CHAPTER - II

MASCULINE ANXIETY

In Saul Bellow’s age there was a drastic change in the status of women. His fiction deals with the problems of men as they meet the responsibilities defined for them by American society. His heroes try to establish their identities through adventure, by joining the war, by scrutinizing their past and searching for a woman to love. As Diana Trilling points out, “modern American fiction is written almost exclusively from the masculine point of view, reflecting the prejudices, fantasies, sexual anxieties and values of male writers” (Trilling 59). The purpose of Bellow’s work was to fight out the dominant mood of modernist despair. He needed a powerful masculine voice which might be effective in the removal of general despair. In an interview with Jo Brans, Bellow explained the reason behind his not writing from a woman’s point of view. He said he sometimes thought of representing woman’s attitude. He just never got around to it. “It just hasn’t come out that way, that’s all” (123). Specifically, Bellow takes up the problem of modern man adjusting to his new role in the society of empowered women. The rise of feminism posed serious challenges to masculinity and the edifice of patriarchy. It questioned the gender differences which were created by the widespread patriarchal biases of Western civilization. Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) censures the cultural identification of women as merely the negative object or ‘other’ to men who is norm and represents the humanity in general. According to her, “Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men. They show it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth” (Beauvoir 175).

Due to these changes in the attitude of women, the men of the new age find themselves experiencing a new crisis that few men in the past ever contemplated. The modern man has become self-conscious and insecure and finds himself at the receiving end of a female upsurge. Men today are generally
nervous and ill at ease with their masculinity. The anguish of modern man and his unique predicament find full expression in twentieth century literature. Writers like Hemingway, Norman Mailer, Philip Roth and John Fowles also give ample proof of modern man’s anxiety and insecurity. As a realist, Bellow depicts the changes that took place in American society. Due to feminist struggles women are catapulted to the front stage of life from margins. Bellow reflects this transformation while portraying the agony and anxiety of men during the process.

In *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millet discusses politics. By politics she means power structured relationships. It is, in fact, the entire arrangement whereby one group of persons is governed by another. The governing group is dominant and the other is subordinate. The relationship between the sexes now and throughout history is one which Max Weber once termed ‘Herrschaft,’ of dominance and subordination, which means the birthright control of one group by another, the male to rule and the female to be ruled (qtd. in Millett 23). The male-female dialectic in Bellow’s fiction involves a power-struggle. Marriage is usually a battlefield and bad marriages are the norm. In his novels men and women are never on equal terms. Women are generally perceived, either consciously or unconsciously, as the ‘enemy’ by the protagonist or at least as the opponent.

Elizabeth Janeway proclaims in *Between Myth and Morning* that under patriarchy women represent the lowest status, a status to which men can fall only under the most exceptional circumstances, if at all. One reason men fear women’s liberation is that it will take away this unique underclass status of women and also prove detrimental to their rights as males. Bellow’s heroes don’t want any change in their status but they can’t resist change.

The dictates of Jewish tradition do not allow women to engage in a career. They follow patriarchal system in which a woman is expected to become a wife and mother. Bellow has high regards for the tradition of Judaism and its division of roles of man and woman.
As women were brought to the front stage of life from the margins due to feminist struggles Bellow depicted the radical change in gender systems and the consequent anguish and anxiety men feel due to this process. Women made a bold entry into the different fields of society causing insecurity and anxiety in men. As a result the gender conflict between men and women took a new turn where men faced potential challenges from women in their once exclusive domains. Men were now under immense pressure to perform, to succeed, to compete with women, to assert their image of masculinity in the face of powerful feminine challenges.

The other sex perplexes both Bellow and his heroes. “What do women want…? They eat green salad and drink human blood” (Herzog 41-42) wonders Herzog, one of Bellow’s protagonists. About modern revolutionary women Bellow says, “…women today show all the characteristics of slaves in revolt. They are prone to the excesses of the lately servile, the newly freed… Gentleness and generosity, which used to be considered feminine qualities, are certainly not contemptible—are they?” (Howard 57-60).

As Dr S. Josh suggests the work places became an important battleground for men and women to test the values of gender. Earlier, it was an exclusive realm of men where they could project their masculine identity. But female liberation gave women ample opportunities to intrude into this domain of men that resulted in gender conflicts (Saul Bellow and Masculinity 65). Bellow fathoms the seriousness of this conflict and presents in its true light the anxiety of men and their efforts to overcome it. In Bellow’s time, male unemployment and the restructuring of old industries created a new crisis in traditional patterns of male authority. Bellow portrays the predicament of such men who experience this crisis and the attitude of women who are admitted into the male domain of work place.

Bellow’s first novel, Dangling Man, deals with the affliction of an unemployed hero who is dependent on his wife for survival. Joseph, the
protagonist, tries to meet the responsibilities expected of him by American society. After resigning from his job at the Inter-American Travel Bureau he is waiting for his call up in the army. That ‘waiting’ is a burden on Joseph. He doesn’t know how to use his freedom in the meantime. “There is nothing to do but wait, or dangle and grow more and more dispirited” (DM 12). He laments, “It is perfectly clear to me that I am deteriorating, storing bitterness and spite which eat like acids at my endowment of generosity and goodwill” (12). Joseph finds himself in a situation contrary to his expectations of himself according to masculine standards. He keeps a journal to record his day-to-day thoughts. But to keep a journal according to the code of the ‘hardboiled’ is not masculine. Joseph feels anxious due to his status and contrasts his situation with the other men of his age. When he is confined to his room, taking his pen to talk to himself, his fellow men “fly planes or fight bulls or catch tarpon” (10). This creates anxiety in him because he does not fulfil the criteria of masculine achievement.

Joseph is constantly conscious of his monotonous life without any purpose, “In the morning I dress and go about my ‘business,’ I pass one more day no different from the others. Night comes, and I have to face another session of sleep- that “sinister adventure” (123).

As Joseph is dependent on his wife he is being deprived of a tough man stature. According to the traditional family system based on patriarchal values he finds himself in a condition contrary to the masculine expectations. In a patriarchal society man is the breadwinner of the family and a woman takes care of the house and children. The man who seeks woman’s support is looked down upon by the society.

Joseph is not able to fulfil the masculine standard of achievement and he feels the more active the rest of the world becomes, the more slowly he moves, “my solitude increases in the same proportion as its racket and frenzy” (13). Joseph feels ashamed of his unsuccessful and stagnant life and avoids going outside his home. The feeling of failure persists and he thinks that “while he (Tad) rockets to Africa and our friend Stillman travels in Brazil, I grow rooted to
my chair. It is a real, bodily feeling. I will not even try to rise” (13).

Joseph’s avoidance of the real world and real life outside his home shows his anxiety, “I am always afraid of running into an acquaintance who will express surprise at seeing me and ask questions. I avoid going downtown and when I must go; I carefully stay away from certain streets” (14). In avoiding normal life Joseph is limiting himself through what Kierkegaard calls “shut-upness” (The Concept of Dread 110). “Shut-upness” is “unfree relation to the good” (110); the anxiety takes the form of “dread of the good” (110); the individual endeavours to shut out freedom and constrict his development. He withdraws and continually negates the good. Joseph also resists goodness in other people and situations. He considers himself a misfit in day-to-day life. Because of being unemployed he has time to record the simplest details of his day in his diary like reading paper, having breakfast, taking a bath etc.

Joseph resents it, when Iva’s mother, Mrs Almstadt, tells someone that Joseph would help her as he is not working now, he is waiting for the army, so he has all the time in the world. Reference to his unemployed status by his mother-in-law, brother or other persons hurts him and provokes anxiety in him.

