



The Issue Of Female Identity And Self-Awareness In The Works Of Margaret Drabble And Khurshid Dustmuhammad

Ikramova Madina Xasanovna

Deputy Director for Specialized Subjects at the Ishoqxon Ibrat Creative School, Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines female identity and self-awareness in the works of Margaret Drabble and Khurshid Dustmuhammad. Focusing on *The Millstone*, *Jerusalem the Golden*, *Mahzuna*, and *Shabada*, it compares how female characters develop individuality through personal choice, family relationships, moral values, and social pressures. The study shows that Drabble emphasizes independence and self-realization, while Dustmuhammad highlights dignity, national values, and psychological resistance. Both writers portray female identity as a dynamic process shaped by inner conflict and interaction with society.

KEYWORDS: Margaret Drabble, Khurshid Dustmuhammad, female identity, self-awareness, womanhood, psychological conflict, gender roles, individuality, comparative literature, national values.

INTRODUCTION

Female identity has become an important problem in modern literary studies because literary representations of women reflect changing ideas about individuality, family, social responsibility, gender roles, personal freedom, and cultural belonging. Identity in literary discourse is not limited to the social position assigned to a female character. It also includes the character's perception of herself, her ability to make choices, her response to social expectations, and her awareness of the values through which she defines her existence.

Margaret Drabble's fiction is particularly significant in this respect. Her early novels appeared during a period of major social transformation in Britain and repeatedly address women's autonomy, marriage, motherhood, education, professional aspirations, and self-definition. *The Millstone*, originally published in London by Weidenfeld and Nicolson in 1965, presents the transformation of Rosamund Stacey, an unmarried academic whose experience of motherhood significantly changes her understanding of herself. *Jerusalem the Golden*, published in 1967, develops another dimension of female self-construction through Clara Maugham's attempt to distance herself from the emotional and cultural limitations of her family environment.

Khurshid Dustmuhammad approaches female psychology from the perspective of contemporary Uzbek prose. His works are characterized by attention to inner conflict, moral consciousness, psychological detail, and the relationship between the individual and social environment. His story *Mahzuna* has been interpreted as an artistic and psychological representation of the conflict between the heroine's moral worldview and an environment alien to her values. The purpose of this thesis is to compare the artistic mechanisms through which Drabble and Dustmuhammad represent female identity and the process of self-awareness.



The research employs comparative-literary, psychological, contextual, and interpretative methods. Drabble's *The Millstone* and *Jerusalem the Golden* are compared with Dustmuhammad's *Mahzuna* and *Shabada*. The analysis focuses on narrative perspective, psychological characterization, inner conflict, social pressure, motherhood, marriage, moral choice, individual agency, and the relationship between female consciousness and cultural environment.

The comparative method enables the study to distinguish universal mechanisms of female self-recognition from culturally specific forms of womanhood. Psychological interpretation is used to examine how hesitation, anxiety, alienation, resistance, emotional transformation, and moral evaluation reveal the internal development of female characters.

The analysis demonstrates that Drabble represents female identity primarily as a process of self-definition against externally established expectations. In *The Millstone*, Rosamund initially understands independence largely through intellectual autonomy and emotional distance. Her unexpected pregnancy, however, forces her to reconsider the boundaries of that independence. Rather than accepting the conventional assumption that motherhood must necessarily be legitimized through marriage, she chooses to raise her daughter independently. The novel therefore transforms motherhood from a socially imposed category into an experience through which Rosamund constructs a new identity. Critical interpretations of the novel have similarly emphasized the relationship between maternity, female agency, and self-formation.

Rosamund's self-awareness is important because it does not arise from a simple rejection of femininity. Instead, she discovers that autonomy and emotional attachment can coexist. Her identity expands rather than being replaced: scholar, independent woman, and mother become interconnected dimensions of the same self. Drabble thus challenges binary models in which a woman must choose between individuality and relational responsibility.

In *Jerusalem the Golden*, Clara Maughan's development follows a different pattern. Her desire to escape the limitations associated with her family and provincial background becomes an attempt to create an alternative self. The attraction of another social and cultural environment gives Clara an imagined model of the person she wishes to become. Self-awareness therefore emerges through comparison between inherited identity and desired identity. Drabble reveals that liberation from one environment does not automatically produce psychological certainty; identity remains connected to memory, social aspiration, emotional need, and the individual's perception of others.

