herself isolated from others. She is afflicted by her
mother’s immoral views and acts, and hence feels loneliness and depression in the deepest part of her heart. She keeps most of her friends away from her mother’s sight, but in the case of Anthony she has to introduce him to her since she has decided to marry him. In spite of her irritation and strong feeling of annoyance they have a very close relationship with each other. Frances expects her marriage to bring about a change in her unhappy life. So she decides to marry him, although she hears from some of her friends that her mother sleeps with him. Not willing to believe it she finally decides to marry him. But soon she understands that even her marriage cannot revitalize her dead feelings, so she starts to think of another possible way:

I find it quite easy to cure depression by work. One just has to keep moving, that’s all. Otherwise one sinks. I’m just an unnaturally energetic person, that’s all. I even think sometimes that I’m not really depressive at all; it’s just that for years I was underemployed. But I doubt if that’s quite true, because my family are all depressives too. (50)

Here in this novel Drabble once again resorts to engagement in work as a remedy which has the capability to cure one’s personal disorders. Frances, like Simon of the last novel, attempts to use her profession as a means of escape from all her disturbing thoughts.

Drabble always has a positive view about the pure mother-child relationship. Thus one of the structural techniques that she employs in her works is the devotion of the mother towards her children. Frances too thinks that she can tolerate her husband’s rough and aggressive behavior. But after sometime she feels powerless and starts to use tranquillizers. Anthony and Frances, unable to find any better way to resolve their problems, decide to divorce. It is after her divorce that Frances meets Karle who is a famous historian, and soon she finds herself in love with him. Her state
of mental disorder does not let her think that he has a wife and a family. On the other hand, though Karle dislikes her over indulgence in her work, he believes that “love was such a rare commodity, too rare to waste” (94). So he ignores his responsibility to his wife and develops a very close relation with Frances. But after a year the surprising and sudden attack of Joy, Karle’s wife, forces Frances to pay more attention to the realities of life she has so far tried to ignore. Karle, who has no moral standards, attempts to continue his relationship with Frances and keeps his wife simultaneously. Keeping her relationship with Karle, Frances reveals how parents’ view of life can affect the life of their children. She tries to keep herself away from Joy’s sight and leads an immoral relationship with Karle. At times she remembers her meeting with his wife:

It was her first experience of such a scene, though these days they seemed to be a common place: marriage in the middle classes had become a violent affair. She and her husband Anthony had thrown things at each other, but that had been an internal matter. She’d never yet come up against a third party, and was not sure of the rules of the game, she had heard of strange alliances between wives and mistresses. Of one thing she was certain; she did not wish to ally herself with Joy at all. (73)

It is at this moment that she thinks about her past and the immoral decisions she made. Although her relationship with Karle becomes obvious to anyone yet this time she wants to try another way because there is something in her heart which hurts hers, something unbearable. Thinking that she fell in love she started an immoral affair with a married man. But after a lapse of sometime her encounter with Joy awakens her from her dream, and she decides not to use as a means for her escape. After their
separation she thinks about his words all the time that, “You’re my one indulgence in life. You’re the one person I choose, who also chooses me. That’s why you can’t leave me. I can’t survive without you” (78-79). She wishes to renew her affair with him but when she receives no answer to her letters she feels that her pride has been hurt. Therefore, she decides to forget him, although life without him seems impossible to her.

Drabble tries to highlight the importance of the role parents can play in order to create a healthy psychological condition for their children. Lacking good parental relationship the protagonist of this novel, Frances, finds her life baseless and without any emotional support. Again because she cannot get any moral standard from them, especially her mother, she cannot discern the right way to lead her life. She benefits from the good qualities like education, self-esteem and independence which everyone might wish for. She always thinks that all her family members suffer from the same disease of hopelessness and depression. Seeing this problem as their heredity sickness, her tutor asks her to learn to cope with its symptoms. She recommends her to “learn to familiarize herself with it, and treat it as a part of a pattern, part of a cycle .... You must learn to see life as a cycle, not as a meaningless succession of mutually exclusive absolute states” (12). Confronted with predicaments which have their roots in her childhood and past, she asks herself several questions “The past had been so full: over-full. What of the future? What on earth could it still hold for her?” (18) Undoubtedly the octopus which survives in a Perspex box makes a turning point in her life. She thinks that the female spices dies after accomplishing what is planned for her it giving birth to a new octopus. During her sickness she finds herself extremely lonely. Trying to overcome her disturbed feelings she decides to find her roots, her
family “she would have to come to terms with the future. She would have to make new connections” (81).

During her journey back to her family she discovers some facts about her father’s speechless life, the illness which killed her sister and the untreatable sickness of her nephew. Recognizing that she also suffers from the same heredity psychological illness she tries to make herself beasier. She acquires the knowledge and skill to deal with her problem. Trying the new way out, though not completely, but partly, “She had been able to evade the effects of the sickness, if not the sickness itself” (101). At times she hear so many things about “the great-uncle who had hanged the cat and then himself, of the distant cousin who had thrown himself under a train, of aunts in lunatic asylums, and another ancient cousin who had tramped the country preaching the work until he was found dead in a ditch” (102). So in order to find the puzzling and unknown aspects of her past she attempts to go to all the places where she has some connections and to see “where she began and the family ended” (101).

The pursuit of archaeology . . . like the pursuit of history is for such as myself and Karle a fruitless attempt to prove the possibility of the future through the past. We seek a Utopia in the past, a possible if not an ideal society. We seek golden worlds from which we are banished, they recede infinitely, for there never was a golden world, there was never anything but toil and subsistence, cruelty and dullness. (124)

She is in a state of retrospection, whether this can cure her or will add to her miseries. Because of her profession she has to be away from her children most of the time, making her wonder if she is sacrificing her present in order to find her roots. According to Joanne V. Creighton, “The novel traces Frances’ second archeological discovery, the neglected history of her own Ollerenshaw family, the forgotten roots which have so indelibly shaped her being and her fate” (Margaret Drabble15).
Searching for her connections enables her to make her life not only more meaningful but also helps to provide her some mental relief. She finds out that the only possible way to have a healthier life is by keeping her ties with her past and to make new bonds with others in every moment of her life. According to Drabble there is something valuable in our childhood memories:

It’s not the place merely; it’s the fact that you were little when you were there, and, therefore, you’re going back to the stage before you were formed. You’re going back to something very early in yourself, that you need to go back to, and going back to the place reminds you of it. (Preussner 565)

So she purposefully portrays Frances as freeing herself from anxiety or fear while she stays in her brother’s cottage. It is in his place that she “feels old and safe like a secure infant” (194). Experiencing this state of emotional comfort she thinks of creating such a warm and lovely atmosphere in her own house and for her own family. She decides to make her bonds stronger this time and stop escaping the realities of her life.