Right from childhood a boy acquires a value system which leads him to assert his subjective freedom. For a boy norms are different. As Simone de Beauvoir has said:

Climbing trees, fighting with his companions, facing them in rough games, he is aware of his body as a means for dominating nature and as a weapon for fighting; he takes pride in his muscles as in his sex; in games, sports, fights, challenges, trials of strength, he finds a balanced exercise of his powers. (Beauvoir 307)

Joseph is unable to play his masculine role. He does not find any opportunities to satiate his masculine desires. Explaining masculine and feminine roles in Sex and Gender, Robert Stoller analyses “Gender’ as a term that has psychological or cultural rather than biological connotations. If the proper terms
for sex are ‘male’ and ‘female,’ the corresponding terms for gender are ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ (9). Due to social circumstances, male and female are really two cultures. Their experiences are different and that is crucial. Right from childhood a child learns to satisfy the demands which a particular gender places upon one. They acquire a value system exclusive for their gender. Joseph finds himself in a situation contrary to his masculine role in society. He compares himself with other successful people, like his brother Amos. He is a wealthy man, “The family is very proud of him, and he, in turn, has been a reliable son, very much alive to his duties” (DM 59). Joseph resents his brother’s rude way of questioning him about his work when they meet and pressurizing him to take money from him. He dislikes the way his niece, Etta, considers him an unimportant person as she is taught to respect only wealthy and important people. Etta’s comment regarding his financial status, “He is not on his feet much” (63) so one pair of shoes is enough for him and “beggars can’t be choosers” (70) challenge his masculine values. His constant anxiety caused by his dangling status is finally relieved in his violent attack on Etta. Clash with Etta finally crushes his masculine ideals. He is angry with his brother bringing up Etta in such a way, “Look how you’ve brought her up… You have taught her to hate the class and, yes, the very family you come from… Are people to be null because they wear one pair of shoes a year, not a dozen?” (72). Right from his childhood Joseph tries to achieve the masculine code of success set by society but failure to achieve these standards of masculine achievement create anxiety and insecurity in him. He remembers one of his friends Abt who was quicker, abler than the rest of them and who could surpass them in learning and in skills. Abt used to feel that he could be successful in anything he chose “Living with him had a bad effect on me, for I withdrew from any field he entered” (87). Joseph feels that “the fear of lagging pursues and maddens us” (89).

Though Joseph wants to keep his ‘separate self’ safe, he feels the pressure of this world unavoidable. “The world comes after you… it singles you out for this part or that, brings you ringing news of disasters and victories, shunts you
back and forth, abridges your rights, cuts off your future… Whatever you do, you cannot dismiss it” (137).

In addition to Joseph’s unemployed status, the reversal of the traditional husband-wife roles causes Iva, his wife, to become the centre of involvement with the world and Joseph’s imposing ego reduced to feeling like a ‘housewife’.

Joseph thinks of himself as a serious intellectual committed to a life of principle and criticizes Iva as a frivolous materialist addicted to corrupting pleasures of the world. The assertion of her own interests disrupts their male-dominated marriage, leading him to decide, “She in brave, shaky, new defiance, started to enjoy her independence” (98). Overcome with feelings of inadequacy, Joseph depreciates her accomplishments, for to praise her efforts would require admitting that the stereotype categories for judging women are false. His vehement condemnation also reveals, ironically, his dependence on her for his role in the world. He hates Iva’s taste in fashion, entertainment and mystery stories. He is desperate to mould her according to his own tastes. But in his unemployed status, he fails to impose his will on his wife. Iva is transformed from a symbol of devotion to a reminder of his failure. Like the first Eve from whom her name derives, she becomes a rebel against his patriarchal authority, accused of taking advantage of his changing status to assert her independence. To protect his self-image as an authoritarian husband, Joseph insists on Iva’s unquestioning support. But his unemployment results in the fading of his domestic authority. He gradually experiences his subordinate position in the family. When he is slighted, he feels his manhood is insulted.

In a society based on patriarchal values, the division of labour based on sex has been strictly followed. Economic independence of women and crisis in traditional pattern of male authority played havoc with men’s lives. The major demand of society from men is the required role in the economy. Daniel Yankelovich, the social researcher, evinces that men experience their jobs and themselves as worthwhile only through priding themselves on the hard work and
personal sacrifice they are making to be breadwinners for families. Accepting these hardships reaffirms their role as family provider and therefore as true men. The conflict of roles generates anxiety in Joseph.

The connection between job and masculinity makes men accept unemployment as their personal failure as males. Dilemma of Joseph is that he is not in a position to assert his manhood and masculine ideals. He is a passive victim to the change of roles in the family affected by his unemployment and his wife’s employment. As Karen Horney explains “What is menaced by a danger provoking anxiety is, as pointed out by Goldstein, something belonging to the essence or the core of the personality” (New Ways in Psychoanalysis 194). Anxiety is a reaction to a threat to some value which the individual holds essential to his existence as a personality. Thus it is not only unemployment which is bothering Joseph but his basic existence as a male is threatened.

Mannheim also seems to be supporting Horney’s viewpoint. According to him, in periods of unemployment, anxiety arises not simply because of the temporary threat to subsistence:

For man, however, the catastrophe (of unemployment) lies not merely in the disappearance of external opportunities for work but also in the fact that his elaborate emotional system, intricately connected as it is with the smooth working of social institutions, now loses its object-fixation. The petty aims towards which all his strivings are directed suddenly disappear, and, not merely does he now lack a place to work, a daily task…but his habitual desires and impulses remain ungratified. Even if the immediate needs of life are satisfied… the whole life-organization and the family hopes and expectations are annihilated (Man and Society 128).

Bellow’s heroes long for patriarchal values and want women in subordinate positions looking after household duties. Unfortunately the women they come across are contrary to their expectations. They are modern and guided
by feminist ideas and ready to imbibe masculine characteristics to challenge men in their houses. An ideal family in the traditional patriarchal mould is always in the minds of Bellow protagonists.

Iva, Joseph’s wife, and Kitty, Joseph’s mistress, become objects of his lust, targets for his frustration and reminders of his failure to see the world clearly. His inability to relate to them is a sign of his low self-esteem brought on by the necessity of redefining his role in society and his marriage. “Masculinity needs constant nurturing and affirmation” (Josh 16). By continuously playing their masculine role males prove them worthy of position they occupy in the male world. The Bellow hero is irresistibly attracted to sensual women as they promise relief from isolation and affirms his masculinity but at the same time they are afraid to be involved with them in a relationship that will lead to the loss of their freedom. It shows heroes’ inner conflict; they want relationships without responsibility.

Like misogynists, Joseph believes that women are flawed creatures and they can be improved by absolute submission to male authority. Throughout history, men have expressed contempt for women’s intelligence, mistrust of women’s integrity and hostility toward women’s aspirations. Joseph shows the same attitude towards women. He himself confesses, “I had dominated her for years; she was now capable of rebelling… Was it possible that she should not want to be guided, formed by me? I expected some opposition” (DM 98).

Joseph doesn’t want to cash Iva’s cheques on her behalf because he was turned down twice. Over this matter of cheque, there is a quarrel between them. Joseph accuses Iva of using her independence to humiliate him, “You want me to do all kinds of things I was never expected to do before…the reason is that you want me to run errands” (177). Joseph asserts his masculine attitude telling Iva:

Don’t make fun of me, Iva. Things have changed. You have become the breadwinner, and whether you know it or not you resent the fact that I stay at home while you go to work every
morning. So you think up things for me to do. You want me to earn my keep… You take it for granted that I have nothing to do. Every morning you leave half a dozen orders for me (178).

Saul Bellow also highlights change in the family set up of the hero on the basis of the new sex equation as a contributing factor in aggravating masculine anxiety. Bellow’s men always find comfort and security in the memories of their childhood, in the family built on strong patriarchal foundations. The most approving female figure to the Bellow hero is her mother who is remembered fondly for her generous love. The hero’s feelings of self-respect as son are embedded in her unconditional love. And he looks for similar acknowledgement of his importance in relationships with other women. The nuclear family makes them insecure due to the reversal of roles of men and women. Joseph also remembers his mother as a loving figure and feels insecure in nuclear family. Asa Leventhal, the protagonist in The Victim, who has a disturbing image of his mother as a mentally ill figure, compensates for that emotional scar by depending excessively on his mothering wife, Mary. The Bellow men romanticize their childhood and idealize their mothers’ love as their difficulties with their wives and mistresses intensify.

To escape the change of roles at home where Iva is the breadwinner and Joseph feels he is ‘kept’ by her, he decides to enter the masculine atmosphere of army. “Perhaps the war could teach me, by violence, what I had been unable to learn during those months in the room” (DM 191). Joseph gives up civilian life to regain in warfare the self-esteem that has slowly slipped from his grasp by the emasculating inactivity of civilian life.

Though army restricts freedom, it is the prominent institution that reinforces patriarchy and its subsequent privileges to men. Ironically enough, though Joseph wants to assert his masculine ideals, he doesn’t possess problem-solving attitude of men, he wants to be relieved of self-determination in the end, and he is relaxed that his freedom is cancelled. Horney describes the conflict of
modern man by describing the contrast between:

the alleged freedom of the individual and all his factual limitations. The individual is told by society that he is free, independent, can decide his life according to his own free will; the ‘great game of life’ is open to him, and he can get what he wants if he is efficient and energetic. In actual fact, for the majority of people all these possibilities are limited…. The result for the individual is a wavering between a feeling of boundless power in determining his own fate and a feeling of entire helplessness. (Horney 289)

In his desperate need to be relieved of anxiety and to get rid of that freedom which leads to fear and uncertainty; Joseph accepts the authority of army. As Paul Tillich says, “better authority with security than freedom with fear” (The Protestant Era 245). Unable to manage his freedom Joseph surrenders his freedom.

