

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Thus the three novels of Margaret Drabble present different characters each of whom is a very fine psychological and therefore behavioural pattern. Each protagonist has her own story - a life which has got different opportunities and different problems to face. Sarah Bennett of 'A Summer Bird-Cage' is an unmarried graduate, trying to establish herself as an educated woman - finding a suitable job and looking forward to marriage. Emma Evans, the heroine of 'The Garrick Year' is a graduate woman who is married and is a mother of two kids. She is not happy in her position, but though bored, is trapped in her motherhood. Rosamund Stacey in 'The Millstone' is also a graduate, and she is doing her research and is totally involved in her career. She is unmarried, but coincidentally she becomes a mother. She boldly experiences the situation of her pregnancy and of her motherhood fully on her own without thinking of marriage as well as society. She manages her career as well as her motherhood very well without succumbing to marriage.

Though these protagonists of the novels have different identities, I do find the kind of relation between them - vertical as well as horizontal. Vertical in the sense that these three novels are chronologically linked. They are written by the same writer within the period of three years

and I do find the step by step development in the identities of the protagonists.

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| 1. The summer Bird-Cage | 1963 |
| 2. The Garrick Year | 1964 |
| 3. The Millstone | 1965 |

The Novel	Protagonist	Class	Status
1. The Summer Bird-Cage 1963	Sarah	Middle Class	Graduate, unmarried working.
2. The Garrick Year 1964	Emma	Middle Class	Graduate, married, mother, not working
3. The Millstone 1965	Rosamund	Middle Class	Graduate, unmarried mother, working.

All of them show the progress of consciousness of their identity as an individual. Sarah is unmarried and has no experience of marriage and motherhood, and its consequences. Emma is both, married and mother, and she has to go through the consequences and has to compromise with her 'self.' She cannot do the justice to her abilities, 'her horizons shrunk to diaper size'¹

But Rosamund of 1965 utilizes her abilities with her 'free will.' She makes her career, becomes a mother and enjoys her motherhood without marriage. She enjoys her freedom in making major decisions and executing them without bothering for the society. At the same time she is not

irresponsible. She bears her responsibilities boldly and confidently. All these three women are conscious about Women's liberation movement and they do refer to feminism directly or indirectly. Margaret Drabble has definitely caught the spirit of women of 1960s, especially graduate, middle class women, in sketching their character. In 'A Literature of Their Own', Elaine Showalter has noted this fact very clearly. She says,

' In the fiction of Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark, and Doris Lessing, and the younger writers Margaret Drabble, A.S. Byatt, and Beryl Bainbridge, we are beginning to see a renaissance in women's writing that responds to the demands of Lewes and Mill for an authentically female literature, providing 'Woman's view of life, woman's experience' ... Like the novelists of the female aesthetic, women novelists today, Lessing and Drabble particularly, see themselves as trying to unify the fragments of female experience through artistic vision.....²

Horizontally also these three women do have the relationship as they share the similar kind of experiences. All of them are from the middle class, are women and are educated with the ability of making a career. As Dee Preussner

points out in his interview with Margaret Drabble,

Her early novels reflect the
persistent themes of women novelists :
presenting one's identity, challenging or
conforming to one's role as caretaker, and
trying to resolve the internal conflicts of
love, guilt, and power.³

Being women at the first place certain roles are expected from them, and certain values are imposed on them. They do have the sense of morality. The institution of marriage has a special place in their vision. This is true not only of the three main characters, but all the other minor characters in the novels. For example, Rosamund's sister Beatrice, Sarah's sister Louise, Sarah's friend Gill, Louise's friend Stella, etc. All of them gave importance to marriage and are suffering from the consequences. Of course, their suffering is the outcome of marriage and motherhood. Thus the theme of marriage and motherhood takes her novels at the universal level. The interview between Preussner and Margaret Drabble goes like this :

Preussner : ... you believe in a common human
character that we all take part
in, such as modern myth criticism
talks about.

Drabble : A common store of human experience
or character I believe that.
And I think it's easier to make
contact with it in some areas of
life than in others.

Preussner : Such as ' having children?'

Drabble : Such as having children.⁴

This shows how much importance Drabble gives to the motherhood and children in her novels, as they constitute the major part of common human experience, and this can be seen in any of her novels under study. The Garrick Year and The Millstone directly deal with the problem of motherhood. But A Summer Bird-Cage has the protagonist in Sarah who is not married and is not a mother. But still she has a special concern for children. She appears to be sensitive about children. It's interesting to see her comment on the incident when John took her and Louise to see Hesther's baby.