In quest of her roots she goes to her grandparent’s Eel cottage which was “like Paradise, like the original garden” (105) in her childhood. But this time the decayed garden makes her feel very sad and disappointed. While she was there in her grandparent’s place, she thinks about her own future and her children. She thinks about the time they have grown up and now do not need her anymore.

The other important scene which brings her closer to her past is the death of her aunt. It is after Aunt Con’s death that she goes to her hometown Tockly. She has not been there for quiet long time. When her father asks her to attend her aunt’s funeral she goes there. But in order to stay in touch with her roots she decides to buy her
aunt’s house later, when she finds her aunt’s letters which reveals her affair with a married man. She shifts to her aunt’s house along with Karle and their children, because it is here that she finds her connection with some forces which give her peace and tranquility of mind.

As I mentioned earlier, most of the characters suffer from psychological illness, for example, her sister who attempts suicide, her brother Hugh who is an alcoholic, and later on we find her mother who experiences a sudden mental collapse while dealing with her wrongdoings and the immoral acts. Janet Bird, her cousin, is another example who suffers from the same mental problem. Drabble herself believes that part of this problem is caused by the environment of one’s life. She writes about this fact in her famous book, *A Writer’s Britain: Landscape in Literature*. In this novel her protagonist shows her faith in truth and of the inevitable impact of landscape upon the personality of each character. Tired of the negative consequences of this existing fact Frances says, “There must be something positively poisoning the whole of South Yorkshire and the Midlands, or they wouldn’t all be so bloody miserable up there, and live in such appalling conditions” (85-86). She thinks that “one can inherit a landscape” and feels that depression is the most common symptoms with the people who live in North part of England. To her the unhappiness of the characters can be called “the Midlands sickness” (100).

Drabble introduces Frances and Janet as two opposing personalities. While Frances is active, independent and self-reliant, Janet lacks energy and confidence. The absence of these qualities makes her life intolerable to her husband. Janet’s thought that she is not a loving and devoted mother hurts her a lot and it makes her feels greatly nervous. Having no confidence she withdraws from wider social contacts. Unable to change the sad condition of her life she is always waiting for something to
happen which would make her life looks better or which would “break the unremitting nothingness of her existence” (134). She feels an unbearable anxiety because she is afraid of so many things, like society, sex and any other thing that requires contact with the outer world.

But Frances’s unpredicted appearance in Janet’s life makes her change positively. Carey Kaplan in “A Vision of Power in Margaret Drabble’s The Realms of Gold” writes, “Frances has enough creative energy and power for almost anything— and, more, she knows it. Life, for her, is largely a question of choosing the right channels for her abundant creative force. She is, she knows, an earth mother with the astonishing powers of a primitive goddess” (Rose, Critical Essays 135). Therefore Janet tries to equip herself with the same vision of power when she looks at Frances. Unable to make any decision she says, “I feel I am myself, and that I’ve got to look after it. But I don’t know what it is. I know it’s there, that’s all. That’s why I don’t think it was at all awful about Aunt Con. She was being herself” (326). In order to show the responsibility of human beings toward their other fellow beings Drabble attempts to help Janet through her other character Frances. She accepts that one should try to see life positively in order to make it more meaningful:

As she straightened herself up, she caught sight of the huge sky, which was an amazing color, dark blue, with a foreground of dark pink and purple clouds, light but regular clouds, a whole heaven of them, spread like flowing hair or weed over the growing darkness. It arrested her. She stood there, and stared upwards. It was beautiful, beyond anything. The two colors were charged and heavy, and against them stood the black boughs of the tree at the end of the small garden, where black leaves, less desolate, struggled to fall in their death throes.
The previous day she had watched from the bedroom window a single leaf on that tree, twisting and turning and tugging at its stalk, in a frenzy of death, rattling dry with death, pulling for its final release. So must the soul leave the body, when its time comes? The amazing splendor of the shapes and colors held her there, the tea pot in her hand. ‘I will lift up mine eyes’, she thought to herself. ‘I should lift them up more often’. (154-155)

Janet understands that one should not give up easily when confronted with life’s difficulties. In fact, through her we can understand clearly Drabble’s message, that living is a very serious matter and people must try very hard in order to fulfill their potential. In this regard Kaplan again remarks that the theme of the novel is:

> All creation, all re-creation, requires the strength to endure pain and horror, the strength to bring forth meaning from the depth- ultimately and always the depths of one-self. The realms of gold are not found without fortitude and endurance. Without sufficient fortitude, the individual will perish. Drabble refreshingly, does not pretend that living productively and vitally in the modern world … is easy or even possible. (Rose, Critical Essays 137)

The other character who lacks this knowledge is Frances’s nephew, Stephen, who like many other characters seeks isolation through alcohol. He can’t think of anything positive but is obsessed with death. He longs for Frances’s power but in contrast attempts suicide at an early age. Later on, in order to escape from his disturbing thoughts he, tries drugs. His unsuccessful marriage and the responsibility of looking after his newborn child are unbearable for him. He soon realizes that he is not able to continue this kind of life. If one read his words that “It didn’t seem right,
to spend too much effort, simply to stay alive, to fear death so much, not only for oneself, but for others” (210) one can understand that he too suffers from depression. He is not able to see the positive aspects of life. Unable to find a better way he decides to end his life that seems aimless meaningless. Finally he ends his and his innocent child’s life. According to some critics Stephen’s decision to end his life at the young age reveals the condition of contemporary people who mostly suffer from a feeling of isolation and loneliness.