In Dangling Man, Bellow takes up the issue of unemployment and resulting masculine anxiety in Joseph due to reversal of roles of man and woman. In Seize the Day, Bellow highlights modern culture where individual competitive success is the dominant goal and failure to attain that goal creates anxiety in man. In this novel Bellow exposes how power of money, legal rights of a separated wife and expectations of society regarding the criteria of success of a man create anxiety in male protagonists. Wilhelm, the protagonist of Seize the Day, is the ineffectual modern American husband who is the victim of women empowerment. He is separated from his wife; his father has rejected him as a slob; he has no friends except an acquaintance Tamkin whom he doesn’t trust completely; he feels that his children’s affections have been poisoned against him and believes that his wife wishes him dead. Thus Wilhelm is a failure in all his relationships due to which he is not able to play masculine role in society. The past is no good to him because it is obsolete, a chronicle of failures. The
future is unreal also, a nightmare of apprehensions. He is paralysed by his remembrance of the past and by his anxieties of the future. His present creates a lot of anxiety in him as he falls short of his masculine role. Wilhelm is always haunted by his past errors: a chronicle of failures. First, he thinks that his choices and decisions have permitted him to achieve and retain some measure of masculine identity. But contrary to his expectations, his free choices have adverse effect on him, every choice serves to limit his freedom, curtail his choices, corner him and slow him down till he finds himself “choking, constricted and unable to move” (Tanner 59). His existence becomes a kind of burden for him:

The peculiar burden of his existence lay upon him like an accretion, a load, a hump. In any moment of quiet, when sheer fatigue prevented him from struggling, he was apt to feel the mysterious weight, this growth or collection of nameless things which it was the business of his life to carry about. That must be what a man was for (Seize the Day 39).

Another thing which creates a lot of anxiety in Wilhelm is his wife who is continuously extracting money from him by using the divorce laws against him:

Whenever she can hit me, she hits, and she seems to live for that alone. And she demands more and more, and still more. Two years ago she wanted to go back to college and get another degree. It increased my burden but I thought it would be wiser in the end if she got a better job through it. But still she takes as much from me as before…She says the women in her family live long, and I’ll have to pay and pay for the rest of my life (47-48).

Bellow highlights the lust for money through Margaret’s character who has been described as the nagging and the exploiting wife. The humiliating problem of money caused by Margaret has made Wilhelm physically emaciated. He has a feeling of suffocation under her influence and cannot get enough space
for his existence. He tells his father of her influence on him, “Strange father? I’ll show you what she is like” (48). He takes hold of his broad throat and begins to choke himself and when his father asks him what he is doing, he replies: “I’m showing you what she does to me… Dad, she hates me. I feel that she’s strangling me. I can’t catch my breath. She just has fixed herself on me to kill me. She can do it at long distance. One of these days I’ll be struck down by suffocation or apoplexy because of her” (STD 48). Wilhelm feels himself like a slave with an ‘iron collar’. Tamkin proves his understanding of Wilhelm’s marital situation by speaking of women as demonic figures with a special capacity to injure men: “Innately, the female knows how to cripple by sickening a man with guilt. It is a very special destruct, and she sends her curse to make a fellow impotent” (97).

In Bellow’s fiction each hero is involved with women, expecting from them emotional security, understanding and confirmation of his importance as a male. Masculinity needs constant confirmation. Contrary to their expectations, the women in heroes’ lives become burdensome, even insane figures responsible for their unhappiness. As a result Bellow’s heroes withdraw from women feeling inadequate to the task of being a husband. Margaret, Wilhelm’s wife, humiliates him throughout the novel. Once Wilhelm sends her a post-dated cheque unknowingly and Margaret gets very angry; and when Wilhelm calls her she replies in a very aggressive tone. She reminds him of his age, suggesting him to join his old job, “you still think like a youngster. But you can’t do that anymore. Every other day you want to make a new start. But in eighteen years you’ll be eligible for retirement. Nobody wants to hire a new man of your age” (112). Margaret is very cunning and spiteful. Wilhelm begs her to go easy on him but she remains adamant in extracting money from him. Seeing such reaction from Margaret, Wilhelm asks her, “Haven’t I done my best? …Everything comes from me and nothing back again to me. There is no law that will punish this, but you are committing a crime against me” (114). Wilhelm is fed up with the divorce laws. He has to earn more money to give to Margaret. Wilhelm hates this concept
of earning more and more money. Money has sinister overtones in the novel. Listening to his father and his friend’s conversation, Wilhelm thinks how they adore money:

Holy money! Beautiful money! It was getting so that people were feeble-minded about everything except money. While if you didn’t have it you were a dummy, a dummy…The world’s business. If only he could find a way out of it. (36)

And Wilhelm believes that it is ‘money’ which affects the relationships in this world. He tells his father:

No, you hate me. And if I had money you wouldn’t. By God, you have to admit it. The money makes the difference. Then we would be a fine father and son, if I was a credit to you - so you could boast and brag about me all over the hotel. But I’m not the right type of son. I’m too old; I’m too old and too unlucky. (55)

His financial status affects his relationship with his father, wife and with others. Tamkin comments:

Money and Murder both begin with M… Money making is aggression. That’s the whole thing…People come to the market to kill. They say, ‘I’m going to make a killing.’ It’s not accidental. Only they haven’t got the courage to kill, and they erect a symbol of it…They make a killing by a fantasy (69).

Wilhelm wants love and sympathy from his father but his father thinks that he needs money. Wilhelm reflects during one of his desperate attempts to get help from his unsympathetic father, “It isn’t the money, but only the assistance; not even assistance, but just the feeling” (56). He only craves for a feeling of attachment and sympathy. His father’s coldness and indifference creates anxiety in him. On another occasion, during his conversation with his father when Wilhelm tries to discuss his problems with him, his father retorts, “I want you to
understand that I’m too old to take on new burdens… And people who will just wait for help—must wait for help. They have got to stop waiting” (109). His father wishes not to be disturbed by any demands from his son—whether monetary help or emotional or moral support. After observing his father’s attitude, Wilhelm says, “It isn’t all a question of money—there are other things a father can give to a son… one word from you, just a word, would go a long way” (109-10). His father refuses to get involved in his son’s loneliness. He needs money which his father can easily give but he avoids the subject whenever it is mentioned. More than money Wilhelm needs communication with an understanding heart.

Feelings of alienation and anxiety thus occur not only because the individual is set in competition with his fellows, but also because he is thrown into conflict about his inner valuation of himself. As Fromm accurately sums up this point:

Since modern man experiences himself both as the seller and as the commodity to be sold on the market, his self-esteem depends on conditions beyond his control. If he is “successful,” he is valuable; if he is not, he is worthless…. If one feels that one’s own value is not constituted primarily by the human qualities one possesses, but by one’s success on a competitive market with ever-changing conditions, one’s self-esteem is bound to be shaky and in constant need of confirmation by others. (Man for himself 72)

In this way modern man gets embroiled in a vicious circle in which he strives continuously for success which is the main source to validate one’s self and to reduce anxiety. Wilhelm knows that he will have to live up to a certain masculine standard of achievement; otherwise he will not be accepted and this gives rise to anxiety.

When his father taunts him that he doesn’t play the traditional role of a Jewish father, he is hurt. He believes, “In Dad’s eyes I am the wrong kind of Jew. He doesn’t like the way I act. Only he is the right kind of Jew. Whatever you are,
it always turns out to be the wrong kind” (STD 87).

Wilhelm calls on his mother for protection in his confrontation with his father, asks Tamkin for help in freeing himself from his estranged wife, Margaret, and begs his mistress, Olive, to protect him from his enemies. His dead mother represents the only source of unreserved love in his life, but her love cannot protect him from his father’s bitter rejection or his own failure to see himself as he really is. Margaret is depicted as a punishing and revengeful figure determined to revenge upon Wilhelm because of his abandonment of their family.

Thus the novel examines the effect of financial failure on a sensitive individual in a society that evaluates a person’s value exclusively in monetary terms. Like Arthur Miller’s Willie Loman, Wilhelm feels that his identity as a father, husband and son is determined by his financial status. Whenever he needs emotional support, he hears only about his financial mistakes. Tamkin and Margaret also exploit him because of his financial plight. Through subtle touches Bellow indicates the power of money in creating anxiety in man.

Wilhelm is caught in a world which is devoid of hope, one in which there is no caring or affection or no real communication among men. There are no family ties, no compassion, no understanding and no love save frustration. Tommy feels deeply estranged from New York, as he emphasizes time and again; it is violent, ugly and oppressive. He tells his father, “even though I was raised here, Dad, I can’t take city life any more, and I miss the country. There is too much push here for me. It works me up too much. I take things too hard” (44). In times of conflict, Bellow’s heroes long for country life. They feel they can be with their true selves only there as city life is full of distractions. Thus nature giving respite to the heroes suggests transcendentalism.

