INRODUCTION

The ancient world history has abundant evidence of women fighting as soldiers, ruling queens led their troops in the field, not as ceremonial figure-heads but as acknowledged war-leaders. The ruling women also commanded the military action at sea. The Egyptian queen Cleopatra fought at the battle of Action, Her uncharacteristic failure of nerve cost her war, the empire, her lover, Antony and ultimately her life. The Warrior Queens were specifically celebrated in Celtic Britain, where the great Goddess herself always bore a war-like aspect. The pre-Christian chronicles have many accounts of female war-leaders. Queen Medals who had commanded their own forces and who made war on Queen Findmor captured fifty of the enemy queen’s women warriors single handed.

It was almost at each level woman made their marks. There was a record of the first known woman sea-captain in John Langdon Davie’s book A Short History of Woman. In the 5th century B.C. a woman had commanded the Athenian fleet in the Persian War. In the battle of Marathon a great bounty was put on John Langdon head. She however survived the war, but decided to commit suicide for being rejected by the very man whom she loved.

Around 2300 B.C., the Chief Priest of Sumeria sung a hymn in praise of the God (Kerenji 2007). It was the world’s first known poem but what is important is this that this first known poem to claim the attention of the world was composed by a woman. Incidentally, the first known priest was also a woman. From the beginning, as humankind emerged from the darkness of prehistory, God was a
woman. However, later ages dismissed accounts of Goddess worship as ‘myths’ or ‘cult.

There had been women poets, priests, queens, rulers, mothers, lovers, soldiers and captains in human history. These women knew their enormous strengths. This strength was recognised because the women had legal rights, access to power, education, and full citizenship. They also had the right to own money and property, the right to divorce, custody of children and financial maintenance. These issues enhanced their strengths tremendously.

It is perhaps a matter of fact that no one had ever told them that women were physically weak, emotionally unstable or intellectually ill-equipped. It was only much later that the so-called advanced society made this false discovery.

The Women’s Liberation Movement did not have the impact on English women writers as compared to the United States and France. The media in England had been rather slower to publicise this movement. Only a very few spokeswomen such as Germaine Greer had sensationalized. Overall the movement is slow, but it is beginning to catch up. The Parliaments has passed equal rights legislations. Women’s studies courses have been initiated at major university levels. New wave of feminist energy has generated its own network of magazines, news-letters and publishing houses, specifically designed to promote and distribute women’s literature. However most of these women’s presses are located in the United States.

In 1975, Virago, a feminist publishing imprint in London distributed its first catalogue of nine books, ranging from Angela Carter’s study of The Sadeian Woman (Angela Carter,2006) to The British Women’s Directory, which deals with issues
like how to get a solicitor, legal aid, a divorce, an abortion. In the suffrage movement, a strong women’s press encourages an autonomous literature. Sheila Rowbotham, one of the leaders of the Women’s Liberation Movement in England, has stated that the fortunes of the new feminism would depend on our capacity to relate to the working class. This action of working class women in transforming women’s liberation according to their peculiar needs.

There is also a female voice that has rarely spoken for itself in the English novel—the voice of the shop girl and the charwoman, the housewife and the barmaid. These voices are beginning to speak only now. They emerge from silence into half-articulate speech.

With the relaxation of restrictions in the open discussion of female sexual experience, and with women’s increased interest in themes of menstruation, masturbation, abortion and childbirth, a critical development is taking place. This freedom of the women writers means a change in masculine range of experience and subjects.

Till recently, women had been the victims of the brutal male experience. However it is now being discovered that a lot of female experience has remained unexpressed. Very few women have been able to tell the truth about the body or the mind. Margaret Drabble, the leading British woman writer of today handles these themes in her works with great artistic vision. She boldly writes about pregnancy, birth, and children and maternity which reflect her to be a writer of feminine sensibility.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Margaret Drabble an English woman novelist has brought to the surface this conflict in the minds of educated women. She has a strong sense of obligation to female tradition. Her heroines ‘...provide a careful portrait of the contemporary woman with crisis and conflicts unknown to her predecessors’( Allen Brooks, 2007). This is not to say that their personal conflicts are greater or any more frustrating, but they do reflect a much more complex engagement with the social and economic order.