At the end of the novel we find that the struggle of Karle and his wife has no result. Karle starts to introspect into his past in order to find some solutions to his problems. He thinks that the only time he experienced real happiness was when he had a close relationship with Frances. His wife’s sudden change into a lesbian provides the opportunity for him to renew his affair with Frances who has always dreamt her of reunion with him. In fact, Drabble in this novel wants to convey her message that our past and future are interwoven. We are here in order to find our ties with our past, to trace a more meaningful future to our lives. Drabble in her interview with Kenyon about this novel states:

I wanted to suggest that the protagonist Frances [Wingate] has literally traveled to the realms of gold, because she goes off into the Sahara where she finds gold bars …. It’s a symbol of luck; it’s also a symbol of the imaginative process. Somewhat portentous, but luck is digging in the right place and the creative bit is guessing where the right place is. The combination of chance and choice in writing a novel is fascinating. I wanted to indicate that these worlds of the imagination exist and can be entered and that one has a freedom to create oneself a good future. (47-48).
Drabble herself remarks that the main theme of the novel is about the interrelationship of the past, present and future. Searching for the realms of gold in the past Drabble again clearly reveals her disagreement with existential philosophers who do not believe in the impact of one’s connection with one’s past and one’s present and future life. If we pay close attention to the titles of her novel novels, we find that the concept of a golden realm is very important in her works. She remarks in The Tradition of Women’s Fiction that, “gold is obviously a very rich image for the woman novelist ... certain images, certain themes stimulate the imagination fruitfully and lead one towards a golden discovery. . . . We are trying to imagine the impossible golden world, and into that we have to try to move” (86-87).

There are several characters in the novel who try to dig into their past in order to bring some meaning into their lives through their professions. Drabble purposefully engages her characters with occupation which is related to their past in different degrees. For example, Frances, the protagonist of the novel, is an archaeologist, her lover a historian, her mother a gynecologist and finally her cousin who is a geologist. Drabble employs these professions to reveal both positive and negative facets of the last generations. Therefore when Frances digs out Tizouk she discovers both the golden valuable objects and the urns filled with the bones of sacrificed children. Looking at these she loses her temper and says, “We unearth horrors, and justify them. Child sacrifice, we label benevolent birth control; a dull and endless struggle against nature, we label communication with the earth” (108).

Finding the realities which make her feel uncomfortable she decides to investigate her own personal history. She is interested in finding the reason behind the Midland sickness and also her inherited family disorder. In fact, like some other of Drabble’s characters, she goes back to her hometown. She tries to find her
connections with her past in order to find a way to cure her depressed feelings. Failing to find her ideal world in desert, she starts excavating her family roots in her childhood garden. But her digging into her past shows her that the golden age of Britain has changed to a kind of harsh industrial environment in the hands of property developers. Attending a conference in Africa where the African Minister for Culture speaks to her about the necessity of digging into the past for discovering a more meaningful future Frances resumes her job once again. She is impressed by the Minister’s speech, “We are in possession of a future and a past beyond our imagination. We must discover our own rich cultural heritage, stone by stone, and we must build a rich future” (223).

However it is not in Tizouk excavation that Frances finally uncovers her personal dream land but it is in her hometown where she discovers her true golden realm of family roots. Coming home for the second time enables her to find her lost self among her familial inheritance, and especially in her aunt’s individual possessions. Searching for a way to fulfill her need for a mother figure she finds it in her common ancestry in her aunt’s May Cottage. She discovers her lost identity in the landscape of her childhood and fulfills her quest of her mother among her aunt’s letters. Giving a new life and vitality to nature is a means by which Drabble reveals the hope for brighter future in this novel. So in order to show the continuity of life she writes that even a decaying tree is “still budded and blossomed, even though undeterred by death, the leaves still breaking from it in its grave” (259). Cynthia A. Davis, commenting on the narrative style of the novel, writes in her essay “Unfolding Form: Narrative Approach and Theme in The Realms of Gold”:

Drabble is not without values and preferences, but she presents them with a recognition of their alternatives, and she promotes them by comparison rather than assertion. The narrator remains overtly
nonjudgmental, and the possibilities of each view are explored and its
foundation described. So the absoluteness and nonhumanness of
Stephen’s position are “justified” by the novel’s concentration on fate
and chance. But the limitation of that view is demonstrated negatively,
by his death, and positively, by contrast with other characters. (Rose,
Critical Essays 150)

Drabble once again ends her novel with unity, harmony and hope for a better future.
Frances’s reunion with her lover and her family roots enables her to resolve her inner
conflict between her moral obligations towards herself and her origins through the
means of love. Finding the real realm of gold in connection with others she returns to
her job in order to fulfill her responsibility towards her society and humanity.

In The Ice Age, Drabble portrays the golden age of England, excavated in The
Realms of Gold, frozen over again by a deadly new frost, as property speculators
dissect the land and deface the nation. This novel attempts to show how people and
the nation are caught in different kinds of crises. The people are totally confused with
the new conditions because they are unable to conform to them. Creighton writes in
her book Margaret Drabble:

And what is happening to individuals clearly reflects, in turn, what is
happening to the British nation as a whole - which is depicted as
getting older, tired, staid, facing crisis and going through some strange
and disorienting metamorphosis. Like other contemporary novelists,
Drabble in these books is attempting to engage with the troubled,
widely shared social contexts and experiences of urban middle-class
life. (92)

Drabble portrays the decline of economical and cultural situation of Britain in this novel
very artistically. Here, Anthony Keating, who is the main character, lives with his
mistress, Alison Murray, who provides a traditional Drabble portrait of a devoted and careful woman of her times. In this novel Drabble’s characters find themselves lost in a state of complete financial and moral collapse. She tries to show the “state of the nation” of the 1970s. She realistically reveals the despairing financial situation of England on one hand, and creatively depicts the unemotional moral atmosphere of the nation, on the other hand. She tries to reveal the problems which the nation is experiencing in the age of “ice”. She uses the image of the prisons to show how property developers imprison not only the country but also people’s psyche. In The Tradition of Women’s Fiction Drabble declares, “By this time I was very conscious of symbolism and a lot of it takes place in prison” (90). She also tries to find out whether Britain can survive in this gloomy condition of society or not.

