Chapter – VI
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CHAPTER VI

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN'S SUFFERINGS

The treatment of Indian women in each and every house is pathetic due to male domination. The subordination of women in general has been world wide but Indian women suffer more than any thing else in particular. From early period women have been revered and given equal status and in course of time they have become an object of oppression. Gandhi explains the position of women from the first to the last in this way: “From being co-equal and co-sharer and help-mate she has become his subordinate-mere chattel to be used at will, satisfying his wants with no rights or will of her own” (III).

Mulk Raj Anand and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai in many of their novels expose the basic conflict of the traditional attitude of man-woman relationship and the pitiable of sufferings done by men on women. They consider the sufferings of women as social injustice by stronger and more experienced men-folk. They have raised their voice against the grieved unjust practices done against women. They choose many women characters to serve this purpose.
In this way Anand, Cowasjee avers, "turned to non-political themes such as the exploitation of women in Hindu society" (154).

In the same way Pillai too moves away from the region of practical politics and concentrated on matters of great human concerns. He probes not only into the political and private life of his protagonists but also exposes the subhuman status of Indian women who are considered to be enslaved and exploited. This is evident from the words of Premila Paul about woman: "She is like an un-paid domestic servant, subjected to perpetual torture by a demanding husband, a ruthless mother-in-law and a nagging sister-in-law" (99).

Though Anand's main focus in his early novels is on the plight of Indian proletariat, he gives adequate attention to the cause of women through his forceful presentation of certain abuses against their freedom and security. His intention is to bring out the inequitable social practices on women. In Untouchable, though Bakha is at the core of the novel, his sister Sohini appears meek and patient. Women suffer not only through men but also through women. They have to face
a lot of hardships and abuses from women also. At the time of getting water from the well the washer woman, Gulabo, insults and scolds Sohini, "you illegally begotten!...You bitch of a sweeper women" (17).

In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Anand provides a sexually starved cruel man, Reggie Hunt, who exploits the women workers in Assam Tea Estate. Anand brings out an insight into the miserable condition of the women workers in India through Narain's description of Reggi Hunt, The Assistant Manager of the Machpherson tea estate, and the plight of coolie women in Assam Tea Estate: "He is very badmash Sahib. He is always drunk. And he has no consideration for anyone's mother or sister. He is openly living with three coolie women" (42). The workers are either lashed or imprisoned when they refuse to offer their wives to Reggie Hunt. This is evident from the words of Narain: "The coolie from Ranchi was lashed, because he refused to give his wife to the Ashashtant platner. The Sahib had Ranbir imprisoned, and took his wife" (171). The women are prone to the blatant sexual assaults of their employers. Anand depicts the fear of the sahib in the minds' of the women workers in the following
line: "The coolie women shuffled like hens at the arrival of a much dreaded cock" (42).

In Untouchable, the working women even in temple are not spared by men who call themselves as priests. Anand portrays the hypocrisy of the holy priest who tries to molest Sohini but resents the presence of Bakha in the temple. Sohini explains the indecent incident in detail to her brother: "He-e-e just teased me... and then when I was bending down to work, he came and held me by my breasts" (54).

The expression of Sujatha is apt to describe the pathetic condition of the women and the coarse behaviour of the priest: "After the molestation of Sohini by Pandit Kali Nath, Bakha was in distress and anger but he could not react for the latter belonged to the upper caste" (60). Bakha curses the priest and thinks of his sister that she should not have been born at all, "So beautiful; So beautiful and so accursed. I wish she had been the ugliest women in the world. Then no one would have teased her!...Oh, God, why was she born, why she born" (57).
In *Two Peasants of Rice* too, there is a brutal violation of Chirutha's modesty. The women folk of serfs - the Pulayis and Parayis always live under the threat of the violation of their honour by the upper class people. Chirutha narrates the incident detailing what Chacko has done, "Chirutha showed her chest to Mariya. It bore signs of nail scratches. The edge of her loin-cloth was also ripped. But she struggled herself free from Chacko's grip and fled" (62). This is a tip of an iceberg that the Pulaya and Pariah girls always live in constant fear of rape.