Sara Campbell in her dissertation published in 2006 calls for a microscopic study of Drabble’s characters in order to reveal their yearning for freedom and equality. Allen Brooks in his book Worcestershire published in 2007 calls Drabble as the writer, of women rights who is a writer well aware of the realities of modern day women. Still, there are numerous published and unpublished theses on Drabble across research circles all around the world.

Margaret Drabble in her first novel, A Summer Bird Cage (Drabble.M. 1963), Drabble has shown the conflict of Sarah Bennett. She is the youngest of Drabble’s heroines who had just graduated from Oxford with a first class honours degree in English. She is blessed with intelligence and good looks, but now after graduation she is caught in a conflict--marriage vs. career. She is exploring both the possibilities. None of the marriages she sees is encouraging. One is happy but dull, another exhilarating but self-destructive and a third, her sister Louise’s, in which she had hoped to find a model of her own, ends in a divorce.
Sarah feels pointlessness about her life because she has come to that stage where she has nothing to do. She feels her life is doomed because she is a woman. She is depressed over the shapelessness of women’s lives and their vulnerabilities;

I looked horrifyingly pregnable, somehow, at that moment: I looked at myself in fascination, thinking how unfair it was, to be born with so little a defence, like a soft snail without a shell. Men are all right, they are defined and enclosed, but we in order to live must be open and raw to all comers. What happens otherwise is worse than what happens normally, the embroidery and the children and the sagging mind. I felt doomed to defeat. I felt all women were doomed A Summer Bird Cage (Drabble.M 1963).

In the next novel The Garrick Year (Drabble,M 1964), Drabble has shown Emma facing the same conflict. Emma is not able to resolve the conflict Sarah Bennett felt between her desire to become an adult woman and her wish to remain a child. Drabble displays this by describing Emma’s odd eating habits and her unusual attitudes towards food and eating.

Jane is that Drabble woman, who is depicted as struggling to find a new morality. The novel The Waterfall (Drabble,M 1969) centres on the love affairs between Jane Gray and her Cousin Lucy’s husband named James, and Jane’s conflict-ridden views of the affair.

The conflict with Jane is that she is divided between the ‘two selves’ within her—that is Jane Gray the woman and Jane Gray the artist, for Jane Gray is a writer
who writes and publishes poems. As a woman she is experiencing sex, fulfilment, femininity and as an artist she tries to give form, order and shapeliness to that experience.

Frances, the leading character of The Realms of Gold (Drabble M 1975) is assertive and different from Rose Vassiliou. She frees herself from the family tangle and conflict and turns all the way back to nature and what she discovers there suggests that Drabble’s vision in this novel is gynocentric.

However, in her later novels, it is seen that like the author the characters experience a mid-life 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 past than with the quality and significance of the lives they are now leading. In the beginning the conflicts in the minds of characters were created by tensions in careers and about the meaning of life but later, Drabble started writing about themes larger than the self.

The Ice Age(Drabble. M 1977) displays individual characters and the nation in the grip of crisis of various kinds. In The Middle Ground (Drabble,M.1980) very little seems to be happening and the characters suffer from monotonous existence. And what is happening to individuals clearly reflects in turn, to what is happening to the British society at large.

Many contemporary writers feels that Drabble is speaking in two languages at once—that of a female being on the one hand, that of first class Cambridge graduate on the other.
She is right when she says this because the conflict of the woman characters of Drabble’s novels is between ‘female self-consciousness and ‘artistic self-consciousness.’ Margaret Drabble is able to portray this with great depth and considerable subtlety because she is a writer with an acute feminine sensibility.

Drabble, obviously, is the first woman writer to describe sex-experiences of women without any inhibition. She depicts with vivid impression the curiosity, pain, pleasure, satisfaction and the state of being altogether different after the act. She is a realist who avoids glorification of sex as D.H. Lawrence does through his novels. She is concerned with the ‘real experience’ as how it affects the feminine sensibility. Even her detailed account of the process of childbirth as in The Millstone (Drabble M 1965) and The Waterfall (Drabble M 1969) speaks of her realistic art of fiction writing. The description resembles the naturalistic narration of the early nineteenth century novelists. But this naturalist-realist technique makes their fiction worth reading and effective. So is with Margaret Drabble, the first person narration in others reveals Drabble’s naturalist-realist method. She is able to bring home her major theme as a writer of women rights. There will be following proposed chapters in my thesis.