Not only does the book begin with Alison’s trying to get her teenage daughter Jane out of an East European prison in the country of Wallacia, but also attempts to reveal that the protagonist of the novel and England are both in trouble in this freezing age. In this novel Anthony, a journalist becomes a property developer, but soon he and his other friends who are architects and financiers face heavy loss. Recuperating from a heart attack, Anthony decides that it has been “[a] terrible year, a terrible world. Two of his acquaintance in prison, one dead by assassination, himself in debt by many thousands. It had all looked so different, four years ago, three years ago” (13). Drabble describes the atmosphere of England prevailing then:

Not everybody in Britain on that night in November was alone, incapacitated, or in jail. Nevertheless, over the country depression lay like fog, which was just about all that was missing to lower spirits even further, and there was even a little of that in East Anglia …. Nobody knew whose fault it really was, but most people managed to complain fairly forcefully about somebody: only a few were stunned
into honorable silence … The old headline phrases of freeze and squeeze had for the first time become for everyone, not merely for the old and unemployed, a living image, a reality: millions who had groaned over them in steadily increasing prosperity were now obliged to think again. A huge icy fist, with large cold fingers, was squeezing and chilling the people of Britain, that great and puissant nation ….

The flow had ceased to flow; the ball had stopped rolling; the game of musical chairs was over. (Ice Age 59-60)

Agitation and depression were predominant in the atmosphere of England and people damned the terrible times. Though Drabble explains to a reviewer that this novel reveals mostly the economic depression, she provides the documentary evidence of the social life more than the economic situation of England. “A huge icy fist, with large cold fingers was squeezing and chilling the people of Britain, that great and puissant nation, slowing down their blood, locking them into immobility, fixing them in a solid stasis, like fish in a frozen river” (62-63). The fate of Britain in the new ice age is presented by the old elm that has endured for generations, as a landmark at the entrance to High Rook House, the protagonist’s historic house. The fall of the elm symbolizes not only the collapse of Britain but also the despair of the hero who burns the tree for firewood. The other symbol which reveals this despairing condition is the uncertain position of the legendary British lion that depicts the condition of the nation, because the once powerful king of the beasts now has to suffer and stand on its last legs. Drabble artistically represents “England, sliding, sinking, shabby, dirty, lazy, inefficient, dangerous, in its death throes, worn out, clapped out, occasionally lashing out” (96-97).

Anthony Keating, Drabble’s second pervasively-drawn male character is the son of a churchman and schoolmaster. He denounces the church and marries Barbara
Cockburn, while still an undergraduate. His wife proves to be of the unfaithful type, “a maternally spirited woman who could not resist a vulnerable face” (25). He continues to be good to her, feeling guilty about his own disloyalties. To earn more money, he sketches and reviews, and proves to be a successful journalist. After some years at the BBC in producing, writing, and editing, he becomes restless. He moves from BBC to ITV, and the new career increases his eagerness. But shortly later, he feels “underemployed, bored, and not at all happy in his relation to his work, his country, or the society he lived in: ripe for conversion, to some creed” (26). His meeting with Len Wincobank causes him to reorganize his life. Leaving a reasonably safe salaried job with a pension, he becomes a property developer. He inaugurates a company along with Giles and Roy Leggett, which brings instant fortune. He feels greatly happy in his new work. Frustrated with Anthony and his friends, who have interest only in money, his wife accuses him “of hypocrisy, of intellectual slumming, of folia de grandeur, of brain fever” (34). She considers them as a set of villains. Anthony makes thousands of pounds and borrows many more thousands more. Barbara who becomes sick of him, moves out of his life and marry another person.

Anthony, along with so many other investors, bankers and stockbrokers, experiences heavy losses. Unable to resist this condition, some become bankrupt, some commit suicide. Anthony’s friend, Len Wincobank, a successful man who earned so much money gets convicted of corruption but hopes to begin again when he moves out of prison. There are other characters who are introduced as big losers, like Giles Peters and Rosy Leggett, the greatest financiers of their generation. This novel reveals the characters’ moral development. Anthony and Alison are the two major characters whose moral growth we see clearly. According to Creighton, Drabble tries to show how her characters’ continual efforts help them to overcome this crisis. She states in *The Ice Age*:
Britain is suffering an age of “ice” – variously imaged in the novel by cold, paralysis, imprisonment, forced inaction, death. The individuals are dwarfed by the age which shapes them, the narrative voice which distances them, the inscrutable play of chance and determinism which move them about. Deftly building up a panoramic sense of simultaneity and similarity in part 1, the narrator cuts from one character to another, each, on a single day, attempting to cope with a debilitating crisis: Anthony Keating with a heart attack; Alison Murray with the imprisonment of her daughter Jane in a Balkan country; Kitty Friedmann with the loss of her foot and her husband in an IRA terrorist attack; Len Wincobank with his imprisonment for illegal property speculation; ….Not only are these individuals stymied by unexpected misfortune, the rest of the nation is summarily included in the “terrible times” which individually and collectively “lay like a fog” over the country… (Margaret Drabble 95)

Delving deep into this novel we find that it shows how Drabble widened her scope from her earlier books which were written with a narrower vision. Here she talks about the other contemporary facts, such as terrorism and war, events happening in other parts of the world. Drabble says that she has presented the heroine of the novel, Alison, with a really insufferable condition. In an interview with Diana Cooper-Clark she remarks, “Life isn’t fair, life isn’t easy, and not everybody can be happy. If you have a defective child or if you are crushed by an appalling illness, then you just say, ‘well, life is supposed to be happy so I’ve got to turn this into happiness” (Rose, Critical Essays 20). Drabble does not state that people to succumb. She believes in a continuous endeavor even if some do not consider it a victory but a loss. For this
reason  Alison is depicted as a person who has always had a maternal and family instinct. She gives up her own career in favor of her children and husband. She was an actress, but had abandoned the stage on the birth of her second daughter, who suffered quite severely from cerebral palsy: she started to work for the Society for Disabled Children, and devoted herself to fundraising, appealing, visiting, talking on radio, television, to the press. She was sufficiently well-known to be able to do this with some impact … One or two of them [her theatrical friends] guessed, shrewdly enough, that her husband, Donnell, might have had something to do with her decision, for Donnell’s career, when the sick children was born, was not going nearly as well as Alison’s, a fact which caused him a resentment which he was quite unable to conceal in public, and which, they felt, might well express itself somewhat violently in private. Like a good wife, perhaps Alison had chosen to retire rather than to compete. (Ice Age 31)

Alison, who has identified herself with beauty and confidence for years, finds it very difficult to tolerate the sad condition of her life, and is hardly willing to accept the signs of old age at first. She says, “I am a vain, a wicked woman, who thinks too much of this world, and of her own body. I am not humble, I cannot face old age, I cannot face ugliness and decay” (94) which shows the state of her mind. To overcome these hopeless feelings she thinks about working for the Foundation for Disabled Children. Another important decision in her life is her divorce from Donnell, and her reunion with Anthony who finds this companionship more meaningful. Harboring the same belief Anthony eagerly welcomes her. They plan to marry but wait “too long, for children to grow up, for ex-husbands and ex-wives to settle, they had waited to make
enough money, to find the right house” (13). The moment Anthony buys the grand old building, High Rook House, the property market crashes. With the boom turning into a slump, Anthony’s life suddenly becomes extraordinarily empty. A heart attack at the age of thirty-eight deprives him of several pleasures in life. He retires to the High Rook House with the money he had earned by building houses in, people cannot live in. Imprisoned in his house with nothing to do and nothing to distract, he suffers solitude. He admits that he has not done anything practical in life.