Bellow’s heroes suggest transcendentalism in later novels. Tommy is helpless to save himself from this alien world where mistrust, cynicism and exploitation dominate people; he is not at home in it, and fears its adverse effect on him which tends to madden him. “Too much of the world’s business done.
Too much falsity. He had various words to express the effect this had on him. Chicken! Unclean! Congestion! He exclaimed in his heart. Rat race! Phony! Murder! Play the Game! Buggers!” (17).

In this atmosphere the only thing which gives Bellow’s hero solace and comfort is memory of his mother’s unconditional love. His mother is the most life-affirming figure who is remembered for her generous love. His feelings of self-respect as a son are based on his mother’s unqualified love and he expects similar acceptance in his relationships with women. In Seize the Day, Wilhelm is accepted neither by his wife nor by his father. As his difficulties intensify he cherishes his childhood memories of his mother. He gets disturbed when he finds the gravestone between his mother and grandmother broken by hoodlums. He wants his father to pay for a new seat, but his father is indifferent to this idea.

Wilhelm is always anxious and feels pressurised to play this or that role. He feels alienated and unable to communicate with others:

What sort of people did you see? Every other man spoke a language entirely his own...he had his own ideas and peculiar ways...You had to translate and translate, explain and explain, back and forth, and it was the punishment of hell itself not to understand or be understood, not to know the crazy from the sane, the wise from the fools, the young from the old or the sick from the well. The fathers were no fathers and the sons no sons. You had to talk with yourself in the daytime and reason with yourself at night. Who else was there to talk to in a city like New York? (83-84)

Thus Seize the Day reflects Saul Bellow’s deep concern for changing values in the modern world and anxiety it creates in individuals. Women exploit males using their legal rights which make men’s lives miserable. Devoid of domestic stability Wilhelm finds it very difficult to confront the changing scenario. Wilhelm witnesses the failure of the American dream by the way his
behaviour is controlled by materialistic values that reduce each human being to an economic entity. Unable to fulfil his masculine role; he feels anxious and helpless. It is only after losing his money that he finds a sense of communion with humanity and a dignity recognized only by those who are aware of man’s ultimate fate, death.

Bellow presents an age of new metropolis in which values are changing at a fast pace. He depicts man in the sex-and-gender wars of the modern age of palimony, often stripped down to size by the female. Bellow’s heroes reassess their roles in homes and society. And if they feel themselves a victim, they are a victim of their own moral sense of right and wrong, their self-evaluation by standards that will inevitably find them lacking in their masculine role. In a changed scenario where women are more powerful and conscious of their rights and where there is conflict of roles, men find themselves enfeebled and emasculated and re-evaluate their roles as man.

Like all Bellow heroes, Herzog also evaluates himself and considers himself a failure in each and every relationship:

He admitted that he had been a bad husband twice. Daisy, his first wife, he had treated miserably. Madeleine, his second, had tried to do him in. To his son and his daughter he was a loving but bad father. To his own parents he had been an ungrateful child. To his country, an indifferent citizen. To his brothers and his sister, affectionate but remote. With his friends, an egotist. With love, lazy….With his own soul evasive. (Herzog 4-5)

According to patriarchal beliefs a male is supposed to play the role of a good father, brother, son and a good husband who takes care of the family. But Herzog is a failure in these roles. He feels anxious as he is unable to play any of these roles expected of him in accordance with masculine standards of American society.
Because of this anxiety, Bellow men try to manifest their masculine credentials. They are scared of the ‘law of the heart’ (*H* 119) though it is in them. Bellow heroes have deep-rooted misconceptions of masculinity and femininity. The fear of emasculation is very strong in them as is evident in Herzog’s reflections when he asks:

To follow this career of personal relationships until his strength at last gave out? Only to be a smashing success in the private realm, a king of hearts? Amorous Herzog, seeking love and embracing his Wandas, Zinkas and Ramonas, one after another? But this is a female pursuit. This hugging and heartbreak is for women. The occupation of a man is in duty, in use, in civility; in politics in the Aristotelian sense. (94)

In the patriarchal society visualised by Bellow men women have little role to play. This is the ideal situation desired by heroes like Joseph and Herzog. Herzog seems to experience the general male anxiety that to be a poet, writer, intellectual or ‘sensitive person’ is actually ‘to be a woman’ (Pradhan 63). The ‘feminine’ is presented in Herzog not in female characters but in the consciousness of the hero, where it resides as a kind of ‘internal woman’ or ‘internal mother’ (Pradhan 63).

The mental obsession of Herzog, his mental suffering, his distressing condition in being a cuckolded husband, his delicacy of feeling, his philosophical reflections adding up to lamentation make him an important figure of the ‘female realm’ of the novel. From this perspective Herzog is more feminine and Madeleine is more powerful and masculine.

Herzog rates himself unsuccessful in keeping with the standards of masculine achievement. He compares himself with his father, “Among the rest was a picture of Father Herzog in his last incarnation- an American citizen- handsome, smooth-shaven, with none of his troubled masculine defiance” (*H* 248). His father was frustrated with Herzog. He questioned him about his job, his
expenses, and his child. He had no tolerance for Herzog, “Papa couldn’t bear such an expression on the face of his youngest son. I aged. I wasted myself in stupid schemes, liberating my spirit” (248).

There are no non-heroes in America, according to American Dream. There are only those who are proving their heroic selves in various ways. “Without a God to comfort those who know the absurdity of this dream, the non-hero has, literally nowhere to exist” (Halldorson 8). Burdened with the demand of a heroic deed, the non-heroes have to confront the fact that they either cannot or do not wish to put themselves out of society. Bellow heroes are also burdened with the pressure to perform in this modern competitive society. Amidst manifold demands they always try to prove their individual selves in such society.

Herzog believes in the dominance of man over woman. He is not bothered about new sex-equation and the changing roles of man and woman. As Joseph MacCadden puts it, “Throughout Bellow’s fiction, different narrator-heroes attack women’s corrupting sexuality as well as their destructive influence on their lives” (9-10).

The problem of Herzog is his inability to lead the family life as per the masculine ideals. He expects Madeleine in subordinate position, looking after household duties. Unfortunately he finds Madeleine completely opposite to his expectation; she is modern and ready to assimilate masculine traits to challenge Herzog in his own house. Madeleine has modern conception of a woman’s life which is beyond the grasp of Herzog. He was offended due to her indifferent attitude, “In the morning she would have liked him to disappear. And he was not used to this; he was used to being a favourite. But he was dealing with a new female generation” (112).

Herzog always wanted Madeleine to feel obliged as he felt that he had given her everything she wanted. Madeleine keenly resented his condescending attitude and during one of their quarrels in the Berkshires she desperately cried,
“So now we’re going to hear how you Saved me” (124). Herzog complained that she was not doing justice to her traditional role as a wife by neglecting her household activities. He cannot tolerate that she did not accept the subservient position he allocated to her. Madeleine was not the sort of wife to switch on to such duties. Instead, she retorted, “It needs four servants and you want me to do all the work” (123). Herzog resented her rebellious posture and felt that he was “a broken down monarch of some kind” (39).

Their divorce puts Herzog off balance. He experiences the humiliation of abandonment by his wife which hurts his male pride very much. This reversal of experiences is certainly shocking to Herzog. But for Madeleine it is the affirmation of her freedom, confidence and power over men. This declaration of women’s independence in the family, even to the extent of breaking the nuptial cord, makes men insecure. An ideal family in the conventional patriarchal lines is always in the minds of Bellow protagonists. They stick to the traditional roles of men in the family and expect other members, the wife and children to be at their command in subordinate roles.

Joseph H. Pleck rightly analyses the power relations between the sexes; men’s power over women, over the other men and men’s power in society in general. Women are used as symbols of success in men’s competition with each other. Sometimes competition for women is considered the ultimate source of men’s competition with each other.

Rejected by Madeleine and deceived by Gersbach, his friend, Herzog is deeply hurt. He is not ready to accept that Madeleine left him for Gersbach. He is also jealous of Shapiro, who is himself a learned scholar, because he appreciates Madeleine’s intelligence. This shows Herzog’s possessiveness. Elizabeth Janeway presents patriarchy in *Between Myth and Morning* as a dual system in which men oppress women and in which men oppress themselves and each other. The patriarchal sexual dynamics of male-male relationships is less obvious than those of male–female relationships and because of this men face a real danger.
In several instances Herzog’s male chauvinism is conspicuous. He doesn’t show any interest in Madeleine’s studies and considers her studies as something against him. He tells Shapiro that he doesn’t know the title of her thesis. Yet he expects Madeleine to know everything concerning the new book he is writing. Madeleine complains that, “he never really listened to her. He wanted to shine all the time” (72) and resented that it was her turn to shine. He considers Shapiro and Madeleine’s intellectual conversation as mere “learned badinage” (76) or small talk. In his jealousy, Herzog thinks that Shapiro is interested in Madeleine’s physical beauty rather than her mind.

