

Vol. 8, Issue-III (June 2017)

ISSN: 0976-8165

The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Bi-monthly, Refereed & Indexed Open Access eJournal



The Criterion

UGC Approved Journal [Arts and Humanities, Jr. No. 768]

Editor-In-Chief - Dr. Vishwanath Bite

www.the-criterion.com

About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Bi-Monthly Refereed and Indexed Open Access eJournal

www.galaxyimrj.com

ISSN 2278-9529

A Manifestation of Intellectual Women's Predicament in Margaret Drabble's *A Summer Bird-Cage*

Neeta B. Jadhav
Research Scholar
North Maharashtra University, Jalgaon.

Article History: Submitted-12/05/2017, Revised-25/06/2017, Accepted-29/06/2017, Published-05/07/2017.

Abstract:

The present paper aims to study intellectual woman's predicament of marriage and personal desire in *A Summer Bird-Cage* by Margaret Drabble which is written in 1963. This novel portrays panorama of marriage and its consequent experiences. Women's predicament of marriage and their personal desire is due to their lack of sense of vacation and traditional sense of security of the institution of marriage. The present novel emphasizes the idea that in spite of education, heroine is not sure about her vacation. She has fluctuating ideas about marriage and career. The major female character becomes conscious about marriage by observing insensitive husbands of her sister and friend. The heroine's growing awareness about female predicament of marriage and personal desire result in her rejection of marriage as sacred system and considers it as a system of caging women into the traditional role of housebound housewives. The critical, interpretative and analytical method for the present study is used.

Keywords: Predicament, awareness, vacation, marriage, housebound.

Introduction:

Margaret Drabble is the prominent British female writer who depicts lifelike female characters. Margaret Drabble's novels are representation of female issues of education, marriage and career, unmarried pregnancy, separation from husband, sexuality, menstruation, mid-life crisis. Drabble's distinct interest in women's predicament makes her special and popular women's writer. Her novels do not represent superwoman but ordinary women who face ordinary challenges of day to day life. In this context, Margaret Drabble's remarks throw light on her popularity as a novelist. She says, "There must be a lot of people like me. A lot of people have got exactly the same worries and problems..." (Poland 264). Margaret Drabble "is answer and example to women who think the role into which society stereotypes them necessarily limits them, or makes them losers in life. She is a sweet reminder to stereotypes of women that no longer swing in the ancient orbits" (Poland 265). She has nineteen novels, some short stories, screenplays, edited books to her credit. Drabble's concern for the predicament of women is depicted from her debut novel *A Summer Bird-Cage* (1963). This novel exposes young woman's predicament between marriage and self-autonomy. The female characters portrayed in this novel are well educated but lacking sense

of vacation. Lacking sense of vacation is the main predicament of these female characters which is significantly portrayed in the novel *A Summer Bird-Cage*.

The main protagonist of the novel is Sarah who is educated and follows her own way of life. Louise's marriage is seen through the eyes of Sarah. Though, Sarah is not married, she plays a vital role to understand the impact of marriage on women. The married couples portrayed in the novel are coincidentally associated to Sarah and she forms her own ways of living life by observing her sister's and friend's marriages. Hence, other educated female characters are also important to know the predicament of female. Other female characters namely Louise and Gill show different aspects of life. This novel, *A Summer Bird-Cage* represents intellectual women's preference for marriage for the sake of social and economical security but their decision prove wrong and their marriage become a cage for them which snatch personal dreams from them. Their personal desires are pushed back due to their insensitive husbands but they struggle to attain freedom from traditional system of marriage.

The female life described in this novel, *A Summer Bird-Cage* is not heroic or extraordinary but what makes this novel more interesting is that narrator's attempt to merge female predicament at the deeper level. Nancy Poland comments in this context that Margaret Drabble "is writing about the universals in private experience, themes and subtleties which sustain the novel as an art form, make it more than a good story, and inspire good readers. The questions she is asking are recording the social history of an era" (Poland 263). The novel *A Summer Bird-Cage* is in depth expression of intellectual women's predicament of marriage and personal desire which becomes a social document of the decade 1960s which is known for women's liberation movement. Though the novel is narrow in scope it provides a discourse on marriage and its impact on intellectual women.