Devoting herself completely to her defective daughter, Molly, Alison’s elder daughter, Jane Murray, does not receive her mother’s care and affection. So gradually the gap between them becomes wider and wider. Lacking parental love she thinks that she is ignored. Unable to tolerate this condition she grows skeptical and seems to make it a point to torment her mother through her wrongdoings. She cannot bear to see Anthony and her mother spending time together and forgetting her existence. Nothing pleases her and she censures everything. It is finally in Walachia that her relation with her boyfriend ends in a traffic accident and the death of two people. Jane is arrested for her offending act in Walachia, a country infamous for imprisoning foreigners on charges of spying or dangerous driving or drug smuggling. It is only at this juncture that Alison seriously contemplates about her daughter. She sets out to rescue and to comfort her daughter who is in a state of extreme anxiety. She is doubtful about how to help her 18-year-old Jane, “but nevertheless considered it her maternal duty to do what she could for her own daughter” (41). Alison thinks that she is responsible for what happened to her daughter. She says about that Jane: “after all the child had had a difficult childhood, poor girl, with Molly spoiling everything; embarrassing, pampered, messy, expensive, time-consuming Molly, eating up maternal attention and affection” (47). Alison’s maternal feelings stop her from getting angry with her daughter. Paying close attention to her devotional acts towards her sick child one can understand that her heart is not
devoid of positive feelings of love and care but it is the difficult condition of her life that has made her negligent towards Jane. It is in a prison that Jane starts to complain to her mother about her emotional sufferings. She says, “you always put her first, didn’t you?” (148). But her mother attempts to explain to her:

There you are, eighteen years old, with everything going for you, good looks, brains, money, the lot, and what do you do, you sulk and feel sorry for yourself and sleep with half-wits who run away when there’s any trouble, and you’re all eaten up with meanness and jealousy, and christ, Jane, what do you think you’re jealous of? A poor lump, who doesn’t know what’s happening to her, who hasn’t a hope of a decent life – and she suffers too, you always tried to pretend she didn’t have any feelings, but you know as well as I do that rages like that don’t happen out of nothing, out of unfeeling, - and you, you have the lack of – the lack of dignity . . . (149)

By now Alison is fully aware that Jane’s suffering is caused partly by her because she did not give her the proper care as her mother. She never paid enough attention to her needs and feelings. Unfortunately, she had never tried to criticize her for her immoral acts. If they had a relationship according to mutual understanding, perhaps Jane could have coped with her problems during the critical moments of her life. She thinks that her mother destroyed her life and future. Like a little bird she shouts at Alison, “You’ve ruined us both. I don’t know how you can go around thinking yourself such a wonderful mother” (150). Jane’s imputation of her mother may be based on misapprehension but it makes Alison meditate upon the past.

Returning to England Alison finds her child Molly closer emotionally to Anthony than her. Molly’s affection for Anthony, her obsession with other things, and Anthony’s genuine care for her bring a sea-change in her, and she looks inaccessible,
unattached, and hostile. Without any sense of acknowledgment for the services rendered by Anthony, Alison accuses him of having intentionally stolen Molly’s love from her. Without listening to the account of the confused Anthony, she says angrily, “No, you alienated her from me, after all those years, I gave myself to that child for all those years, and you walk in, you charm her, you take her from me” (178). She finds her life, aimless and suffers a lot when she realizes that her daughter Molly, for whom she sacrificed all her life can live without her help too.

In fact, Alison shows a lot of care to her daughter Molly who suffers from mental abnormality. Finding that Jane hates him and does not approve of his existence and relationship with her mother, he is unable to make a good emotional relationship with her. During Alison’s absence, as she has gone to save her daughter, he accepts to look after Molly though he is himself sick. His moral act changes his vision towards his life completely. By devoting his time and love to this child, it helps him to stop thinking about his sad experiences any more. He finds himself quiet satisfied in this life, away from London and its stressful condition. He waits for Alison eagerly, but on her return she destroys his hopes with her strange behavior. But Anthony understands her situation and attempts to reveal his good intentions later while hoping for better and more peaceful days. Arguably Fox-Genovese in “The Ambiguities of Female Identity: A Reading of the Novels of Margaret Drabble” writes that Drabble reaches the climax of her development with The Ice Age where her “increasingly harsh repudiation of female being,” and her undeniable withdrawal on her part to discuss “the womanliness with which she no longer chooses to identify”(244) demonstrate her expanded moral vision.

Anthony is a spontaneously amiable person. He tries come closer to his own children who live with their mother. Talking about her new wider vision to Monica
Lauritzen Drabble says that Anthony’s care for others might be considered as a new possibility and way of looking for men as a whole. Moreover she remarks:

I would perhaps argue that historically, chronologically as time goes on, the overlap of men’s and women’s lives will be greater than it is now. Therefore the difference will not be so great. And that is what I would hope for and expect – that our children’s generation will have a larger area of common experience than we did. And it will be very interesting to see in twenty years’ time which area still remain a woman’s preoccupation and which a man’s. (255)

In the beginning Anthony abhors businessmen, clearly evident in his comment that Len minted money “raping the city centers of Britain” (26). He always thinks about his children and also Alison’s family, while buying the High Rook House. Away from London’s uncomfortable life he admits that it has become unpleasant because of what people like him did:

He had taken every step in his nature towards self-destruction: he had played with fire, he had gambled, he had tried to turn upside down his dearest principles, and by any law of justice, he, like Len Wincobank, should have ended up in prison, or, like Max Friedmann, dead. But fate had given him a second chance. Yet again, he was going to have to decide what to do with his life. (218-19)