In most of the novels by Margaret Drabble, the relationship between mother and daughter is treated as a main theme. The figure of the father is shadowy and unimportant as seen in The Millstone(Drabble. M 1965). Perhaps, this is because when she was a child her father was away on war and most of her childhood was spent with her mother and her older sister. Mrs. Drabble recalls in an interview she
gave to People magazine (13th October 1980) that Maggie was a fiery child with a hyperactive mind and gave many sleepless nights to her mother.

The doctrine of sympathy had a conscious or an unconscious effect on the writers of the century, to name a few Fanny Wright, Margaret Fuller and John Stuart Mill. We can say that their writings forecast the modern feminist ideals. Their contributions are universally acknowledged by those of the movement’s founders. Another name that cannot be omitted is that of William Godwin, an ardent feminist of the day who wrote An Enquiry Concerning of Political Justice (William Godwin 2010) in which he advocates the rights of women. Godwin did not merely write about feminism but actually put into practice the things he wrote while bringing up his daughters. In days when women’s education was domestic, ornamental and heavily loaded with religion, Godwin taught his daughters the radical social philosophy and English history. He trained them in such a way that they were expected to be on par with men intellectually.

P.B. Shelly, the 19th century Romantic poet, too explicitly believed in feminism. Shelly’s feminism becomes obvious in his comments on Plato’s Symposium. He had full sympathy for women who were heaped by male sexism and brutality. He tried to free his sister Elizabeth from this but was disappointed because after some time Elizabeth lost her nerve and went back to the narrow pessimistic world to doom which was the destiny of most of the women.

Shelly always felt that a woman need not essentially be delicate, neat, trim and traditional. As a feminist he felt that she could do all the things that a man did intellectually. In Mary, who was Godwin’s daughter, he saw all these things. She
was bold in behaviour and did not have any domestic accomplishments or any interest in acquiring them. She was “never like most of the female contemporaries” explains her biographer Mwriel Spark.

It was exactly this “Womanliness” from which Shelly wanted to rescue woman. In Mary, he saw his promise and dream fulfilled. By showing the example of Mary, he proved to the world his ideas of feminism and what it was possible for woman to become. His contribution is indeed significant.

Of course, Shelly as a feminist emerges only recently—after the publication of his comments on Plato’s Symposium (2008). However, his poetry is full of his ardent support to woman as equal to man or at least many of his poems reveal his desire to see woman intellectually equal to man. This is strongly felt in poems like “Revolt of Islam” and “Prometheous Unbound.”

In the 19th century, England was awakened intellectually. Many social issues were discussed: a major social issue being the cause of women. The 19th century also seemed to be the age of female novelist due to the emergence of great names like Jane Austen, Bronte sisters and George Eliot, and others. In the 20th century also there are a number of great women writers like Rebeca West, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, etc., but Margaret Drabble is perhaps the most ambitious of all, she writes with broad social concern and plays a lively role in popular and literary culture. Drabble also has the strongest sense of connection to female tradition as can be seen in her novels.

Drabble won fame and reputation with the publication of her novels one after another since 1960. In all these novels the central character is a woman. She
revealed in these novels, a very personal experience, personal to such an extent that in The Waterfall (Drabble, M 1969) she has described with details the act of delivery of baby by Lane, the protagonist of the novel, thus showing that, becoming a mother is pleasurable but along with this pleasure there are lot of vulnerabilities attached to it.