Marriage as a bird-cage:

The very title of novel *A Summer Bird-Cage* implies the keyword cage. A cage is such a place where someone is confined in certain boundaries. This novel *A Summer Bird-Cage* depicts women's lives confined in their marital state. The major female character Sarah observes instances of broken marriages all around her. Louise's marriage is seen through the eyes of Sarah. Sarah's observation and her association with other female characters are significantly portrayed in this novel. Due to her observation, she contemplates about the predicament and shapelessness of women: "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. Louise thought she wasn't but she was. It would get her in the end, some version of it, simply because she was born to defend instead of to attack" (29). The bad marital experiences of Sarah's mother, her sister's loveless marriage, her friend Gill's oppressive marriage indicate the marriage as an obstacle in the path of women's ambitions. Sarah's mother is being forced to live as her husband wants. She hardly expresses her own feeling and hence she wants to educate her daughters. She says, "All I am is a servant, that's all I am, just a household drudge" (64). Her mother's life is confined in limited housebound duties. In this regard her marriage is like a cage for her.

Sarah's sister Louise marries Stephen Halifax for social and economical security but her expectations from marriage shatter when she loses her freedom. She follows a traditional way of marriage by which a woman is recognized. In this regard, Simone de Beauvoir's comments are noteworthy. She says, "The destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage...marriage is the reference by which the single woman is defined" (Beauvoir 451). Louise goes for this traditionally offered destiny. Louise's predicament of marriage is due to her thinking that marriage is an answer for lack of sense of vacation. It is clear from Sarah's utterance "I thought about jobs, and seriousness, and about what a girl can do with herself if over-educated and lacking a sense of vacation. Louise had one answer, of course. She was getting married" (8). Louise marries Stephen for his money not love but when she realizes that her existence as a wife is mere ornament to her house, she feels her marriage is her like a bad experience. Louise's marriage is seen through Sarah's perspective and according her, Stephen "wanted a wife to be a figurehead to his triumphal car, a public admiring ornament to his house. A hostess"(9) Louise's predicament is evident when she suffers from traditional bridal sleeplessness and walks "firmly and regularly from one end of it, along the hall to the front door, and back again, backwards, like an animal in a small cage trying to take exercise"(22). Louise's predicament can be linked with an animal that is in a cage. Louise's predicament is due to her lack of sense of vacation. Her decision to marry a wealthy man for his money results in her loss of autonomy and self-dignity. She limits herself in doing secretarial jobs for her husband.

Sarah's friend Gill is another female character who finds herself confined into the cage of marriage. Gill shares with Sarah that how she is trapped in her marital state: "Once he said to me, "Put the kettle on," and I said, "Put it on yourself, I'm reading"; and he said, "put it on, what the hell do you think you're here for?"(39-40). It becomes evident here that Gill's life is confined in her domestic works. Tony assumes Gill for every work and does not respect her at all. Gill and Tony get married because they both love each other. Their marriage is an outcome of their love not for money as Louise does. One noteworthy point is that Louise as well as Gill is educated women but they find one ultimate end of their education that is marriage and after getting married their personal dreams rise which clearly implies their predicament. They prefer to get married, to become notable ladies. In this regard Mary Wollstonecraft writes "When they receive a careful education, they are either made fine ladies, brimful of sensibility, and teeming with capricious fancies; or mere notable women" (Wollstonecraft 85).