In this regard Elaine Tuttle Hansen writes in her article, “The Uses of Imagination: Margaret Drabble’s The Ice Age”: 

The merchant bankers and other powerful men with whom Anthony is clearly obsessed not only represent the destruction of old feminine values of community, family, respect for the past, and social conscience; worse, they exploits these values by paying illusory lip
service to them, and they then refuse to take responsibility for the collapse of the social order brought about by their ruthless quest for private profit. (Rose, *Critical Essays* 155)

Called upon to fetch Jane from Walachia to London, Anthony becomes a victim of overwhelming problems. “His past – his eccentric career as a song writer, television producer, property man, man of enforced leisure- stands before him. He broods over his and his friends’ opinions of England. He realizes that “all the past was dead, that it was time for a new Age” (252). He finally realizes that he should learn to cope with his time. Fortunately he is able to save Jane, but he himself is mistaken for a British spy and ends up imprisoned in a labor colony, “for anti-Walachia activities and espionage” (279). Ironically his imprisonment provides him precious time for his spiritual development. He reads Boethius’s *consolation of Philosophy*, which substantiates the ways of God to men, and scrutinizes the mysteries of the Divine Will as it is obvious in the temporal events. He determines to write a book about the nature of God and the practicability of religious faith in contemporary modern world.

It is his spiritual wealth which helps him to get rid of his unconscious feeling of aimlessness and helps him grow to a full man. Drabble tells Barbra Milton, “If you were to get high up enough over the world, you would see things that look like coincidence, are, in fact, part of a pattern” (40). At the end of the novel Anthony recognizes that human life is not futile and meaningless but is connected with the real and purposeful ways, which may be beyond human understanding and appreciation, and everything is part of a larger providential scheme.

Anthony unexpectedly reaches spiritual heights, and his faith in God saves him from the chaos of the terrible times. All of the characters in the novel are said to be freezing to death, either literally or figuratively. They are equally the sufferers of
the ice age, for, although not frozen to death physically, they are frozen spiritually. In this novel, Drabble presents property development as being responsible for ruining both the life of the people and the country at the same time. She depicts the condition of Britain in the changing views of her hero, for “he, like the nation, was living beyond his means, on borrowed time and borrowed money” (182). On the other hand, through sketching Alison’s character she exemplifies Britain as a land, the beautiful English countryside, that Anthony and his partners in greed exploit for economic their personal profits. Drabble creatively reveals the reasons behind contemporary people’s estrangement from their land and nature.

In this work Drabble seems to convey the message that property is prison. In *The Ice Age*, she also depicts the concept of property imprisoning nature symbolically, through images of barriers, walls and fences. Demonstrating the destiny of her male protagonist she tries to show the existing oppositions between property and humanity which is symbolized by images of architecture and represented in the novel. Anthony thinks about the meaning and significance of historical memorials:

Ozymandias, King of Kings. Look on my works, ye mighty. Well, he hadn’t been far wrong, Ozymandias he had lost his kingdom, perhaps, but at least part of his monument remained. By their monuments ye shall know them. By the pyramids the Parthenon, by characters and St Peter’s by St Pancreas Station and the Eiffel, Tower, by the post office Tower and the Chrysler Building. All large buildings express both piety and pride: how could they not? Man’s own achievement, they point to the skies. His own geometer had enmeshed the skies. They witness at once man’s sufficiency and his insufficiency (203).
Property developers are portrayed as villains of the piece in *The Ice Age*, and they are castigated for their sins against society by being incarcerated in prisons, as malevolent to humanity as their own brutal structures. Much of *The Ice Age* is a portrait called Walachia, suggesting walls. A major part of the novel portrait behind the walls in a little known totalitarian state named Walachia. This is a place where Jane and Anthony are arrested and imprisoned in Krusograd jail. Suffocated in the prison he thinks the ice age not only has dominated over Britain but also in other parts of the globe as well.

Anthony’s solitary constraint in Krusograd prison represents the cell of the self and he finds on his way to the jail that “I do not know how man can do without god.” He is stopped in the middle of the road by the thought, “If God did not appoint this trial for me, then how could it be that I should be asked to endure it, he asks.” By the end of the novel, we see Anthony has a vision of God, symbolized by a rare bird, that he believes is “a messenger from God” (297). The rare bird represents a “wall creeper,” symbolizing in its free flight over the prison walls the freedom of the spirit. Instead of going mad in his cell, Anthony peacefully writes a book “about the nature of God and the possibility of religious faith” (293). Drabble said in an interview that Anthony “was there [in prison] because he’d read an awful lot of stories about being a British gentleman when he was a little boy … I think Anthony Keating, or myself, or any of us, are what we are partly because of what we read when we were little. I accept that completely” (Hannay 132). The final symbol of the novel represents not only the spiritual rebirth of the character but also Drabble’s hope about the future of the human condition in the modern world.

In *The Middle Ground*, as its title suggests, the subject is middle age. The last novel written in the second phase of Drabble’s career is the pinnacle of her portrayal of characters in their thirties and of questioning what occurs next in their lives at this age.
This work shows the climax of her humanistic concern about social predicaments that contemporary people confront. Through a complex narrative technique of multiple viewpoints, she also depicts the identity crisis of modern society for her four major characters, especially her heroine Kate Armstrong. Kate is a divorced journalist who has built her fame successfully but is undergoing emotional breakdown since she has reached a “middle ground.” The four main characters, Kate, Evelyn, Hugo, and Ted are all members of the professional middle class and all in their middle ages. While the conditions in London are changing in the modern times, the characters in the novel are unsure about their future; they are going to experience new territories:

The middle years, caught between children and parents, free of neither: the past stretches back too densely, it is too thickly populated, the future has not yet thinned out. No wonder a pattern is slow to emerge from such a thick clutter of cross-references, from such trivia, from such serious but hidden connections. (The Middle Ground 182)

Kate Armstrong, the protagonist, like many of her friends, suffers from excessive state of nervousness which her friend Hugo tags as her mid-life crisis. After a useful life of about forty years, she feels some anxiety all of a sudden, and her life takes a different turn. She also thinks as though she is left in a “draughty open space” (16). As with her other characters of this second period, Kate is a woman wondering where to go forward in her life.