The Victorian woman writers too perhaps wanted to write about the very personal conflicts, issues, experience and relationship but they did not have the nerve to do so. Perhaps they did not want to hurt their families or offend their friends by unconventional options. Of course, sometimes these woman novelists got around these issues by using pseudonym, e.g., ‘George Eliot’ was adopted by Mary Evans. But in their use of material from life, they were in bondage to the feminine codes of love and loyalty. Drabble wrote these books, just about the time when sociologists and journalists were realising the problems of a housewife. So when Drabble’s books were out, educated young wives and mothers were finding it difficult to adjust to domestic life. They found their own problems discussed in the novels. They identified themselves with the central woman characters and were one with her. Margaret Drabble’s greatest gift lay in her sense of timing. She appeared on the literary scene as the first English woman to give voice to the delusive promise of college life, followed by the cold touch of matrimony and child-rearing (Williams, Merryn. 2007).

Other elements like fate and coincidence are also to be found in the novels of Drabble, perhaps this needs illustration because she is interested in tradition. The word ‘fate’ has lost its metaphysical doctrine and also its conviction for the modern reader but Drabble deals with fate in a reflective manner which generates self-
awareness in characters. Early novels by Drabble have characters who strive to avoid consequences of their actions, to delay or to outwit fate, even though they inevitably fail and are caught. Emma Evans in The Garrick Year (Drabble.M 1964) withdraws from her conflicts, hoping to defeat them by aesthetic detachment. She sees the consequences of a potential affair with Wyndham, but she maintains an aloof critical pose, inspecting and mocking him rather than risk an embarrassing human involvement. But she gets trapped in the end by Wyndham’s car as she tries to duck out of sight of her husband: a symbol of fate thwarting her attempts at escape and exposing her affair.

Rosamund in The Millstone (Drabble.M 1965) is Drabble’s first protagonist who begins to understand and to accept her fate. The book begins with her tragic romance with George, — tragic because she cannot accept his love and has to shun him off out of her life. But the complication of her pregnancy and motherhood make Rosamund question the Providence: why was her daughter stricken with potentially fatal heart trouble? She has inherited from her parents a sincere concern for those who suffer, a sympathy that her pregnancy heightens. Her struggles have been a test of faith, and her adherence to motherhood gives her the reward of self-knowledge, at least, to some degree.

Jerusalem the Golden (Drabble.M 1967) also structures itself around models of fate: Clara’s fated meetings with Clelia and Gabriel Danham; Clara’s attitude towards her home town and the telegram announcing her mother’s illness, seem to be fateful signs of retribution for her neglect. Clara understands this but despite her understanding she remains rather selfishly fixed in a doomed quest for escape.
In The Waterfall (Drabble M 1969) Jane Gray struggles to escape her fate but it catches her up everywhere: she can neither escape the tragic romance nor live with it in peace. Quite opposite with Rose, in The Needle’s Eye (Drabble M 2004). She enters permanent conflicts of her family on her own and makes no attempt to escape her fate. Unlike Clara, Rose accepts the consequences of these family ties in spite of the unpleasant things present there. This does not bring her happiness because most of the time she feels bitterly embroiled in a marriage she may well wish has never been. But at times we see in moments of grace that Rose is blessed with a side to her character that is simplicity and sincerity, which in some ways the opposite of self-consciousness. She stands as Drabble’s main example of the good that comes from accepting fate.

In The Realms of Gold (Drabble M 1975), Frances Wingate has both, simplicity and sophistication but she is lesser heroine than Rose because everything comes to her easily. She is lucky and her fate brings her luck because unlike other heroines of Drabble she marries her lover in the end and has a happy family.

Drabble’s earlier novels, specially The Summer Bird Cage (Drabble M 1963), The Garrick Year (Drabble M 1964) and The Millstone (Drabble M 1965) are in the first-person narration and since all the three are in the first-person, it is hard to know when the protagonists are self-portraits of Margaret Drabble and when they are simply intended to represent members of her own age group. When she was asked whether she was working out her own problems in her first three novels.

But Sarah, Emma and Rosamund seem to be more than fictional members because they represent their creator in certain very detailed ways. Sarah and
Rosamund are Oxford English majors like Drabble and like her they have important and complex relationship with their sisters. For example, in The Millstone when Rosamund becomes pregnant she writes about it to her sister Beatrice.