Gill and Tony quarrels for everything and Gill becomes mere painting object for her husband. The conversation between Gill and Sarah is very important in this context. Gill shares her predicament to Sarah. Tony treats her badly and paints all the time "and he seemed to think that I ought to be happy just sitting around in the nude and letting him paint me, and cooking him the odd meal" (39). In this context, Simone de Beauvoir's comments are significant, "marriage has always been presented in radically different ways for men and for women....woman, integrated as slave or vassal into the family group" (Beauvoir 451-452). Louise's predicament is the treatment given by Tony who treats her as a servant not equal life partner. Marriage as a bird cage is effectively evident through Gillian anecdote which depicts

everything: hasty marriage, quarreling, humiliating treatment, abortion and separation. Hence, this novel *A Summer Bird-Cage* becomes an epitome of all female experiences related with education, lacking sense of vacation, blindly leaping into marriage, humiliation, struggle for personal desire which enable women to follow their own way. The female characters' attempt to come out of their predicament of marriage and personal desire is significant characteristic of this novel. Though, these women accept traditional way of marriage, they become a part of social change by their attempt to come out of confinement.

Marriage and personal desire:

This novel *A Summer Bird-Cage* (1963) represents women's predicament of marriage and personal desire. The main reason of inner struggle is women's radical outlook to accomplish their personal desire. They struggle to come out of their predicament and attempt to break the bondage of marriage. Margaret Drabble in this novel *A Summer Bird-Cage* depicts the predicament of marriage and personal desire through three female characters namely Sarah, Louise and Gillian. Sarah's real predicament rises when she completed her education from Oxford but fails to understand her next move. She decides to pass time in Paris. Sarah's expressions are very much noteworthy to understand her predicament. She says, "I had gone there immediately after coming down from Oxford with a lovely, shiny, useless new degree, in a *faute-de-mieux* middle-class way, to fill in time" (7). She fails to decide what she can do with her new degree, "strung together in occasionally ecstatic, occasionally panic stricken effort, day and night, year in year out" (146). She has to choose between traditionally provided marriage and personal desire. The real predicament lies in her insufficiency to know the power of education. Sarah's predicament is quite clear when she renounces university career because she thinks that "you can't be a sexy don. It's alright for men, being learned and attractive, but for a woman it's a mistake...it detracts from the essential seriousness of the business" (183-184). Her indecisiveness of career shows her preference for ordinary work and looks. Sarah is "a young woman blessed with intelligence, good looks, articulateness, and humor, whose sense of expectation, aspiration, and promise is coupled with a disturbing lassitude, an inability to know what to do as a female person"(Creighton 39). In spite of intelligence and good looks, she faces inability to choose between marriage and career. She also feels lonely when she thinks about

the classlessness and social dislocation that girls of my age and lack of commitments feel. I sat silent; amazed by the recognition of how much I missed community, and how deeply I felt my social loneliness. I had no colleagues, no neighbours, no family (96).

Sarah's lack of commitments to marriage or career indicates her predicament and so she takes up BBC job for passing the time. She wishes to "be a high-powered, in a way that I wouldn't like to be called Bohemian, or bourgeois, or intellectual, or promiscuous" (96). Sarah's predicament is also evident when she feels that she cannot become attractive bride as her sister. She looks

horrifyingly pregnable, somehow, at that moment: I looked at myself in fascination, thinking how unfair it was, to be born with so little 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 (28-29).

Sarah has fluctuating ideas about marriage. She does not want to confine herself into the marriage system and on the other hand she fears to be single. Her predicament lies in her confusion between opinions. Her sister's marriage experiences provide an example of loveless and meaningless marriage and her friend Gillian's experiences provide an instance of male dominating marriage. These two marriage experiences compel her to think rationally about marriage. She has lover, Francis who is absent throughout the novel. Francis is awarded a Commonwealth scholarship to study political theory in Harvard. Sarah's personal desire is evident when she converses with Tate and Lovell, Francis' friends, inclines to "tell everyone that I had got a good degree too, as good as any of theirs" (110). Unable to find suitable job, but she does not make hasty decision of marriage as Gillian has done. She begins "to formulate the idea that of all the many kinds of marriages, Gill's and Louise's represented some kind of extreme, and that both extremes were to be avoided" (74). Sarah clears herself that marriage does not solve the problems of jobs and domestic works. She asserts that "the days are over, thank God, when a woman justifies her existence by marrying" (74).