His disdainful approach towards her studies compels Madeleine to pursue them more intensely, to prove that she can succeed. Herzog ardently resents that and describes it as a bitter and exaggerated competition between them:

I understood that Madeleine’s ambition was to take my place in the learned world. To overcome me. She was reaching her final elevation, as queen of the intellectuals, the cast-iron bluestocking… Madeleine, by the way, lured me out of the learned world, got in herself, slammed the door, and is still there, gossiping about me (76-77).

As if there were only a single place in the academic world and she has to throw him out, before she can take over his position. Her knowledge is so intimidating to him that he would much have preferred to keep her unlearned. Herzog considered Madeleine’s need for intellectual fulfilment as a compensation and substitute for her lack of emotional fulfilment with him and this fear had probably unconsciously became the reason behind his contempt and hostility towards her studies reflected in his comment, “She has built a wall of Russian books around herself” (59). Madeleine’s cold attitude creates sexual anxiety in him. Herzog feels that his sexual powers have been damaged by Madeleine. He regrets loss of his sexual ability, “And without the ability to attract women, how was he to recover? It was in this respect that he felt most like
a convalescent” (5). Thinking about various women in his life he ponders:

What crooks they were-Madeleine, Zelda…others. Some women didn’t care how badly they damaged you. A girl, in Zelda’s view, had a right to expect from her husband nightly erotic gratification, safety, money, insurance, furs, jewellery, cleaning women, drapes, dresses, hats, night clubs, country clubs, automobiles, theatre! (40)

Madeleine’s influence on Herzog is so powerful that she determines his physical movement during the narrative action. Herzog seems to be in awe of Madeleine. The news of their divorce comes as a shock to Herzog. It became clear to him how well Madeleine had prepared to get rid of him. She threw him out of the house for which he has just signed a lease. When she disclosed the news of divorce to Herzog, she expressed herself with dignity, in that “lovely, masterful style of hers” (8). There was a hint of servitude in his love for Madeleine. Since she was overbearing and since he loved her, he had to accept the flavour that was given. In their confrontation in the untidy parlour, two kinds of egotism were present:

…hers in triumph (she had prepared a great moment, she was about to do what she longed most to do, strike a blow) and his egotism in abeyance, all converted into passivity. What he was about to suffer, he deserved; he had sinned long and hard; he had earned it. This was it. (118)

During their conversation, Herzog listens to Madeleine’s speech submissively:

Step by step, Madeleine rose in distinction, in brilliance, in insight… It occurred to Herzog that she had beaten him so badly, her pride was so fully satisfied, that there was an overflow of strength into her intelligence… She had never looked more glorious. There was an element of theatre in those looks, but much more of passion. (9)
Herzog contrasts his image with Madeleine’s glorious image and feels himself as a passive and helpless person, “In his posture of collapse on the sofa, arms abandoned over his head and legs stretched away, lying with no more style than a chimpanzee” (11). He feels that Madeleine wants to “kick out his brains with a murderous bitch foot” (McCadden 93). In incident after incident she appears as a cold-blooded person. She attacked him one evening “swinging like a street fighter with her knuckles” (H 57) and Herzog accepted her blows as the unreasonable actions of a sick person. Herzog repents and feels that he lowered his standard in marrying Madeleine. He wonders:

This Herzog, this man of many blessings, for some reason had endured a frigid, middlebrow, castrating female in his bed, given her his name and made her the instrument of creation, and Madeleine had treated him with contempt and cruelty as if to punish him for lowering and cheapening himself, for lying himself into love with her and betraying the promise of his soul. (184)

Besides Herzog there are other characters that face apathetic behaviour from their female counterparts. Himmelstein, Herzog’s dwarf lawyer, consoles him with the assurance that his predicament as an exploited husband is rather ordinary for “the bitches come and the bitches go” (80). Even the whores, the traditional objects of sexual pleasure, appear as threatening figures. Like Herzog, Himmelstein also seems to be influenced by Madeleine, “A strong-minded bitch…. Terrifically attractive. Loves to make up her mind. Once decided, decided forever. What a will power. It’s a type” (82). Throughout the novel Herzog, sensitive men are unable to cope with powerful women. Ramona rejects George Hoberly, Aunt Zelda controls Hermann, Madeleine humiliates Herzog and Bea Himmelstein ignores her husband. Even Valdepenas, the cab driver, complains to Herzog about his girl friend that ignores him.

A recurring situation in Bellow’s fiction in general, and in Herzog in particular, is that powerful wives take advantage of the divorce courts to extract
the last penny of financial benefit from a responsible ex-husband. Bellow heroes are unable to adapt themselves to the new sex-equation. Like Wilhelm, Herzog also is afraid of modern and vindictive women. He is afraid of masculine woman like Madeleine and fears that Madeleine will usurp his position as a male. He wants to live in conformity with patriarchal values. The idea of marriage with Ramona makes him think, “he could be a patriarch, as every Herzog was meant to be” (202). Herzog does not want to acknowledge the change of roles. He detests Madeleine’s masculine role and body language, “Madeleine swings her weight like a male. She made all the decisions to take the kid and throw me in the street. She thinks she can be both mother and father” (87). It highlights the conflict of roles of men and women in changed scenario and masculine anxiety it was creating in men.

Herzog was baffled due to Madeleine’s behaviour. He feels humiliated, “As long as I was Mady’s good husband, I was a delightful person. Suddenly I was a mad dog. The police were warned about me and there was talk of committing me to an institution” (35).

Bellow heroes are destined to bear the pressures of the life they lead because the supporting structures of family and religion are not available to them any longer. They become alienated and shattered because there is no certainty and security in their lives. With new sex-equation and consequent changed circumstances, heroes’ minds pose impossible questions and each repeated question riddles the temporary security of their lives.

While trying to recover from the emotional damage of his marriage, Herzog draws strength from his mother’s sacrificial love and wishes that a woman would show the same dedication to his welfare. Another factor which guides Herzog is the philosophy of Judaism. He becomes free of his hatred and obsession with Madeleine when he perceives Madeleine and Gersbach as fellow human beings. It is the spirit of Judaism to accept life as it comes. His mind becomes still with a realization that human life is subtler than its systems. Thus
with this novel an attitude of acceptance towards life’s limitations is seen. Herzog has no messages for anyone in the end. End of the novel also suggests Bellow’s shift towards transcendentalism.

In Bellow’s *Mr Sammler’s Planet*, a scathing attack on women at the beginning of the novel establishes the misogynistic tone of the novel:

Females were naturally more prone to grossness, had more smells, needed more washing, clipping, binding, pruning, grooming, perfuming and training. These poor kids may have resolved to stink together in defiance of a corrupt tradition built on neurosis and falsehood, but Mr Sammler thought that an unforeseen result of their way of life was loss of femininity, of self-esteem. In their revulsion from authority they would respect no persons. Not even their own persons. (*Mr. Sammler’s Planet* 29)

This novel exhibits unconventional women who are free from traditional male-centred roles such as wife and mistress with terrible consequences for society. Sammler, the protagonist, is against the unlimited freedom given to women as a result of the feminist movement that affected the family system negatively. The change in women’s attitude disrupted the traditional patriarchal order of the society. The three main female characters in the novel are lacking in ethical values and feminine qualities. Margotte Arkin is the niece of Mr Sammler on the side of his dead wife Antonina. Margotte ignores the reality of evil in the world and considers it ordinary. Sammler lives with Margotte to avoid the sloppiness of his daughter’s apartment and to remain in touch with Margotte’s dead husband. In Margotte’s house everything that is considered traditional is turned upside down. If femininity is associated with the notion of neatness and clean kitchen, Margotte’s house is just the opposite. Her kitchen, a source of pride for a traditional home maker, is kept so untidy. Her life style is so disorganised that she leaves the windows open, thereby placing the safety of the house at risk. After her husband’s death Margotte became a political theorist. She
spoke in her husband’s name. Like other Bellow heroes, Sammler too undermines the intellectual potential of women. He considers woman’s desire to outdo the traditional female role not instrumental in the maintenance of the family system. Sammler’s judgement of Margotte elucidates his typical attitude to women: “She talked junk, she gathered waste and junk in the flat, and she bred junk” (15).