There is a deeply personal, honest and exploratory quality about Margaret Drabble’s work. Her works are moral and humanistic in nature. Her strength as a writer is in the way she has turned herself to her time and her concern with social determinism and historical change has in some ways made her more of a realist with an acute feminine sensibility (Rose, Ellen Cronan.2005)

Taken as a whole, her work shows new morality against the old, incorporating the viewpoint of the intellectual socialist wife and mother. She is sometimes dismissed as a ‘Hamstead novelist’ because her characters live in or around that fashionable and expensive area of London, inhabited by rich socialists and famous writers like herself. Drabble’s novels draw the reader to the tension exemplified by Drabble and experienced by many contemporary women who are struggling to define themselves within a patriarchal frame of reference. The strength of these characterizations stems from her own unresolved questioning and her experience of living in what she has termed as the ‘unchartered world’ of modern female identity.

All her novels have a typical feminine insight and with the exception of The Ice Age (Drabble M 1977) all her novels are closely linked to the woman’s experience. She is, therefore, regarded as a “Women’s novelist.” If a women’s novelist is someone whose subject is women, then the author of The Summer Bird Cage (Drabble.M 1963), The Garrick Year (Drabble.M 1964) and The Millstone
(Drabble.M 1965) was a women’s novelist. In these novels her subject was what it was like to be a woman in a world which calls woman the second sex.
SCOPE

Drabble was greatly influenced by De Beauvoir’s The Second Sex (Beauvoir. 2004). It is this novel Drabble has dealt with the anatomy of the female. She describes as to how women undergoes her apprenticeship, how she experiences her situation, in what kind of universe she is confined, what modes of escape are vouchsafed her.

Margaret Drabble is a contemporary popular writer. She is perhaps the most wanted writer amongst the women readers. This is natural as she writes about their particular experiences. Her earlier novels are about the situation of being a woman, whereas the later ones are about ‘being’ a woman in a man’s world. Emma, Sarah and Rosamund are faced with the situation of being a woman whereas her later heroines about being a woman in a man’s world. Drabble feels that many times people sneer at her because she is a woman writer. She says that there is no point in sneering at woman writers for writing of problems of sexual behaviour, maternity gynaecology. She feels that this is an area of personal relationship.

Margaret’s novels reveal the feminine quest for equality and self-assertion as her world is the one where women live, rejoice, suffer and learn from life. This is the world where men are welcome, but they must come with full understanding and without any pretention of being superior to women. If on the one hand, Drabble takes delight in describing woman’s passionate longing for man. She is equally delighted to describe the way a baby comes in this world out of its mother’s womb. She is being perfectly feminine and bold enough to reveal the feminine experiences.
OBJECTIVES

Following will be the objectives of this thesis:

1. The objective in the first chapter will be to examine how women have grown in stature through different phases of history.

2. To analyse how Drabble gives moral support to all suffering women as she describes their lives in her novels.

3. To explore why the study of Margaret Drabble’s work is the study of the female voice.

4. To examine the difficulties and hardships faced by women and the conflict in their minds as they face a war within whether to accept social order or act on their own will.

5. To explore Margaret Drabble’s capacity to write about the experiences of motherhood.

6. To examine the achievements and uniqueness of Drabble’s fiction.
TECHNIQUE

The thesis will examine the following techniques employed by Margaret Drabble to bring out the essence of her writing:

1. Realistic art of fiction writing.
2. Use of the first person narration.
3. Use of Expressive technique.
4. Use of Identity Politics.
5. Regional British and Indian accents and words.
6. Comic Irony and Humour.
7. Use of symbols in language.
THE PROBLEM

The story of the human race begins with the female because it is she who carries the Original human chromosome. It is sad that the generations of historians have regarded ‘Man’ as the star whereas in reality it is the woman who deserves the status of a star. The future for humanity depends on her labour, her skill; her biology which holds the key to the destiny of the human race.

The society in which we live today had specified certain rules which are different for men and women. The woman has to perform the biological function of reproduction and, therefore, her opportunities remain restricted. It is solely her responsibility to take care of the children thus putting an end to all her opportunities.