Louise's expectations from marriage are different from Sarah. She expects social status and economical security. Louise's wants to fulfill her personal desire and so she gets married. She is not interested in career. Her situation becomes horrible when she realizes her true status in her home. She has to attend her husband's call and many consider her as secretary than wife. Her husband compels her not to meet her friends and thus she loses her liberty. Her marriage does not happen to be a good and she feels that she is in cage. Her desire to get whatever she wants proved wrong and so she in search of liberty breaks the bond of marriage. She poignantly acts as per her personal desire. Her aspirations are clear to her and act accordingly. Louise shows her nature of change as per time demands. She breaks away her marital relationship and indulges herself in extramarital affair. She fulfills her desire of love from other man than her husband.

Gill is other female character who faces predicament of her hasty marriage with Tony, her lover. Tony treats her highly insensitively. Her life becomes like a servant's life. Tony makes her "feel so useless. Once I said to him, "I feel like a still life, I want to do something", and he gave me a bit of canvass and a few paints and said, "You paint me then." It was awful, I was so offended" (42). Her marriage experience takes away her liberty so she aspires to break relationship with Tony who lacks "total responsibility and social conscience, and his habitual promiscuity" (43). Her personal desire is to do something more work than domestic work. She does not wish "neither to know nor to care" (44) about her future. She just wishes to leave her husband who treats her badly. She does not give birth to child because she doesn't "like that. Sort of accidentally and without my consent" (41). The humiliating treatment by her husband becomes turning point for her next move into her own life. Gill's predicament is different from Sarah and Louise. Gill realizes her limitations and prefers to be alone whereas Louise indulges herself into adultery and Sarah wishes to marry but with some

precautions. The novel "is centrally concerned with examining the life of the contemporary women and in helping readers "to find patterns or images for a possible future-to know how to behave, what to hope to be like" (Korenman 61-72)

Conclusion:

A Summer Bird-Cage is in depth study of intellectual women's predicament of marriage and personal desire. Sarah is the main female character but other female characters namely Louise and Gill also provide various aspects of women predicament. Marriage which traditionally offers women a sense of security proves wrong here. Margaret Drabble minutely depicts lifelike female predicament which seems universal female predicament. These women are educated but lack sense of vacation which becomes main reason of their predicament of marriage and personal desire. Sarah keeps herself away from marriage but fails to attain career as per her degree. The fluctuating ideas about marriage indicate the changing scenario of intellectual women's mindset. They want to remove predicament of marriage after they experience the bad treatment given by their spouses. One may make one notable point here; insensitive husbands compel them to search for their personal desire and personal life. Marriage becomes a cage for them but they attempt to remove their difficult life and follow their own way of life. Margaret Drabble explores the female predicament of married and unmarried women by providing various aspects of female lives. Sarah's predicament of what to do with new degree depicts educated woman's issue related to career. Hence, this novel is the depiction of intellectual women's every aspect of life. Thus this novel significantly manifests the intellectual women's predicament.

Works Cited:

- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Trans. Borde Constance and Shelia Malovany-Chevallier. London: Vintage Books, 2011. Print.
- Creighton, Joanne V. *Margaret Drabble*. New York: Methuen & Co.Ltd.1985. Print.
- Drabble, Margaret. *A Summer Bird Cage*. England: Penguin, 1967. Print.
- Korenman, Joan S. "The Liberation of Margaret Drabble." *Critique*, 21 (Fall 1980): 61-72.Print.
- Poland, Nancy. "Must be A Lot of People Like Me." *Midwest Quarterly*, 16, 3 (Spring 1975): 255- 67.Print.
- Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. England: Penguin Books, 2004. Print.