The second female character is Shula, Sammler’s daughter, who represents the modern woman obsessed with self-gratification. She involves her father in her theft of Dr Lal’s manuscript. On being asked about the morality of her deed she shows no guilt feeling. While Sammler defends traditional moral values, Shula articulates a set of guidelines that justify the commission of any crime. While his daughter is guided by her chaotic modern rules Sammler is not able to play the traditional role of a Jewish father. Instead of guiding his daughter, he is forced to play the role of a spectator in the family.

Third female character Angela, Dr Elya Gruner’s daughter, symbolises the licentious modern ways that are responsible for the abrasion of the family values. She transforms her sexuality into a psychological weapon to humiliate men. She reverses the traditional role of woman in her sexual exploits. Angela refuses to show her grief over her dying father and tells Sammler that she cannot play “old-time deathbed scene” (254). He is shocked to see that modern people can indulge in different types of sexual behaviour but cannot come to terms with one’s father at the last opportunity. Sammler detests the sexual madness of the 60s. He is shocked to see the casualness, frequency and meaninglessness of sexual relationships. Throughout the novel, the sexual freedom of modern Americans is depicted as debasing animal lust. Both Sammler and Wallace, Angela’s brother, have negative views about women. Wallace comments about women, “But you know you can’t trust them. They are animals, aren’t they?” and Sammler replies, “Temporarily there is an animal emphasis” (152). Wallace calls Angela ‘swine’ and considers modern women lustful and raunchier than men. He tells Sammler that Angela does not have attachment for any body, “Nobody is so
special. Angela represents the realism of race, which is always pointing out that wisdom, beauty, glory, courage in men are just vanities and her business is to beat down the man’s legend about himself” (154). Angela describes her personal life to Sammler without restraint, in direct terms. She carries a great statement to males, the powerful message of gender. Sammler sympathizes with Wharton Horricker, Angela’s boyfriend, understanding the misleading and corrupting influence of Angela on him. Sammler calls this young, ‘sex-crazy’ generation “the Pepsi generation” that wants to be happy and pleasure giving. Even Elya Gruner, Angela’s father uses abusive language for his daughter. Talking about Wallace, Angela also confesses her nature before Sammler, “I was so slutty that he became frightened of girls” (125). It is natural for the young generation to behave obscenely. Sammler wonders how this generation is indulging in such unusual relationships. He laments that the things poor professional once had to do for a living, performing for bachelor parties, ordinary people are doing just to be sociable. He is amazed to see changed attitude towards sexual relationships and comments, “I can’t really say what it’s all about. Is it may be some united effort to conquer disgust? Or to show that all repulsive things in history are not so repulsive? … Is it an effort to ‘liberalize’ human existence and show that nothing that happens between people is really loathsome?” (130).

This novel seems to be different from previous novels. The protagonist of the novel, being a septuagenarian and having more experience of life, seems to be accepting and accommodating in his attitude towards women and towards life. It is through other male characters that we discern the masculine anxiety they feel. Sammler is more like a spectator. While the world anticipates the first lunar landing, Sammler finds himself fascinated by the possibilities of future. Through his communication with the young individuals in the novel he tries to re-examine the soul-slaying egocentricity of impersonal sexuality and material greed, and edges closer toward empathy with his fellow human beings. He tries to make them realize the goodness of responsible love but it seems to be futile. In the end he rationalizes the modern condition by thinking about Elya Gruner. He feels that
Elya knew the terms of his contract and fulfilled it. In the same way everybody knows the terms of his contract.

Same kind of anxiety regarding modern relationships is found in *More Die of Heartbreak*. It deals with the distortions in modern human relationships and failure of modern marriages despite gender compromises. Kenneth Trachtenberg, the protagonist, is a 35 year old assistant professor of Russian literature at a university in the Midwest’s rust-belt. Having grown up in Paris, he has come to America yearning for meaning of life in contemporary world and to be near his uncle, Benn Crader, a distinguished Botanist who teaches at the same university. Kenneth considers Benn a visionary, “one of those passionate natures who long to find and see what perhaps does not exist on earth” (*MDH* 141). Unfortunately, Benn’s aptitude for contemplation and unconditional love do not help him in confronting contemporary life and particularly modern women. As Kenneth puts it, “The higher the range of vision, the more your control is weakened” (262). Benn is a ‘sex-abused’ and ‘woman-battered man’ (54-55), “a visionary with the plants, a dud with women” (306). Kenneth has come to Benn to seek transcendental wisdom and at the same time to protect Benn from bad effect of his sexual entanglements with women. In this mutually dependent relationship, Kenneth believes that they are on a special mission: to bring to human life, the visionary gifts Benn brought to plant life, “to transpose his magical powers from botany to love” (330). As Stephen L. Tanner observes, the gap between intellectual achievement and blundering practical behaviour has interested Bellow for a long time (*Religious Vision* 287). Among the problems of living as a transcendental person in contemporary America, the novel picks out “the demon of sexuality” (*MDH* 23) because it is the only realm where the gap within the single person between intelligent achievement and irrational blundering is so dramatically apparent. As Kenneth perceives, “Once you get into the erotic life, modern style, you are accelerated till your minutest particles fly apart” (240). Benn, though an intellectual person, is “unable to manage his sexual needs, or to be more accurate, his love longings” (278).
Both Kenneth and Benn find modern relationships devoid of love and compassion and also very different from previous times. Pondering over changed relationships Kenneth observes: “Free and liberal sexual contacts have now become conventional… Behaviours that would once have been wild are now no more exceptional than setting the table for a family supper” (83). Thus people who want to invest genuine feelings in relationships and expect love and compassion in return remain confused in modern times. Benn and Kenneth feel masculine anxiety as they feel themselves incapable of managing their relationships and confront modern women not appreciating their love. Talking about modern times Kenneth explains new aspect of sexual relationships to Benn, “Whatever troubles people run into, they look for the sexual remedy. Whether it is business, a career problem, character difficulties, doubts about one’s body, even metaphysics, they turn to sex as analgesic” (86). Kenneth says people in modern times indulge in these relationships hoping it will transmit love, but “love would be transmitted if there were any” (86).

Kenneth is a classical misogynist who regards women as traditional witches. The philosophy of Kenneth is concerned with the dissuasion of men from marriage and also from the company of women. He discourages Benn, his uncle, from marrying Matilda Layamon. Bachelorhood is valued as morally and spiritually superior to marriage. Bellow manifests Kenneth’s hatred towards the opposite sex. Kenneth becomes furious when uncle Benn secretly marries Matilda Layamon. Before marrying Matilda, Benn had a list of failed relationships. And at the time of commitment, he runs away from every relationship. In relationship with Caroline Bunge, with whom he planned marriage and who gave Benn her flight number and arrival time and made all arrangements for marriage, he ran away to Kyoto. Kenneth says about Caroline that he warned Benn against Caroline Bunge, “She was very handsome but she spelled trouble” (75). Benn was ashamed of his undignified escape from Caroline. After Caroline Bunge, Benn involved himself with a lady called Della Bedell, divorced wife of an alcoholic, who suffered from repressed sexuality and
tried to have relationship with Benn. Kenneth comments that in this sexually
crazy modern world people try to keep pace with changing scenario and women
also don’t want to be left behind in sexual matters, “There are women who are
driven to daring invention, and come on with dazzling initiatives. Others, fearing
to be left behind to sink and drown, make desperate but senseless moves” (88).
Della Bedell also makes a desperate move and is not able to tolerate Benn’s
rejection. Showing her frustration she writes to Benn, “When do I get my chance
to live?” And: “What am I supposed to do with my sexuality?” (86) Della
Bedell’s anguished cry, “What am I supposed to do with my sexuality?”
resounds throughout the novel, becoming in its reverberations the distressed
question of a secular age in which love has degenerated into sexual mechanics.
Della Bedell’s episode haunts Benn throughout the novel. Benn blames himself
and pities Della Bedell. But he is unable to face this situation and escapes to
Brazil. Benn recalls this incident time and again and gets disturbed, “I see her
suffocated by swollen longings. Poor thing, her heart gave out” (87). Kenneth
tries to comfort him making him realize the changed equation between men and
women, “women are allowed to be more aggressive now. But when they are
rebuffed it’s terrible for them. It used to go the other way, women saying no to
men. The men became accustomed to it” (86). Benn’s masculine anxiety is
shown in his escape to Brazil to avoid Della-episode. Talking about the absurd
sexuality of his times Kenneth observes, “There are very few people willing to
declare themselves out of the running. Stop running, and you join the consensus
of the dead. Hence the sexual craziness in the moves and motives of men and
women…they are continually trying something on” (211). In describing Benn’s
encounter with Della Bedell, Kenneth tells him, “talk about slavery and freedom”
(85). Slavery and Freedom is a book by a Russian writer Berdyaev, whose
chapter titled “The Erotic Lure and Slavery: Sex, Personality and freedom” is
strikingly congruent with Kenneth’s view of sexuality. Like Berdyaev and other
Russian sexual mystics, Kenneth views modern sexuality as immoral and either
trivial or destructive because of lack of transcendental element. The Japanese
strip show and the rape hearing in the novel are both intended to show the
degradation of sex on the “literal” level.

