

Women, Politics and Resistance in Margaret Drabble's *The Waterfall* and Doris Lessing's *A Proper Marriage*

Dr. Ajit Kumar
Scholar, Department of English
Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra
Haryana, India

Abstract:

Feminine ideologies have faced criticism for their portrayal of both sexes and the male hegemonic aspects of society. Margaret Drabble and Doris Lessing explore the complex nature of patriarchal pressures that lead women to deceive others. In Drabble's *The Waterfall*, Jane Gray deceives her friend Lucy to achieve a self-secured position, fearing rejection, competitiveness, and insecurity. In Doris Lessing's *A Proper Marriage*, Martha desires female liberation from patriarchal clutches through different means. Jane believes that male assistance is necessary for a sustainable and liberal life, while Martha does not compromise on her liberty. Both Jane and Martha feel the need to present their original contribution hidden in male hegemonic powers, aiming to create a harmonious atmosphere in society. Thus, applying the different feminine theories, the current research underscores that both novels exhibit a true representation of a patriarchal society, with the protagonists Jane Gray and Martha Quest aiming to bring a life for women that is equally respectable and liberal to men in all spheres.

Key Words: Feminine, Hegemonic, Patriarchal, Liberal, Ideologies etc.

Full Paper:

Feminine ideologies have come under the effect of invariable criticism right from the beginning of their movement, aiming to bring out the human image of both sexes and annihilating the male hegemonic aspects of society. David Bouchier says, "women suffer because of their sex" (2). This movement has been led by women who realize that men are parthenogenetically produced by a woman and want her to be subjugated in all forms such as wife, beloved, mother, sister, etc. The feminist movement is an effort to break the image of woman as 'other' and 'object' and demand for autonomy in their substantial existence. Women achieve tremendous momentum in the later period of the 1950s, with women novelists claiming their rights regarding sexual and political existence. However, it cannot be denied that the subordinate position of women has been imposed on them by men. Women have all the essential and equal qualifications to men, and they develop the attitude that emerges as the base of the prosperity of the family. They work equally to men for the welfare of the family, making their efforts and sacrifices comparatively bigger than the males of their family.

Feminists present their views on the different patriarchal forms as a daughter, mother, sister, and wife. A woman is oppressed in all forms, and she is expected to sacrifice her individuality for her brother's welfare and her parents' wishes. She has to adopt a dual approach on mothering as she has to accept the form of a mother and at the same time she has to perform the role of a wife as well. Critics and feminists come heavily on these expectations while criticizing the different forms of women and the oppression imposed by the patriarchal society. Adrienne Rich says, "Patriarchal man created...physical force, ignorance" (126-127). However, the position of women is changing steadily, and they are beginning to take part in the outer acts of society. Out of all these perspectives, a woman has to bring out the semi-position of herself who does not want to forget the essence of womanhood but seems to develop the best form of human existence. The writing of Bronte sisters, Virginia Woolf, and Jane Austen has framed the base of feminine existence in English literature, relegating the subordinate position of women in society, second position of women in the marriage market, and motherhood as imposition and exploitation in the name of sisterhood. Raymond Williams favours this idea saying, "a new feminine experience" (9). However, this experience helps to deliver a favourable society.

Margaret Drabble, an English novelist, was a prominent figure during the second wave of feminism, which emerged in the 1960s and 70s. Drabble's novels, as a woman, highlight the challenges faced by women in a male-dominated society. Her works almost exclusively explore the dilemma and loss of identity that educated and accomplished women intellectuals have faced in their quest for personal fulfilment. Every book depicts a distinct approach used by modern women to revolt against oppression and restore their sense of self and fulfilment. The analysis of intelligent women's search for self-identity and fulfilments with gallantry and tenacity from a feminist viewpoint focuses on three of Drabble's early literary creations: *A Summer Bird-Cage*, *The Millstone*, and *The Waterfall*. The three works' potential classification as a trilogy explains why they are being studied. These are the explanations. First of all, they explore how recently freed female intellectuals battle through uncertainty and bewilderment to pursue their identities and find fulfilment in a patriarchal culture. These topics are shared by both of them. Second, they fully expose Drabble's feminist awareness by illuminating the three distinct approaches used by the female protagonists in each of the three books to achieve their identities and aspirations. The heroine Sarah in the first book of the trilogy, *A Summer Bird-Cage*, is forced to give smart women's identities and duties some serious thought when she becomes perplexed by them. Her confusion shows that intelligent women are starting to reevaluate women's identities after being woken from a sleep of subjugation in the past. It signals the arrival of the right moment for women to set off on a path of self-discovery. Two strategies used by modern women to reclaim their identities are revealed in *The Millstone*, the second book in the trilogy. First of all, women fight against prevailing ideologies and the patriarchal construct of the feminine mystique in order to overcome feelings of repression and dissatisfaction. By accepting maternal love, women also come to understand their femininity and restore their sense of self.

The trilogy's third book, *The Waterfall*, explores the third strategy intelligent women use to realise their identities. Drabble displays her support for the realisation of a woman's personality and feminine identity via the embrace of sexual love based on mutual understanding by showing the heroine Jane's miraculous recovery from a spiritual wasteland through her embrace of genuine love. The way Drabble conducts herself fully reflects her distinct feminist consciousness, which is made clear by her emphasis on the independence that women have declared through their rebellion against traditional ideologies, the positive effects of maternal love, and the importance of sexual love that is founded on equality, understanding, and support. Despite the success of the first wave, Drabble continued to struggle against the atrocities of male-dominated society. In *The Waterfall*, Drabble explores the struggles of Jane Gray, a woman with bravery and intelligence, in her relationships with men. Despite her efforts to be a true wife and mother, Jane Gray is often abandoned by her husband when she bears her second child. Betty Friedan calls it, "non-existence" (264) of women in the human society. She reveals the truth, that her existence is nothing as a "human being" (282). Her sisterhood also comes into question when she deceives her friend Lucy by developing a love affair with her husband, James. Drabble highlights the social hurdles that impose insecurity on women, and Jane Gray's inclination towards her sister's husband is influenced by the insecurity imposed by the social environment.