I found myself almost liking John,
so touched had I been by his taking us to show
the baby and his appreciation of it. I shall
never forget the way it lay there with its
tiny curled fingers and its skin transparently
blossoming, a little pool of absolute
stillness and silence in all the dirt and

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bustle. She remains my image of motherhood, Hesther Innes, with her her little baby, sitting in her dressing gown whenever I think how utterly awful it must be to have a baby I think of her, and yet, someone recently told me, when she found that that baby was on the way she tried to gas herself.... she was afraid that the baby would ruin her career. But the baby won, it existed, and when I think of mothers and babies I nevertheless think of her.⁵

Thus babies and motherhood have unique place in Margaret Drabble's novelistic world. That is why, perhaps, Elaine Showalter includes her fiction in 'motherly fiction'⁶ and says,

Drabble is the novelist of maternity, as Charlotte Bronte, was the novelist of school-room.⁷

Motherhood has the direct impact on the women's physical and emotional life. It makes a woman helpless many times and restricts her free will. She has to look after them, and has to give the priority to their (babies') interests keeping aside hers. This is illustrated by the example of Emma Evans of The Garrick Year. Emma says,

..... but one is at helpless disadvantage with a baby on one's knee,..... I often think that motherhood, in its physical aspects, is like one of those prying disorders such as hay fever or asthma, which receive verbal sympathy but no real consideration, in view of their lack of fatality : and which, after years of attribution, can sour and⁸ pervert the character beyond all recovery.'

Emma got a job as a newsreader and announcer in a television company. She wanted to do the job as it was convenient in two ways - as a chance of career and from the point of view of a mother.

It would have kept me happy and I would not have had to leave the babies for more than fifteen hours a week.... I knew that I would never again have so adequate a chance of⁹ satisfying my conflicting responsibilities...

Rosamund in The Millstone also was worried about how she was going to manage the child and her career, but of course she could manage that. In A Summer Bird-Cage there is a pathetic picture of Stella Conroy who is a friend of Louise. She marries the physics man - Bill. Bill lectures at the Polytechnique, and a Cambridge graduate Stella, who was

totally reliable as far as charm, deference and cleanliness
are concerned'¹⁰, is totally lost in two babies. 'She hadn't
brushed her hair, or worn make-up for days'¹¹. She said to
Louise.

.... that kind of life was all
right for him because at least he spent the
day with intelligent people, ... the other
teachers at the Polytechnique they were
better than babies and the milkman.¹²

Thus it becomes difficult for a woman to establish her own
identity according to her own will, many times because of her
motherhood. Though man and woman both are parents, a woman
has to suffer physically, emotionally and spiritually. Of
course, the motherhood gives a very different kind of love and
satisfaction to a woman which Emma and Rosamund feel very
keenly.

She put her in my arms and
what I felt it is pointless to try to
describe. Love, I suppose one might call
it,.... I lay awake for two hours, unable to
get over my happiness. I was not much used to
feeling happiness : satisfcation, perhaps, or
triumph, and at times excitement and
exhilaration.¹³

But this positive aspect of motherhood is very

marginally depicted in the novels, as it is so in reality also, and the negative aspect affects a woman's personality quite a lot.

Besides motherhood one more important factor in woman's identity is her financial status. One might say, 'Why only woman's? Man's identity also depends on it.' Yes, but more so in the case of a woman, because in any society man is expected to, and does earn money. He is always self dependent and nothing comes in his way towards money. But that is not the case of a woman. Society expects that she should look after the children and husband keeping aside her own interests. Emma in The Garrick Year has to leave the rare opportunity of job because of her husband's career and children. She has to leave London and go to a countryside against her wish, with the result of dissatisfaction and utter boredom and probable adultery. She depends on her husband for money. Though he is responsible for her dependence, though he knows that she too can earn money, he openly insults her saying that she abuses his money. It's really strange! This reminds one of Simone de Beauvoir according to whom a woman is forced to remain in a particular situation of dependency and on top of it, she is accused for that. Emma is not allowed to earn money on the one hand, and on the other is not expected to spend 'his' money as she wants, and if she does, conflict

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arises. When she bought a marble pillar for twelve pounds and five bob delivery money, he objects it thus :

'And whose money did you pay for that with ? '

' I'll pay you back.'

' Oh will you, what out of ?'

' My next job. If we hadn't come here at your request I'd have been earning more pounds a week now than you are here, and don't you forget it.'