This kind of molestation is seen in the novel *Two Leaves and a Bud* also. Reggie Hunt is an embodiment of evil who is so lustful and exploit the working women and their daughters sexually. He does not leave any body's wife or daughter unmolested. One day he finds Gangu's daughter, Leila, plucking leaves all alone. He advances towards her and tries to put his hand round her waist. But she escapes from his clutches and runs away from him. Reggie's passionate feelings are shown by Anand in this way:

The fierce passionate resolve he had made to leave her at all costs mingled with the summer's
prime and covered him with sweat. His whole body was tinged with the glow of heat in whose aura he could see the girl fluttering in the excitement of her despair. (273)

Leila's struggle in the python's grip is an anticipatory image that foreshadows the doom that she has to face at the hands of Reggie the human python. As she gathers fuel in the forest for the hearth fires of her father's home, Leila is in the grip of python. Anand narrates that even the animal in the forest also against the women: "It seemed that she would never be able to extricate herself from the snake's terrible embrace, and she cried... with a sudden deliberation and pressed the scythe upwards. The sharp blade of the instrument bruised the python" (163-64). She escapes from the coil of the snake.

Though the novel, Two Measures of Rice, has central theme of revolution, the plight of the oppressed women is discernible. For instance, Pillai attracts the attention of the readers to the miserable condition of the women workers in the paddy fields of Kuttanad. Mariya says, "there wasn't a parayi or Pulai who was touched by anyone except her own
husband. But today our girls have their eyes on the young Thambarans” (70).

In general, women play a second fiddle in the male-dominated Indian society. But there are some women who want to voice against the sufferings. Through Chirutha, Pillai also shows how such women become aware of the need to rise against such inhuman treatment meted out to them. Chirutha argues with her husband about the right of the women: “We too, have our problems...Even the young Paraya girls have a right to live. I'm also ready to go to jail” (90). Chirutha wants to become the leader of the Pariah women. She even thinks of setting up a separate association for women to remedy the problems of women. Sohini, Bakha's sister in Unotuchable, and Chirutha, Koren's wife in Two Measures of Rice, are characters with their own distinctive personalities. The experiences which they encounter depict the sad plight of women community.

In Untouchable, the temple priest after the molestation of Sohini escapes from the anger of the public. His trump card is untouchability. Sohini elaborates to Bakha: “When I screamed, he came out shouting that he had been defiled”
Bakha is unable to bear such a painful experience in his life. He wants to take vengeance on the priest: “I will go and kill him! And he rushed blindly towards the courtyard” (55). At last he gives up the idea of killing him because the serfdom of thousands of years has humbled him.

In Two Leaves and a Bud, the villain, Reggie too escapes from the clutches of law after killing Gangu. At the time of trying to molest her, Leila evades from Reggie. Frustrated Reggie shoots blindly and the bullet kills the oncoming Gangu who comes there to rescue his daughter. Reggie is brought up for judgement on the charge of murder. But the jury unanimously declares a verdict, “you are discharged” (276). On the contrary in Two Measures of Rice, Chacko dies at the hands of Koren when he tries to rape Koren’s wife Chirutha, “Chacko was battered to death” (99). In Anand’s Untouchable and Two Leaves and a Bud the villains, the priest, Pandit Kali Nath and Reggie escape unhurt even after doing crime against women. But in Pillai’s Two Measures of Rice Chacko is killed for his shameful act against Chirutha. It is clearly seen that women are taken to task, humiliated
and suffered at the hands of cruel men wherever they are—in
hut, in the forest and even in the temple.

Undoubtedly, the main theme of *The Big Heart* is
industrial revolution. But it surveys the problems of social
and cultural perspectives of the common people. This can be
seen at the beginning of the novel, which centres round the
concerns of fraternity of coppersmiths. As in *Two Measures
of Rice*, Chirutha and Koren fight for the cause of the
workers, Anand, in *The Big Heart*, presents Ananta and
Janki with great importance. Their common sympathy for the
downtrodden masses of people brings Ananta and Janki
together. Janki, like Chirutha, was an active member of the
feminist movement in Bombay before she comes to Ananta's
native village along with him. Ananta's concern for the female
victim of society is clear from what he says about the poor
woman in Bombay, "And you could buy a girl and run a
brothel for what you and I still give here for a mid-day meal"
(28). It is the social set up which has to be blamed for making
a woman a prostitute. Anand depicts Ananta as a man of the
senses, roused by what he sees and feels rather than calmly
persuaded by learning.
In *The Big Heart*, Anand expresses the authentic pictures of the Indian women through the words of Janki:

And, though I try not to think of people bitterly, I have certainly began to think clearly of all those who deny us freedom. First of all my parents, who created me not because they loved each other but because they loved each other but because they considered it a duty, and who regarded me, when I was born, as a curse because I was a girl. (74)

The poet, Puran Singh, too gives a similar account of the wretched life of captivity and slavery which an Indian woman is doomed to live in a tradition-bound society:

Look at the souls trapped in the airless kitchens of the old houses, think of them sweating before the uneven fires of wood-sticks and cow-dung fuel, think of yourself, and then, rubbing the metal utensils with ashes to clean the soiled pots after every meal—not souls but slaves. (84)
The wretched existence of Indian women is aptly described by Ananta as well as the poet. All the evil forces prevent them from freely asserting their individually as a human being. The poet exhorts: “Think of the Women of Europe, released from the dark prisons which men’s blindness has made of homes everywhere. At least those European women are getting to know that they are half dead and are trying to come alive” (84).