The deterioration of sex by literalness or the denial of transcendent is indicative of contemporary American society in general. Benn proves extremely susceptible to ‘love-longings’ and their peculiarly modern distortions (278). When in his mid-fifties, Benn suffers an onrush of erotic longing- impulses that Rudiberg, Kenneth’s father, is skilled at handling- he impulsively marries Matilda Layamon, a woman much younger than himself. Unfortunately, the marriage brings him neither peace nor love. By marrying the wrong woman Benn also embroils himself in her family. Involving his son-in-law in a financial manoeuvre designed to yield millions of dollars, Dr Layamon makes Benn realize value of his daughter and price he has to pay in marrying her, “If you are going to share the bed of this delicious girl of high breeding and wallow in it, you’ll have to find the money it takes… We think you could be made whole (MDH 171). In trying to make Benn ‘whole’ both Matilda and her father shatter his psychic well being. Benn’s vision is in fact, acutely impaired by his entry into Layamon family and his descent into the chaos of American greed, ambition and desire.

The dominant goal of competitive success carries over to become the individual’s goals in his personal relationships also. Horney has excellently described this phenomenon:

It must be emphasized that competitiveness, and the potential hostility that accompanies it, pervades all human relationships. Competitiveness is one of the predominant factors in social relationships. It pervades the relationships between men and men, between women and women, and whether the point of competition be popularity, competence, attractiveness or any other social value, it greatly impairs the possibilities of reliable friendship. It also as already indicated disturbs the relations between men and women, not only in the choice of the partner but in the entire struggle with
him for superiority. *(Neurotic Personality of our Time* 284)

They are not, however, entirely to blame “Benn had wanted to come down, he had a special wish to enter into prevailing states of mind and even, perhaps, into the peculiar sexuality associated with such states” (165-66). By insisting that his attraction for Matilda’s captivating beauty is love, Benn undergoes his version of the West’s current “ordeal of desire”- implicating him in the “fallen state” in which, says Ken, “our species finds itself” (100, 19). Residing in “the absence of love” and attempting to compensate for “inner poverty” with “sexual enchantments,” contemporary humanity is in dire crisis (241, 118,155). As Citrine perceives in Humboldt’s Gift, plenty of people are “oppressed to the point of heartbreak” *(HG* 350).

To a journalist who interviews Benn about the “dangers of radioactivity from Three Mile Island and Chernobyl,” Benn makes the unexpected reply which suggests novel’s title and its central theme: “It’s terribly serious, of course, but I think more people die of heartbreak than of radiation” *(MDH* 87). Implicit in Benn’s unconventional statement is his perception of two invisible yet deadly forces. While science has made the first one clear to us—warning of the terrible dangers produced by extreme levels of radiation— the lethal condition of “heartbreak” cannot be detected by instruments. As invisible to the naked eye as radiation, the misery of ‘human impoverishment’ is registered, Bellow makes clear, not by scientific instrument but within human heart. Benn tells the newsman, “Sorrow at heart killeth full many a man. And it is a safe guess that there are more deaths from heartbreak than from atomic radiation. Yet there are no mass movements against heartbreak, and no demonstrations against it in the streets” (197).

Not only Kenneth but Dr Layamon, Matilda’s father is also is critical of her, “From childhood—hell, from birth!—she was demanding, moody, contrary, tetchy, a complainer and a schemer (136). Benn is so uncomfortable in his relationships that he becomes a kind of runaway groom. First, he runs away from
Caroline Bunge, second, from Della Bedell and finally he is afraid of marrying Matilda Layamon. When he watches a horror movie with Matilda he compares her with a murderer. Merging Matilda with Tony Perkins playing a psychopath was a deadly move and it seemed to paralyze Benn. This vision in the movie house suggested him not to marry Matilda Layamon. Like Kenneth, Benn also have negative thoughts about Matilda. He fears that he might harm Matilda. “I couldn’t bear to think what might happen in the night. Sometimes people are violent in the sleep and do horrible things. What if I were to do something terrible while unconscious?” (237). Benn was not himself with Doctor Layamon and Matilda. He told Kenneth, “Matilda and Doctor feel that I should be made whole” (196). Benn was carrying an unfamiliar and heavy burden. After marriage Benn feels that Matilda was very different from the lady he courted. With Layamons he felt, “out of his milieu, out of his depth, under orders not to speak.” (145). Describing his position in Layamons’ house he tells Ken, “It’s all Matilda. I’m hardly ever in the picture. Every evening he turns up at the dinner in the role of the botanical professorial bridegroom” (147). Benn is so terrified of Matilda’s presence that he feels, “he was burdened, bowed to the ground by the weight of Matilda Layamon’s shoulders, which were heavier than solid bronze” (243). Matilda does not meet Benn’s expectations. Her attempt to use Benn to gain money is the example of love in its degenerated contemporary forms. The meaning of human love and connection between love and sex are the themes of this novel. Instead of seeking love and compassion in relationships, “men and women are determined to get out of one another (or tear out) what is simply not to be gotten by any means” (161).

Besides the influence of modern women another thing which creates masculine anxiety in Bellow’s heroes is their relationship with their fathers. Like most of Bellow heroes Kenneth is also not a favourite of his father and it creates anxiety in him. Fathers expect masculine role from sons. They expect that sons should be responsible for the family and children. Kenneth’s father resents his attachment to his maternal uncle Benn. It is from Benn that Kenneth hopes to
learn something of the “higher spheres” of existence, knowledge to which Ken’s natural father, Rudi Trachtenberg, is wholly indifferent. An American expatriate who remained in Paris after the Second World War, Ken’s father is a cosmopolitan whose many accomplishments belong strictly to the sexual and social spheres of life. In “tennis, (his) war record…in sex, in conversation, in looks,” Rudi Trachtenberg is, according to Kenneth, an unqualified success. Rudi is an embodiment- a ‘Hegelian…Master Spirit” (65). “The historical thing which millions of sex-intoxicated men were trying to do and botching, he did with the ease of a natural winner” (137).To Kenneth’s dad, Benn was incompetent and one of his weaknesses was his complicated relationship with women. Kenneth disappoints his father in terms of success, “The natural desire is for a son who will take up where you left off and advance along the same front. He wouldn’t say it in so many words, but I suspect that sexually he considered me a kind of wraith” (40). He is concerned about his family life and often asks about the little daughter Kenneth had by Treckie, his girl friend. Kenneth’s father’s motive was to draw him away from his uncle. Being a husband and a father would have reduced his need for an uncle. His father lays emphasis on his role as a husband and makes him aware of his duties, “What you do for him, you should be doing for a wife and for your little girl” (41). In patriarchal system role of a man is very different and Kenneth doesn’t meet the masculine standards according to the tenets of patriarchy.

With his uncle Benn, Kenn shares a disposition for ineffective and “confused relations with women”; he cannot even convince Treckie, the ‘childlike’ but wilful young woman he loves, to marry him. Ken is conscious of his lack of sexual talent. He reflects that it is the hidden defects that make the worst trouble for you. What he has in mind is his sexual inferiority to his father, the “phallic cross” he had to carry (189). He makes an effort “to right the balance” by giving himself “more mental weight.” Yet Ken thinks this effort of compensating mentally for the lack of sexual power to be futile and laments, “how far we’ve fallen below the Classical Greek standard. We have split things in two, dividing the physique from the mind” (39-40). Ken seeks to mend this
'split’ and wants to realize his ‘soul in the making’ (37). He remains confused and self-conscious in his relationship with Treckie. He is unable to understand Treckie’s true nature and comments, “Treckie was clever-either very clever or playing by clever rules, those different rules based on the…foreign assumptions of a new generation of young women” (64). Treckie likes rough treatment in love and Ken is not able to satisfy her according to her weird expectations. He observes, “If I treated her kindly, she might not care for it. All I could do in the circumstances was what I knew how to do, and I can’t say how satisfactory this was. There are women who like to keep you in the dark” (64). Ken’s masculine anxiety is exhibited as he is unable to understand Treckie’s behaviour and what she wants. He presumes, “she knew that the more difficult she was, the more I would yearn towards her. And to her, as to my dad, I may have been a sexual wraith” (71). Considering the fact that Treckie has a child with him he feels she loves him. But when she rejects his marriage proposal he is not able to understand her refusal. He tells his friend Dita what another character Fishl says about modern women’s expectations regarding an ideal man, “it was a common feminine fantasy to put together an ideal man. No real person has everything they dream of, so they assemble parts and elements from here and there” (255). So Kenneth feels it was not easy on his part to satisfy Treckie. Like Herzog Kenneth also has violent fantasies regarding Treckie. When he realizes that Treckie is not affected by what he feels and does not hold herself responsible for him, he imagines punishing her for this behaviour, “What I wanted was to catch the next flight to Seattle and kick some sense into Treckie” (204).