Doris Lessing in her novels emphasises how patriarchy has produced a set of ideas that uphold male dominance by internalising women's inferiority. Man is the head of the family and is responsible for overseeing and managing all of its activities, according to the duties that patriarchal society assigns. Cooking, laundry, and housecleaning are the tasks assigned to women in the family. She is restricted to the function of reproduction and becomes pregnant even when she is not ready. Her whole life is devoted to raising her children, providing for her family, and handling various domestic duties that naturally fall into the routine. Men used women as objects of social, physical, and psychological oppression. Housewives are expected to be content to stay at home and raise their children while men continue to enjoy all the freedoms and mistreat women. The positions of a wife and a mother were the only ones that women were allowed to play, and intelligent women who want to be released from these obligations were met with mistrust. According to her, being a mother is a social skill that can be learned by helping to care for children, just as adoptive parents, stepmothers, stepfathers, and wet nurses do.

Doris Lessing's novel, *A Proper Marriage*, presents the violation of women in the market of marriage. Lessing addresses various aspects associated with women in married life, such as dependence on men for economic needs, child-rearing, and their existence being related to sexual being only. She feels that marriage is, "a sinking state" for women (Zeman 98). She believes that if men assist women, they can become equal human beings to men on all outer fronts. Lessing nullifies the traditional belief that son is the only heir of her father's property and highlights the pitfalls and fluctuations that are harmful for a happy conjugal life.

Doris Lessing's *Martha Quest*, the protagonist, violates all the imposed limitations of women under the hegemonic patriarchal structure. She is passionate, and represents the revolutionary interest for advancement

in social status, educational opportunities, professional freedom, and political rights. Jane Gray suffers in the hands of both her husband and lover, who cheat her with male-dominated acts and exploit her physically and psychologically. Despite her respect for marriage, Martha Quest leads her life on her own terms and decides to divorce from her husband when she finds marriage to be a hurdle.

Patriarchal society creates an atmosphere where women are denied their rights and chances to stand equal to men. Jane Gray is denied her individual identity by being in the company of her husband and lovers, but she knows her skills and abilities and does not want to confine herself to the boundaries set by the patriarchal society. Both novels resemble the expectations of their husbands, Douglas and James, who want their women to perform according to their wishes. Jane submits herself to the wishes of her husband and then to her lover, while Martha decides to leave the marriage institution and reject the fate imposed upon her by her husband. Lessing questions the society about the existence of human empowerment and annihilates gender discriminations that force the exploitation of women and provide supremacy to men.

Margaret Drabble and Doris Lessing explore the complex nature of patriarchal pressures that lead women to deceive others. Jane Gray, a woman who deceives her friend Lucy, seeks to achieve a self-secured and stable position to meet her personal and social needs. Her concern is not jealousy but fear of rejection, competitiveness, and insecurity. She seeks to achieve a self-liberated but socially stable position, seeking the help of Lucy's friend. Both Jane and Martha desire female liberation from patriarchal clutches through different means. Jane believes that male assistance is necessary for a sustainable and liberal life, while Martha does not compromise on her liberty. She believes that women are capable of sustaining and developing their individuality in society. Martha's psychology suggests that liberation for women may bring equality for all human beings, bringing more humane and liberal emotion for both sexes. Jane Sheila Rowbotham suggests, "the liberation of women" is essential for the betterment of humanity (11). The patriarchal pattern creates an environment that drags women to the stance of subordinate. Martha's psychological dilemma revolves around the existential values of a woman, questioning the responses of men for her commitment towards his family. The patriarchal patterns name families or children after the name of the husband or father, not the wife or mother. Martha becomes anxious about the approach of other women towards their subordination. On one hand, Jane makes efforts to avoid the term 'subordinate' to her name and sustains her identity in her own family, while on the other hand, Martha revolts all familial circumstances to obtain the esteemed stance of womanhood.

Both Jane Gray and Martha Quest have the same tendency but their views differ. They both feel the need to present their original contribution hidden in the male hegemonic powers. When she visits her home along with her husband, she makes love with Douglas and feels as if it is her own home, "a flag of independence in itself" (Lessing 237). The social structure denies their real associations to the human world, bringing out a sense of equality and existence. Man wants his woman to lead a life governed by him and perform according to his wishes. Jane Gray becomes passive to her man and starts behaving according to his wish. Lessing underscores that the son is considered heir of parents' property, with the treatment of parents towards their children varying.

Thus, both Drabble and Lessing focus on the social ideology and they wish to create a harmonious atmosphere in the society. Both the novels exhibit a true representation of a patriarchal society. Both the protagonists Jane Gray and Martha Quest want to explore the sensible plight of humanity for women in the society. These women, with their different attributes, raise their voices against the male hegemonic aspects. They aim to bring out a life for women that is equally respectable and liberal to men in all spheres. So, the current research underlines the valuable movement towards bringing a harmony to the androgynous substance in the society.

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