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Emma is a classic example of woman's condition in a society where she depends on others. She says,

Why should I even listen ? But I do listen, I am the perfect audience , I do more than listen, I depend. For love, and bread and butter, and company, I depend.

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Unlike Emma, Sarah and Rosamund both are financially independent. Though Rosamund is an unmarried mother, she does face the situation boldly only because she does not depend upon anybody else for money . She could will freely and get what she wanted because of her job. Sarah's sister Louise knows the value of money. She sees the poor condition of Stella and decides to marry a rich man just for the sake of money. She says.

Never will I marry without money.

Thus Drabble's women are affected by money. In this respect
Preussner says,

... While Drabble rebels against hierarchical, exclusive world of novelists like Jane Austen and often aligns herself with the have-nots, money is a structuring principle in her novels, too . Her characters are often shaped by money or a lack of it, and attitudes toward money form the basis for social ties between family members and friends..... 17

Not only within the social structure, within the structure of the family also money matters very much, and for women it becomes difficult to earn money though they are capable , as they have to take the responsibility of the children totally. That is why Mary Hurley Moran says,

..... she (Sarah) discovers that life after college is inevitably a downhill course for women of her generation. Although the novel's action takes place in the early 1960s, women think in terms of either a career or marriage, not both. Yet Sarah, intensely alive both intellectually and emotionally, wants both : She explains to someone

'You can't be a sexy don.' (Bird-Cage, P.198).
She therefore making a commitment to either marriage or a career for as long as possible, for she knows that as soon as she chooses one she will have to relinquish her dreams of the other.

In other novels Drabble offers portraits of young women who have in fact made the choice of marriage and suffer bitterly from the ensuing constriction of their
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horizons.

Thus through the matrix of marriage 'family' enters differently in the life of woman where she has a different role. Her role in the family before her marriage is of a daughter, and after marriage it is of a mother, a caretaker of a family, with different expectations from others. This change is a very significant element which shapes the identity of a woman in Drabble's novels, and of course in real life also. Family in general has of course important place in one's personal life, married or unmarried. One is a part of it. Though it is responsible many times for the personal problems, the ties between the family members are strong. Sarah didn't like her sister Louise, still she allowed her to come. At the end the unity is established between

them, 'because blood is thicker than water',¹⁹ as Sarah puts it. Emma doesn't allow her home to break at the end of the novel though she is not happy with it. As Moran puts it,

'The family, then can be a comforting,
nurturing institution, a spot of safety and
stability in the midst of uncertainty.²⁰

The physical and mental action of the protagonists of Drabble takes place primarily in the family. So what they are and what they do is a reaction to the family. 'What they are'- their Being - is because of the heritage of their families, their parents. Though their parents do not involve directly in any of their actions, we find their reflections in their daughters. Rosamund's parents are socialists, and consider social responsibilities. She has her roots in them. She says,

I suppose I taught because of my
social conscience. ... But I am my parents'
daughter, struggle against it though I may,
and I was born with the notion that one ought
to do something, preferably something
unpleasant, for others. So I taught.²¹

These protagonists have a particular kind of family past, and are in conflict with the present when they establish their own family through marriage, but they are all confident, and face the present boldly and make the adjustments

consciously to maintain the unity of the family. Thus 'family' plays a unique role in their identity. In this connection Mary Moran rightly says,

Family, like nature, is in Drabble's fictional world an important factor in a person's identity as well as a source of spiritual and psychological solace. Although the family curtails individual freedom, by influencing one's character and imposing familial responsibilities, it is ultimately a bulwark against life's turbulence and uncertainties..... family, then, is another one of the conditions of existence, along with metaphysical and natural forces, before which human beings must bow. The movement in Drabble's novels is always away from existential protest toward graceful submission to these conditions.

One more remarkable point about Drabble's women is their sense of morality. In fact all the problems they face, are there because of their morality. Though they consider their self, they don't consider only that, but that in terms of others. Emma does not want to make her career at the cost of the suffering of her children. She goes to Hereford against

her will because she does not want 'to separate the children from their father.'²³ . Though she gets involved in Wyndham Farrar, she doesn't go to the extent of adultery. When she was involved in the affair, it was out of passion and boredom, and she didn't approve it.

When we drew up for dinner I was feeling both nervous and mean. I did not even like him so thoroughly does passion²⁴
obscure one's sense of identity.

At another point she says,

Our liaison took on a certain regularity.
But although it took on regularity, it did not exactly progress. The reluctance was²⁵
wholly on my side.