The feminist groups have strongly opposed this practice. Betty Friedan in her book The Feminine Mystique (Betty Friedan, 1963) encouraged women to work outside the house. She has also emphasised the damaging effect of the mother’s constant presence with the child. The feminist proved that it was important to have child-care centres so that women could protect their jobs and go to work. Thus, in the twentieth century feminist protest became a major social concern. Despite many improvements in the society, the feminist groups feel that enough has not been done for them.
WORK PLAN

In order to throw light on the status of women through different phases of history and their quest for equality and self-assertion. From the 1960’s the female novel entered a new and dynamic phase which, in the words of Elaine Showalter, has been influenced by the energy of the international women’s movement. Here we see a renaissance of women’s writing. They have insisted upon the right to use vocabularies previously reserved for male writers only. Moreover novelists like Margaret Drabble, Dorris Lessing and A.S. Byatt have started describing female experience through artistic vision. We find in this new dynamic phase women’s view of life and women’s experience.

Margaret Drabble is strongly connected to the female tradition. We can say that a whole generation of women readers identifies with her characters who they feel represent their own problems. Her heroines are pre-occupied with the difficulties of fulfilment and self-definition in man’s world, the conflicting claims of self-hood, wife-hood and mother-hood.

The dynamics and expectations of the women in the present day are very satisfied and demanding. What makes this challenge more daunting in the dropping levels of tolerance? This affects the harmony between the male and female partners. The old tradition of women looking after the household and rearing up children has undergone great changes in attitudes of women. One can notice a drastic change where the young girls are more self assured and independent. Thus the child rearing practices particularly with the advent of more nuclear and single parent families are under going tremendous changes in the society.
Many people who are not willing to accept this change are suffering unequal relationships and forced to counselling. However it is seen that more people are giving in the demands of the feminist groups to provide them the space for their development. If one were to study carefully the demands of the women for equality, there is nothing whimsical about this fact. The super ego of men as superior to women is diminishing slowly. The authoritarian elders are also changing the life styles and slogging to change to the demands of the younger generations. The women economically too are coming up steadily where they have enough money to spend on themselves.

Talking about tolerance level amongst the females, it is hearting to see that fortunately majority of the younger members are willing to the right change in attitudes. They expect the other sex to also give them a space for correction. Some women groups wish to be sacrificing moms and pragmatic mothers. There are people in the East who feels that the women of the West are liberated just because they wear trousers, trim there hair, smoke and drink like the men. But alas! It is not so. It is indeed a totally misleading picture since their plight is worse than their sisters in the East. A detailed study of the women conditions in the western society reveals that there is a constant effort to improve their lot. Education is a vital tool to exploit the opportunities. Once this is achieved, a vast struggle emerges where the political seen, economic up liftment of women matters. The status guaranteed by the laws of the land and sustained efforts of the feminist groups highlight the inadequacies or deficiencies in the implementations of the policies.

Equal rights for women in possession of properties, jobs at work places, liberty to marry, divorce, pregnancy termination and adoption of children etc have
enhanced their overall development. This is an on going process for eradications of shortfalls in the women empowerments.

Next effort will be to analyse how Drabble gives moral support to all suffering women as she describes their lives in her novels. Women and their suffering is the major theme of Drabble’s novels. She is strongly connected to the female tradition. We can say that a whole generation of women readers identifies with her characters who they feel represent their own problems. Her heroines are pre-occupied with the difficulties of fulfilment and self-definition in man’s world, the conflicting claims of self-hood, wife-hood and mother-hood. Margaret Drabble, a contemporary novelist, is frequently interviewed, photographed and is the subject of several feature articles. She was born on 5th June 1939 in Sheffield, Yorkshire. She is the daughter of John Fredrick and Marie Bloor Drabble. Her father was a barrister but after retirement, he published a few novels which fetched him fame as a novelist. Her mother was an English teacher at The Quaker School. Margaret and her sister attended this school.

In the 19th century, England was awakened intellectually. Many social issues were discussed: a major social issue being the cause of women. The 19th century also seemed to be the age of female novelist due to the emergence of great names like Jane Austen, Bronte sisters and George Eliot, and others. In the 20th century also there are a number of great women writers like Rebeca West, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, etc., but Margaret Drabble is perhaps the most ambitious of all, she writes with broad social concern and plays a lively role in popular and literary culture. Drabble also has the strongest sense of connection to female tradition as can
be seen in her novels. The novels portray sad existence of woman: “The sexual
doom of womanhood, it’s sad inheritance” (Drabble M 1969).