The women in foreign countries enjoy more freedom. This is evident from Anand’s observation of the better position of European women who are free to enjoy life and free from inhibitions, when compared with their counterparts in India finds elaborate expression in his *Across the Black Waters*. For instance, Lalu is shown as evidently surprised by taking notice of this striking contrast:

Lalu could not keep his eye off the smiling, pretty-frocked girls with breasts half showing, bright and gleaming ... Such contrast to the sedate Indian women who seemed to grow old before they were young, flabby and tired... Why even the matrons here were dressed up and not content to
remain unadorned like Indian wives, who thought that there was a greater dignity in neglecting themselves after they had a child or two. (13)

Both Anand and Pillai depict the sufferings of women in a significant way. “For the artist in Pillai, woman was the most favourite subject” (66). This is clear from the large number of novels and short stories he has written with women as his main subject. His novels present a great variety of women characters ranging from prostitute, mother, sister and wife and their untold sufferings.

Among Anand’s fictional works, according to Saros Cowasjee, “The Old Woman and the Cow, is the only one of Anand’s novels to have a woman as its central character; it is also his one novel to present the woman’s point of view” (157). The Private Life of an Indian Prince is another novel of Anand which deals elaborately with man-woman relationship highlighting the predicament of women in Indian society.

With woman as his central concern, Pillai gives sustained attention to the sufferings of woman in The
Unchaste. Padmanabha Pillai marries Janaki when she had been in pregnancy. But after marriage she considers herself as a fallen woman and elaborates the position of wife in this way: “A wife must be above suspicion. Then alone can she live. I am on object of dark suspicion...I should have married somebody” (27).

Padmanabha Pillai’s treatment of his wife symbolizes the attitude of men towards women with its distrust, hypocrisy, selfishness, and self-centredness. This characteristic male attitude is exposed when Janakiamma explains the real motive behind his acceptance of her as his wife knowing that she was the victim of rape and with a child: “If a fallen woman becomes a wife, she has to put up with anything. That is selfishness on the part of the man who exploits her condition” (34).

As far as Pillai is concerned getting children without being married is no crime. He says in Kayar, “Some women deliver children without husbands. That is not a big problem” (57). If a woman conceives before marriage, she is condemned and she becomes an object of humiliation. But the society does not think even for a moment that the woman is a part of
the heinous crime. It forgets the man behind it. On the contrary it is the woman who suffers and faces disgrace.

In the **Lament for the Death of a Master of Arts**, Anand presents Nur, the hero, as a man of realizing his mistakes as to what he has done to his wife. Though he was cruel at the beginning, he has become a changed man afterwards. While dying, he recalls remorsefully how selfish, cruel and indifferent he has been in his treatment of his wife. “He wished he could hold her in his arms now and make a contact which he had refused to establish between himself and her ever since they had been married, except in the moments of lust” (48). He remorses,

> She had hidden the light of her affection and her love in her own distress always.... had suffered and yet never shown it by word or deed. He suddenly recalled that he had cruelly and deliberately detached himself from her, because she was restrained by the conventions. (49)

Anand makes his hero filled with utter despair and repentance for the inhuman treatment he has done to his
wife and for his utter failure in carrying out his responsibilities as a husband, now he remembers:

She had yielded to him the perplexing knowledge of her pregnancy. And even then she had followed him about like a devoted dog, worshipping him with eyes, while he, in the panic of the fear of fatherhood... And when she had proudly presented him with a gift of a little red-faced girl child, who frowned and cried with closed eyes, he had felt like murdering her and the child. (49-50)

Like Janakiamma in The Unchaste, Lakshmi of Private Life of an Indian Prince is another example of the victimization of women in a society of male domination and conventional morality. She becomes the innocent victim of the inhumanity of men and the rigidity of moral system when she is raped by a Muslim and later rejected by her husband, a Hindu.