Dustmuhammad's *Mahzuna* constructs female identity through a more explicit collision between internal moral values and external social pressure. *Mahzuna* enters an environment in which accepted behavior contradicts her understanding of dignity and interpersonal boundaries. Her psychological discomfort becomes a form of moral self-recognition. Research devoted specifically to the story emphasizes that its national character is revealed through internal conflicts and through the contradiction between the heroine's moral world and the social environment surrounding her.

The significance of *Mahzuna* lies in her inability to normalize what she internally experiences as humiliation. Her sensitivity should therefore not be interpreted merely as passivity. Psychologically, her resistance demonstrates the existence of an internal value system that remains stronger than external pressure. Dustmuhammad constructs self-awareness through

this moral boundary: the heroine recognizes herself most clearly when society asks her to behave against the principles through which she understands her dignity.

In *Shabada*, the representation of womanhood is closely connected with intimate relationships and the psychological distance that may develop within family life. Dustmuhammad's narrative attention to gestures, observations, silences, and emotional reactions makes domestic interaction a space in which characters reassess both themselves and one another. The story belongs to the body of Dustmuhammad's short fiction made available among his recognized works. Female self-awareness here is less openly confrontational than in *Mahzuna*, but it similarly emerges through emotional perception and the realization that personal existence cannot be reduced entirely to an externally assigned family role.

The comparison reveals an important difference in the dominant artistic direction of the two writers. Drabble tends to represent female self-awareness through the expansion of individual agency. Her heroines question inherited definitions of marriage, motherhood, class, education, and femininity and attempt to construct identities based on conscious personal choice. Female identity consequently appears fluid and capable of transformation.

Dustmuhammad's female characters are more closely connected with the ethical and cultural dimensions of identity. Self-awareness is frequently revealed when a woman evaluates her environment according to internal concepts of dignity, sincerity, loyalty, modesty, affection, or moral responsibility. This does not mean that his heroines lack individuality. On the contrary, their individuality becomes visible precisely through their psychological refusal to dissolve completely into social expectations.

At the same time, the distinction between Western individualism and Eastern traditionalism is insufficient to explain the works. Drabble's heroines remain deeply shaped by emotional relationships, while Dustmuhammad's women possess an individual consciousness capable of questioning their environment. In both cases, identity develops dialogically: the female character discovers herself through interaction with family, social convention, cultural memory, emotional experience, and personal choice.

The works of Margaret Drabble and Khurshid Dustmuhammad demonstrate that female identity is not a fixed social category but a continuously developing form of self-consciousness. Drabble emphasizes independence, intellectual agency, motherhood, social mobility, and the right of women to redefine conventional roles. Dustmuhammad concentrates on moral self-recognition, dignity, psychological sensitivity, family relations, and the preservation of individual integrity within culturally complex social environments.

Despite their different literary traditions, both writers portray self-awareness as a process generated by conflict between the inner self and external expectations. Their female characters become conscious of their individuality when they are required to make choices, interpret emotional experience, defend personal values, or reconsider inherited roles. Comparative analysis therefore demonstrates that the artistic representation of womanhood in British and Uzbek prose combines culturally specific forms with universal questions concerning freedom, dignity, belonging, and the search for an authentic self.

References

1. Drabble M. *The Millstone*. – London : Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965.
2. Drabble M. *Jerusalem the Golden*. – London : Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967.

3. Dustmuhammad Kh. Jajman. – Tashkent : Sharq, 1997.
4. Dustmuhammad Kh. Hijronim mingdir mening: qissa va hikoyalar. – Tashkent, 2000.
5. Dustmuhammad Kh. Beozor qushning qarg'ishi: hikoyalar. – Tashkent : Sharq, 2006.
6. Qurbonova F. I. National character in Khurshid Dostmuhammad's story "Mahzuna" // European Journal of Humanities and Educational Advancements. – 2022. – Vol. 3, No. 3. – P. 1-2.