The Victorian woman writers too perhaps wanted to write about the very
personal conflicts, issues, experience and relationship but they did not have the
nerve to do so. Perhaps they did not want to hurt their families or offend their friends
by unconventional options. Of course, sometimes these woman novelists got around
these issues by using pseudonym, e.g., ‘George Eliot’ was adopted by Mary Evans.
But in their use of material from life, they were in bondage to the feminine codes of
love and loyalty. Drabble wrote these books, just about the time when sociologists
and journalists were realising the problems of a housewife. So when Drabble’s
books were out, educated young wives and mothers were finding it difficult to adjust
to domestic life. They found their own problems discussed in the novels. They
identified themselves with the central woman characters and were one with her.
Margaret Drabble’s greatest gift lay in her sense of timing. She appeared on the
literary scene as the first English woman to give voice to the delusive promise of
college life, followed by the cold touch of matrimony and child-rearing.

Thereafter efforts will be made explore why the study of Margaret Drabble’s
work is the study of the female voice. From her first novel, A Summer Bird Cage,
depicting Sarah Bennett’s indecisiveness about how to shape her life given the bird
cage image of female identity she sees played out in the lives of women around her,
to her latest novel, The Middle Ground (Drabble M 1980) portraying Kate
Armstrong’s paralyzing mid-life crisis in which no satisfactory pattern of how to
live emerges, Drabble is seen exposing the social traditional avenues of middle-class
female self-fulfilment, bringing out the feminine sensibility in her work.
Margaret Drabble’s novels to date run from A Summer Bird Cage (Drabble.M 1963) to The Middle Ground (Drabble.M 1980). Her novels, we can say, are highly literary because many of them have literary or religious quotations and there are references to other writers, particularly A Summer Bird Cage reminds us of Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice and The Waterfall reminds us of The Mill on the Floss (Eliot George 2003).

In her first novel, A Summer Bird Cage, Drabble uses bird cage as an image of a trap in which a woman often finds herself. It is a story of Sarah Bennett, a young woman blessed with intelligence and good looks but she does not know what she should do as a woman. At a cocktail party someone asks her, “And what will you be?” “How should I know?” Sarah replies, “I will be what I become, I suppose” (Drabble.M 1963).

Drabble’s fiction reflects the contemporary world in its complexities and uncertainties. Her early novels are a good deal denser and more subtle than, at first, they appear. The surface lucidity of her novels and the technique of first person narration have led many readers to think that the persons of whom she is talking about are drawn from the author’s personal life. This is an old problem with all the authors who write in the first person. However, this gives Margaret Drabble’s work a hidden complexity distinguishing her from the other writers. From her very first novel, the depth and the subtlety of her first person characterisation grows, reaching its height in the portrait of Jane Gray of The Waterfall. The Waterfall is important because Jane Gray, the central female character, breaks out of the constricting bird cage of female identity shown in the first novel, A Summer Bird Cage. Her focus on the women’s lives and her attempt to come to terms with women’s changing role in
modern society is serious, searching and important. Fundamentally liberal and humanistic, Margaret Drabble is committed to the idea that novels should be alert to common human experiences, as can be clearly seen in her writing.

The difficulties and hardships faced by women and the conflict of their minds as they face a war within whether to accept social order or act on their own will shall be analysed. The early feminist demanded professions for unmarried women so that they could earn their own living. They also demanded the right to property for the married women. They backed up these demands by fighting for women’s admission to universities in order to secure the qualifications necessary for their professional activities and to attain the level of education necessary to manage their own financial affairs. As their demands were conceded to and middle-class women began to move into professions, the feminist movement further demanded the right to vote.