She is a responsible mother from the beginning to the end. For the sake of children she is ready to do anything. She jumped in the river to save her daughter. At the end of the novel when they went to the picnic, she saw a real snake.

I saw curled up and clutching at the sheep's belly a real snake the Garden of Eden was crawling with them too, and David and I managed to lie amongst them for one whole pleasant afternoon. One just has to keep on and to pretend, for the sake of children, not

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to notice.

In The Millstone, Rosamund is an unmarried mother. She doesn't marry, but she is chaste, and gives a lot of importance to chastity. She says, 'I was naturally chaste'²⁷ when she comes to know about her pregnancy, she wants to do away with it at first with the help of gin. She says,

It (gin) was so thoroughly nasty undiluted that I felt the act of drinking was some kind of penance for the immorality of my²⁸ behaviour.

She didn't tell anybody, even to George, that George was the father of her child. And when the child was sick she became unhappy, but was ,

..... glad that George had been spared this²⁹ quite unnecessary sorrow.

She is a very good natured woman and is very sensitive to human sorrow. When she first visits Ante-Natal Clinic, she says,

I Was reduced almost to tears by the variety of human misery that presented³⁰ itself..

In A Summer Bird-Cage Sarah does not like immoral behaviour of her sister. She has the sympathy for Daphne.

Daphne inflicts such pain on me. She

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makes me confess how much I am a bitch. And Daphne, who was chased by a god and was turned into a tree to preserve her virginity. Perhaps there is some truth in that fable. Something our Daphne had preserved. Who would rape a tree ?
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In contrast to Daphne Sarah's sister Louise is immoral. She appears beautiful, but in reality she is meanminded. She marries a man, whom she doesn't love, just for the sake of his money. On the day of her marriage she looked beautiful. Sarah comments,

..... Louise looked so perfect. She was a photographer's dream ... she leaned her head this way and that, obliging, serene, betraying no impatience. The spectators were thrilled For them she was the real thing; and for me too she almost was, for that half-hour, a meningless and pure as the flowers she carried. By virtue of form, not content. Symbol, not moral.
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Thus the protagonists of Drabble's novels are women with sense of morality and responsibility, with consciousness of the society. They are kind human beings, with sensitive minds, and their humanity is their real identity which takes them

above the limits of their womanhood. They are all fatalistic, they talk about coincidence, accident, chance and fate, with a very little scope for their own free will. In the interview with Barbara Milton, Margaret Drabble says,

..... choosing to be something and being struck down while you do it by a falling brick. The whole question of free will and choice and determinism is inevitably interesting to a novelist Are your characters puppets in the hands of fate or are they really able to make free choices ? I think we have a very small area of free choice.

In spite of this they react, they protest if necessary, and try to make the most of the available situation for the good of all concerned. They are not selfish or selfcentred women. That is why they become more appealing and leave the mark of their identity on the readers. Within themselves one by one they show three different stages of growth and development. In the first - Sarah - there is the hope for the prospects of life. The second one - Emma - shows these prospects blocked, and the third one - Rosamund - presents a kind of solution which ultimately leads her from the womanhood to the personhood. Thus these characters

together represent changing image of a British woman after 1960s.

Thus the quest of Drabble's protagonists for their identities passes through the matrix of marriage, family, society, value - system and monetary considerations, which constitute the very idea of Being and Becoming in her novelistic world. These protagonists do enjoy the exercise of free will for achieving their authentic identities generally without sacrificing the existing social and moral structures. This very aspect of her novels singles her out as a major contemporary feminist writer. Her bold treatment of the predicament of women in her novelistic world helps her to enjoy a distinct place in the tradition of the contemporary women novelists which is being enriched by the writers like Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark, and Doris Lessing.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- 3 Interview with Dee Preussner : "Talking with Margaret Drabble" , in Modern Fiction Studies, (Vol. 25, Nov.4. Winter , 1979 - 80) pp. 563 - 577.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Margaret Drabble, A Summer Bird-Cage, (Weidenfield and Nicolson, London, 1963), pp. 186 - 187.
- 6 Elaine Showalter, A Literature of Their Own, (Virago Press Ltd., London, 1979), pp. 68 - 71.
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- 11 Ibid, p. 213.
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- 26 Ibid, p. 172.
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- 32 Ibid, p. 33.
- 33 Interview with Barbara Milton, "Margaret Drabble : The Art of Friction, LXX", The Paris Review, (No. 74, Fall - Winter 1978), pp. 43 - 44.