[S]he doesn’t know what will happen next, nor how to make it happen, and, being an energetic and active person, she strongly dislikes the feeling of helplessness, the lack of direction, that this uncertainty generates. She looks at the component parts of her life—her children, her ex-husband, her ex-lover, her work, her parents – and doesn’t know what to do or to think about any of them. (Middle Ground 10)
Like many other protagonists in Drabble’s fiction, Kate has been brought up in an unhealthy atmosphere but becomes competent by hard work and positive will power. Realizing that she is highly ambitious, she feels that she could not waste her entire life at Romley. When she meets Stuart Armstrong, a very handsome man, she falls in love with him. At first she realizes that his whole family shares the positive quality of kindness. Later on, we find that Stuart suffers from a kind of indecisiveness in his life. So Kate tries to find a way to make her life’s condition more stable. She becomes a journalist and starts her career with writing for women in most part. Engaged in her work she creates the right place in the society for herself.

She had a knack for finding the right thing at the right moment. She started to write new-wave women’s pieces some time before they became fashionable, sharing her pregnancies and exhaustions and indignations with a shocked and enthralled public. Her lower-middle-class origins, onto which she grafted the language and opinions of the artistic and articulate middle class proved an invaluable asset; she could communicate with a large audience … she was, unashamedly, a women’s writer, but men read her eagerly. She created a place for herself, and set a good price on it. (39)

This shows without a doubt Drabble’s characters’ capabilities to cope with life’s difficulties. According to Creighton, “Both Kate Armstrong and Margaret Drabble have generated their early work out of their identities as women, and were viewed as writers of women’s works, as champions of feminist perspectives.” (Margaret Drabble 104-5) Kate has the ability to turn every sad experience into something fanciful and lovely. Busy with her job she never tries to think about the facts which lead her to a divorce.
Her illicit relationship with her friend’s husband, Ted Stennett, which “began with the usual sexual fervor and emotional declarations, soon settled into a business-like partnership, an exchange process for their mutual benefit” (51). Although she is fully aware that he never intends to marry her yet she continues to have an affair. This matter reveals some facts about the moral conditions of contemporary people. Even the silence of his wife discloses this truth:

Adultery is in itself farcical, and there was a lot of it around in those days, for she and most of her friends were in their early thirties, many of them tied to their spouses by small children, not yet ready to leave and set up house again, and equally unwilling to resign themselves to a life of bad-tempered fidelity; in theory, few of them disapproved of adultery, few of them had embarked on marriage with much hope of survival, most of them professed to believe in sexual freedom, honesty, self-expression. (54)

The above passage shows the moral state of affairs of the modern society clearly. It seems that for a contemporary man qualities such as honesty and integrity have no meaning. Kate, who likes to be free, is against ending her in marriage. At first she is determined to keep her affair as it is but after a lapse of some time she starts to think more logically. She thinks about her aged parents, her children who are growing up, and her brother who is on the verge of a mental breakdown. The idea that her children are grown up and might leave her anytime proves intolerable to her. Commenting about Kate’s emotional condition Creighton writes that:

Kate’s early interest in the personal and the unique has been gradually replaced by a fascination for the general … just as Drabble’s novels have increasingly turned to the social scene rather than to the individual psyche. Kate feels that she is now writing about subjects
“which were really beyond her scope” (p.59); and some reviewers and critics have had the same opinions about Margaret Drabble’s latest work. Where earlier life had for Kate easily yielded its patterns, easily translated into language, now Kate struggles with the difficulty of shaping life into meaningful patterns, into pithy and witty disquisitions. *(Margaret Drabble 105)*

Here in this novel, like *The Millstone*, once again Kate’s unexpected pregnancy changes her vision. She is confronted with the mid-life crisis of her life and becomes totally confused. She even starts to look at her present job as being unstable and leaves it in order to find a better one. When she talks about her fear and tension to her friends, she finds that all of them are suffering from the same problem, saying that they too “were going through re-appraisals, dissatisfactions, the discontent of realizing one would never in this one and only life be anything else but what own was, and some of them said that they envied Kate for her free-wheeling existence, her rapid turn-over of topics” (61). At first she believes that her pregnancy is “an offer that could not be rejected” (67) and is determined to rear the child without marrying Ted. Considering the child as a means that can save her life from aimlessness she firmly decides to keep it. But when the doctor informs her that her child suffers from “spine bifida” and strongly recommends her to abort the child she breaks down. She finds herself helpless and disappointed because “Maternity had been her passion, in life, and she had been forced to deny it. Fate had forced her to undo her own nature. I denied my nature, thought Kate, therefore nature cannot help me” (230).

Finding herself extremely anxious she attempts to indulge herself with men. Here in this novel it is Kate’s son who understands her condition and comes to help her. Accepting her son’s hand she is able to overcome her inner anxieties. Drabble is persistent with the positive impact of one’s family throughout her writing. Mary Jane
Elkin in “Alenoushka’s Return: Motifs and Movement in Margaret Drabble’s The Middle Ground”, which is published in Rose’s collection of essays, states:

Clearly, families are Drabble’s abiding concern, and just as clearly, her travelling into the past with families suggests a conviction that it is only in family configurations and interactions that characters (and readers) find whatever answers there are to find. Families are the carpet, and we readers along with characters must search for the figure in the carpet, that pattern which recurs and informs. (175)

For the second time Kate tries to find some relief by engaging herself with her work. This novel, like many of Drabble’s other works, brings out character’s eagerness to turn to their parents. In fact, Kate is able to derive meaning out of her life when she renews her relationship with her family members. She admits that accepting one’s connections with the human community can save one’s life from being drowned in the sea of nothingness. Even Hugo, who was lost his interest towards his family and parents, now in his middle years is more worried about his mother’s arthritis. Hugo, a war correspondent who lost half his arm in Eritrea, is a friend of Kate. The way he treats Kate makes her extremely cheerful and optimistic about her life. His words that “Too much was happening in the Middle East, and anything one committed to paper might be rendered meaningless by the next morning’s headlines” (160) shows not only his progress in writing of his book but also his concern about others.