In the course of time, women were given franchise but political equality did not ensure social equality, there was a note of disillusionment and betrayal that the free women were not free after all. They had profession and children but they were still bound to the husband, home and family triangle. There was a conflict between personal relationship and artistic integrity. Many young educated women had to fight with themselves in order to confirm their newly won liberation. Consequently, they had to experience a terrible war within. This war had claimed many precious lives. Women, in an attempt to assert their independent identity had to embrace death. Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath are two obvious examples.
Drabble’s tremendous capacity to write about motherhood is well known and the same will be highlighted. The interaction between the mother and the child is for Drabble the most beautiful relationship in the world. Margaret Drabble is a novelist with a special capacity to write about the experience of motherhood. The aspects of maternity have been represented in literature through the centuries, but until recent years relatively few novelist themselves were mothers, and Drabble approaches the subject with first-hand experience into insights that have not been available to men writers or to childless women writers. She has said, for her personally, motherhood has been ‘the greatest joy in the world’ and she has a sharp awareness of the mixed delights and anxieties of parenthood. This relationship is something unique and asserts once again the Feminine Sensibility in her novels.

Another situation that Drabble describes in the same novel is when Rosamund is not allowed to see the child for two weeks after the operation. She becomes desperate and restless. All her efforts to remain calm and polite fail. It is the maternal instinct that comes above all and she starts shouting in a hysterical manner: “I don’t care about anyone, I don’t care, I don’t care, I don’t care” (Drabble.M 1965).

Drabble, the mother of three children, started writing novels because of an unexpected motherhood which came her way. She started her career as an actress and even gained a reputation as a gifted one for the career, but she became pregnant earlier than intended and thought the writing profession a convenient one (Diana Cooper-Clark, 2005). However, in The Garrick Year she writes, the motherhood she had dreaded, “turned out to be one of my greatest joys” (Cooper, 1978).
Margaret Drabble, being a woman feels and experiences these things. Therefore, she is able to write about them with ease and confidence. Her own children have now grown up but she is still a mother and cares for them. Drabble is an active vice-patron of the Child Psychology Trust, an organisation set up to observe and treat disturbance in children. This shows that mothers belong to the ranks of the caring.

In the end achievements and uniqueness of Drabble’s fiction will be displayed. She is the first woman writer to describe sex-experiences of women without any inhibition. She depicts with vivid impression the curiosity, pain, pleasure, satisfaction and the state of being altogether different after the act. She is a realist who avoids glorification of sex as D.H. Lawrence does through his novels. She is concerned with the ‘real experience’ as how it affects the feminine sensibility. Even her detailed account of the process of childbirth as in The Millstone and The Waterfall speaks of her realistic art of fiction writing. The description does resemble the naturalistic narration of the early nineteenth century novelists—Thackery, Trollop and others. But this naturalist-realist technique makes their fiction worth reading and effective. Thus, her place a social reformist is secure as her following is expected to grow without stop.

De Beauvoir describes, “How woman undergoes her apprenticeship, how she experiences her situation, in what kind of universe she is confined, what modes of escape are vouchsafed her” (Beauvoir, 2004).

Drabble is an ambitious writer with a deep social concern. Her novels are lucid and eminently readable. As explained in earlier chapters she is a writer of
feminine sensibility. The characters are young women, who leave universities, get married, have children, get involved in affairs and reach the midlife. Drabble herself was interested in acting and got married. She had a baby and had to give up the acting career. She turned to writing and write about own experiences which are common to all women.

When Rosamund becomes pregnant, she does not give up her work but continues to find satisfaction in her work even in that state. She sees no reason why her work on thesis, her proposed career of the assistant lecturers and so on should be interrupted by having a baby. “I simply did not believe that the handicap of one small illegitimate baby would make a scrap of difference to my career” (Drabble M 1965).

The crucial discover she makes during her apprenticeship to life is that she is confined to the sphere created and ordained for her by the men. After marriage the women struggle for their identity but do not get it. She is stuck up with husband and family which are ingredients of the feminine experiences.

Drabble is popular amongst the women readers because she writes about their experiences. Her novels are about the sex behaviour, maturity and gynaecology which make her a writer of feminine sensibility. She is perhaps the first writer who describes the sex experiences of women without any inhibition.

Her world is where women live, rejoice and suffer and learn from life. This is a world where the men are welcome but they must come with full understanding and without any pretentions of being superior to women. It can easily be reinforced
that Margaret Drabble without any trace of doubt is one of the major writer of this century.