When he discusses Treckie, with his father, his father makes a comment upon women’s strange behaviour, “We don’t know women son. Not even after a lifetime of observation, practically research. Science itself is ignorant in this branch of knowledge” (65). Kenneth considers women as trouble-giving creatures. He discusses modern distorted relations and frivolous attitude of modern women towards love. An old professor Komatsu in Kyoto tells Benn that Americans who search docile wives in Kyoto often are disappointed. After a year or so in the US the ladies are Americanized. Roles are reversed. In a short while, the man might become the attendant when the wife commanded him.
Ken comes to his uncle for guidance but ironically he finds Benn also is a victim of divided consciousness. As Ken says, “I had come to America to complete my education, to absorb certain essential powers from Uncle, and I learned presently that he was looking to me for assistance” (92). Even before Benn Crader’s disastrous marriage with Matilda Layamon and his following “fall” he has gone on record affirming the universal need for love and the ‘heartbreak’ brought on by its absence.

Like Herzog, Ken Trachtenberg, admits that he “used to be sold on” theories and ideas but “discovered that they were nothing but trouble if you entertained them indiscriminately” (19). There are some “matters”- including the “matter” of Uncle Benn’s “fall”- “for which theorizing brings no remedy” (19). Ken’s partial deafness directly links him to Arthur Sammler, whose partial blindness symbolizes the Bellovian hero’s divided consciousness, vacillating between the “superstructures of explanation” and the soul’s “natural knowledge” (47). Ken contemplates, “Modern life, if you take it to heart, wears you out” (118).

Benn and Kenneth discuss modern relationships and talk about absence of heart in the matters of love. Kenneth wonders what if Matilda is not the woman of Benn’s heart. There are people who advise you to leave the heart in the matters of relationships. It shouldn’t figure. It is untrustworthy. “In some cases the heart takes early retirement… Everybody pays the heart lip service, but everybody is more familiar with the absence of love than with its presence and gets so used to the feeling of emptiness that it becomes ‘normal’ (241). Kenneth agrees with Benn that more people die of heartbreak yet nobody organizes against it. Both of them are dissatisfied and troubled with women in their relationships.

The gradual dissolution of Matilda’s image in Benn’s eyes- and his attempts, at the same time, to deny his troubling ‘visions’- ultimately brings about his ‘fall’ from ‘whole’ vision into ‘critical consciousness’ (265). Benn’s
‘fallen state’ is shockingly revealed to the ‘plant clairvoyant’ one night at the Layamons, luxurious duplex. During his temporary stay at his wife’s house, Benn used to derive inspiration from a ‘red azalea,’ from afar, in his mother-in-law’s study. One day when he enters the study to his shock and dismay, he finds that this exquisite plant is actually a fake— a cunning silk replica wrought by Oriental hands. In shock, Benn telephones Kenneth, in the middle of the night, to report this terrible news:

I was drawing support for weeks and weeks from this manufactured product. Every time I needed a fix, a contact, a flow, I turned to it. Me, Kenneth! After all these years of unbroken rapport, to be taken in…. The one thing I could always count on. My occupation, my instinct, my connection… broken off. (300)

To Benn this fatal error is much more than a ‘sign’ of professional failure. He blames himself for having disconnected not only from plant kingdom but from the inner kingdom of his essential self. He feels that he has been punished for betraying his profession: “I’ve been punished, Kenneth. For all the false things I did, a false object punished me” (300). Having deviated from his original nature he is duped by a fake.

Kenneth feels that in modern times individuals’ feelings and frustrations are not important. Individuals are only part of a larger whole. At one point in the novel, Kenneth feels “People like ourselves weren’t part of the main enterprise. The main enterprise was America itself, and the increase of its powers. Submission to those powers made something of you” (194).

Despite their negative experiences with modern women and modern world, both Benn and Kenneth try to find their own ways out of these problems and to find a solution, however small that may be. Kenneth expresses his goal of life:

Inner communion with the great human reality was my true occupation, after all. It was a field without much competition, so
few took it up. I did it out of conviction that it was the only worthwhile enterprise around...unless you made your life a turning point, there was no reason for existing. (188)

Kenneth’s taking care of Dita unconditionally shows his effort to make human relationships meaningful. Benn also tries to avoid involving himself in the materialistic world and tries to be original instead of ‘fake’. Schlossberg, a character in *The Victim*, emphasizes that it is wrong to be ‘less than human’ and ‘more than human’ and says that it is necessary to choose dignity and be human. Man has to find a way between “claustrophobia of consciousness” (33) and “hyperactive but unfocused consciousness”. Man cannot survive by suffocating his feelings in his own heart. Benn agrees with Kenneth that in the matter of love “everybody is on a separate system...And in every breast there’s a glacier that has to be melted, otherwise love can’t circulate” (192). In the same way man cannot survive without feeling and compassion. In the case of these extremes of consciousness, it is not a matter of simply locating some middle point between scarcity and overabundance of thought. A balanced consciousness is dependent on the transcendent. In his later novels Bellow tries to solve the problems of this world on a transcendental level. In the same way Bellow suggests in this novel that whether it is sexual problems or other problems of modern world man can find a solution on a transcendental level leaving behind limitations of this world.

Bellow’s novels exhibit a gradual change in his heroes’ outlook towards women, and how they deal with masculine anxiety. Mid-twentieth century witnessed a drastic change in the status of women. Roles of men and women reversed. Women entered once exclusive domains of men and consequently a new sex-equation emerged. Men lost their domestic authority. The empowerment of women brought a cultural change in society. The male chauvinism was challenged by the new ideology. Men felt a need to prove their masculinity but in the changed scenario they lost the opportunities to play their masculine role. It was not only an issue of unemployment and power in society which troubled men, their existence as men was threatened which provoked a lot of anxiety in
them. The tradition of Judaism supports patriarchy and in patriarchal system males are considered superior and women are placed in a subordinate position. Being a Jew Bellow has high regard for family life and the hegemonic patriarchal order. But Bellow is a visionary writer who understands the changing scenario and its demands. He explores the means to inhabit this world on equal terms with women. Initially most of Bellow’s heroes are reluctant to treat the women as equals. They are not able to deal with the conflict of roles in changed scenario. They are in a condition of shock and exhibit their dissatisfaction, anger and aggression. They are so baffled due to new sex-equation that they deny it and resist it. They search different ways as defence mechanisms to escape the changed situation.

To escape this situation Joseph in *Dangling Man* takes shelter in the authority of army. Unable to face the conflict of roles at home where his wife has become the breadwinner and he has lost his domestic authority; he accepts the atmosphere of army based on patriarchal values. He finally surrenders his freedom which creates anxiety and uncertainty in him and which he is unable to use. He feels relieved in the end after getting rid of his responsibility. In *Seize the Day*, Wilhelm’s wife exploits him by using divorce laws. He does not feel at home in the competitive and aggressive atmosphere of city life where the individual’s value as a person depends upon his competitive victory and individual is evaluated as a saleable commodity. As Wilhelm is unable to perform his masculine role expected of him by the American society, he feels anxious and alienated. It is only through his confrontation with death that he identifies with whole humanity. The shift in hero’s attitude from repulsion towards acceptance can be seen clearly in *Herzog*. Initially he is very vindictive in his attitude towards Madeleine but gradually he becomes free from Madeleine’s obsession. He sees his problem in a larger canvas. In the end he seems to be at peace with himself in natural surroundings. It also suggests Bellow’s move towards transcendentalism. In *Mr Sammler’s Planet*, right from the beginning Sammler, the protagonist seems to be accommodating women’s
point of view. It is through young male characters that we come to know about masculine anxiety males feel in contemporary society. Sammler shows empathetic attitude towards women. He tries to make them realize value of responsible love. He tries to see the life from a broader perspective.

Thus Bellow’s heroes gradually move from hegemonic masculinity towards soft masculinity accommodating women’s views and demands. Bellow’s constant concern is the dignity of self and possibility of human in modern life. He has belief in the power of individuality and his male characters are open to the possibility of growth.

The next chapter explains the cultural anxiety of the characters which they face in contemporary society.