It is through the narrator that we find so many details about Hugo’s life, for example, about his marriage with Judith. Hugo has married Judith “because everyone else seemed to be getting married” (175). He is most of the time away from his home because of his job. This prevents him to have a meaningful relationship with his wife or spend more time with his family. The emotional gap between them makes his wife think that he is having affair with Kate. Hugo, who earlier in the novel claims that it is natural and necessary for children to reject their parents, changes his mind after a
tragic accident which happens to his son. So, in order to forget his sorrows about his son and his unpleasant relationship with his wife he occupies himself with writing.

Ted is another character that Drabble tries to sketch, giving his personality some details. Ted shows “little feeling for individual suffering” (64), and takes pleasure in his work as a doctor. He is not only a “competitive, ambitious, addictive man” but also a womanizer. Unable to find any single woman who plays an effective role in his life he despairs. Therefore he attempts an immoral way of moving from one woman to another in order to find the right one with whom he can share his feelings. He marries Evelyn because in his view, in this way he can rescue her from a period of “terrifying loneliness” (43). He is emotionally upset and needs someone who can tackle his problems, someone who can care for him and love him. He enters into an immoral relationship with her because he lacks integrity. Justifying his wrongful act he says, “None of them had loved him enough; none of them had loved him as he had loved them. They had not been single minded, as he had been. They had not given themselves.” (186).

Later in the novel we are introduced to his wife Evelyn, who is a well educated and smart woman. Being a wife of a womanizer hurts her a lot but she tries to hide her pain. In order to find a right way to cope with her life’s problem she becomes a full-time social worker. She thinks of marriage as a “funny business” and also feels that “marriage was the root cause of all evil” (147). In spite of her dissatisfaction she never thinks of divorce, believing that Ted will not marry Kate because she is “too disorganized for him; he could never have taken the constant flux of her home, the lack of regular meals, the wild opinions, the eccentric out-bursts, the haphazard hospitality” (147). Keeping herself busy with her job she fails to give proper attention to her own son, Sebastian. At one point Ted says, Evelyn “had stuck obstinately to her disadvantaged mothers and deprived babies and derelict old people” (185) and it is probably the reason why she cannot play her role as a mother and wife.
suitably. Though she always speaks about the significance of leading life by faith yet practically it is after her accident that she understands truly the vitality of faith in people’s life. She comes out of her despair when she receives love and care in the hospital. Finding the spiritual value of her job for humanity she declares, “All we can do in this world is to care for one another, in the society we have” (263). This is the moral message Drabble tries to convey to her readers throughout her novels.

Drabble in this work reveals her social concern through multiple points of views. She depicts the fragmentary condition of the contemporary world by accidents that beset her characters. Through depiction of the jobs of her characters she seems to have widened her vision in this phase of her career. For example, Hugo is a Middle East correspondent and is asked to write about the international and political situation in the world. Ted is a doctor whose duty is to care for others’ health. Evelyn is a social worker who not only presents the social view of “London today,” but also helps its inhabitants to find a better way of living in the chaotic modern world. Drabble’s protagonist, Kate, a journalist, is responsible for showing the feminist view of “Women today.” Drabble helps her readers to understand what is happening in the society they live in, by portraying her characters’ lives, their sufferings and the choices they make in order to overcome their problems.

This novel depicts the crises of some characters who enter their middle age and also explores the mid-life crisis of Kate in most part. Although she finds herself trapped in the difficulties of modern life yet she does not concede defeat. She attempts hard to find a way to adapt herself to the prevailing conditions. In her moral journey she finally finds that human love provides her a pleasant feeling and can help her to come out of her shell of loneliness. Drabble creates a scene in which Mujid gives Kate a pair of Arabian slippers as a parting present when he observes Kate walking bare foot in the kitchen. This kind act of his arouses a strong feeling in her. Therefore, she, who has been attempting to find patterns in everything, determines to seek more
spiritual ways in her life. So she says, “Enough of patterns, she’d spent enough time looking for patterns and trends … shapeless diversity. What was wrong with it?” (225). Creighton rightly declares:

Like their author, the characters, for the most part successful in their professional lives, are now experiencing a midlife reappraisal of self… The old values, ways, and ideas no longer hold, but the new way is not yet clear. They are obsessed less with their pasts than with the quality and significance of the lives they are now leading - lives which strikingly resemble those of their associates. The personal issues which formerly concerned Drabble’s characters - relationships to parents, children, husbands and lovers - now generate less tension than do the question about careers, about the meaning of life and about viable connections to something larger than the self. (Margaret Drabble 91-92)

In this novel Drabble artistically symbolizes not only the collapse of contemporary society of England but also the decadence condition of the world as a whole. At the same time, she again provides the scenes to equip her characters with a hope for the future. As an example, she transforms the catastrophic condition of Evelyn’s life by changing her son’s emotional mood and making him a more affectionate person. On another occasion we observe this shining light of hope when Hugo embarks for Baghdad to resume his work as a Middle East correspondent. Ted begins his work again by “Looking at a research project on new resistant strains of mosquito” in India (167-68).

To celebrate all these hopeful changes Kate decides to bring them together at a big party. This party at the end of The Middle Ground shows Drabble’s optimism about the future of Britain’s social conditions on one hand and her wish for the betterment of the state of affair of the world, on the other hand. Bringing all the family and friends together at Kate’s home she demonstrates her conviction on the
importance of human ties once again. Arguably *The Middle Ground*, like many of Drabble’s other works, is stressing about the importance of families. As discussed previously, Drabble does not judge her characters’ moral choices. She says that “it is immoral to choose for example something that one cannot fulfill or do. To choose a heroic or self-denying role that one then reneges on or betrays is to be unknowing of one’s own psychology and therefore to be immoral, I think - I don’t know what the clear answers are” (Lauritzen 248). She wants the reader to think about the right and moral answers to their questions.

To conclude, Drabble’s novels of this group dramatize the confusing mass of shifting characteristics that constitute personality and the consequent difficulty of leading a moral self-directed life, by conditions that society impose upon one’s life. Joyce Carol Oats points out that Drabble expresses accurately in words “the tone of contemporary English culture.” Drabble is now more concerned with the social morality of the characters rather than with depicting the personal moral reactions they show. In the second phase of her writing she attempts to show the heterogeneous mix of contemporary people and their urban places. Although she writes about communal concerns and other aspects of modern life in these novels but it does not mean that she accepts all its moral codes and standards. She deplores the violence and other dehumanizing aspects of modern society and helps to guide her readers to tread the proper path in their personal and social lives.