In Private Life of an Indian Prince, Indira is left alone in the palace while her husband, the prince, spends all his time dallying with his seductive mistress, Ganga Dasi. Indira tells her husband about the agony of isolation and neglect
suffered by her: "Oh, you don't know how I suffered... I have been eating my heart out for you bit by bit, until there is no more of it left even to give it you!" (213). Unlike certain other docile women, she cannot suffer the pain for ever. So, later, "she disengaged herself from him as soon as she realized that she must not yield and surrender and be used up completely, so that he could throw her on the scrap-heap afterwards under pressure from Ganga" (113).

Pillai's description of Ratnamma is suggestive of the fate of all such married women in *Foam and Froth*:

She is a dignified lady of about forty years. Holding the bars of one of the open windows of the air-conditioned room, she stands looking at the wide world with an urge for fresh air. Like the sigh of a house! Like the hot breath of a bed-chamber. (9)

When her husband goes out to meet his mistress, Ratnamma cries out in despair: "Oh! I can't.... I will fly away from this cage" (98).
In *The Unchaste*, Janaki Amma's life is a profound study of the loneliness of a woman, a wife and a mother – a loneliness conditioned by family and society. This becomes particularly clear from the long conversation between her and her son Prabha about the miserable life she has lived for twenty one years in her husband's house. Janaki Amma defines the pathetic condition of woman in every family in this way: “The women in her family had been born to be submissive. Seldom did they protest or resist” (87).

The authors' common vision of an ideal man-woman relationship is based on mutual love, understanding and respect as free individuals. Anand's view of such a relationship becomes explicit in the following words of Dr. Shankar in *The Private Life of an Indian Prince*:

And I suppose this will only after when woman stands on the same footings as man, and love becomes a reciprocal business, embracing the whole of the man-and woman relationship, and not merely mistaken for sex, which is only one part of the relationship. Then men and women might live together more intensely, and their
relationships might become more enduring, and non-possessive, and separation might begin to both partners in a marriage a misfortune. (315-16)

On the contrary Pillai, in his novel, The woman, shows how the marital relationship between Divakaran and Sumathy based on mere sex without mutual love and respect ultimately collapses. It is evident from the following passage that the partners have miserably failed to achieve individual fulfilment through their union:

He developed one aspect of womanhood; not consciously, it happened by circumstance. Apart from the motherhood in the female aspect of that human being, Divakaran could not contribute anything to motherhood’s basic element of happiness. But tradition insisted her: you are married; you belong to Divakaran alone. (94)

In Indian society, marriage is crucial to the status of a woman. The marriage has its own formalities. Anand and Pillai have presented in their novels that marriage is not for love but for material things. Like Anand, Pillai has brought
out the drawbacks in the arranged marriages. This becomes clear, for instance, when Sumathy, disillusioned with her married life, makes a strong condemnation of such ill-arranged marriages in her characteristic language: “Married off! One came from somewhere...He was made to tie the thali. That thali must be there till death!. He alone should touch her. If another man looks at her, it is wrong. Then-then-what all he shows!...that is a husband!” (143).

There are many victims of arranged marriages in the novels of Pillai and Anand like Sumathy. In Anand’s novels the women are sold in marriages arranged by their parents. On the contrary in *Two Measures of Rice*, Koren in order to marry Chirutha, he has to give fifty rupees and twenty five measures of paddy to her father, Kaliparayan. This is rare custom which is not heard of at any villages in India. Kaliparayan does not mind about the person as to whom he is going to his daughter but his only concern is the cash.

In *Lament for the Death of a Master of Arts*, Nur in his death-bed recalls the day of his marriage with Iqbal:
The day when they led two sheep to be martyred before the divines and the witnesses... that poor, silly girl, Iqbal, was as much a pawn in the game which her father was playing with mine as I was in the game, which my father was playing with her. (41)

Anand's Maya of *The Sword and the Sickle* and Janki of *The Big Heart* have become young widows, before Lalu and Ananta accepted them, and Pillai's Karuthamma of *Chemmeen*, are all such cruel victims of arranged marriages. In *Chemmeen*, Karuthamma is married to Palani but her former lover, Pareekutty, goes to her house to convey the bad news of her mother's death. The people in and around Karuthamma's house start malign her character, out of which Palani doubts her fidelity. During night time Palani goes out to fish unfortunately he is swallowed by the water. The reason for his death is attributed to her lack of chastity.

Anand's *The Old Woman and the Cow* and Pillai's *The Woman* deal with woman and her status in society. In their portrayal of the place of woman in the family or more particularly in the marital relationship, both the writers turn
the attention to the agonizing experiences of isolation and alienations suffered by certain female characters. In each case, there exists a kind of incommunicability, some kind of psychological barrier between the partners.

In *The Old woman and the Cow*, Anand presents Gauri as an unlucky girl even in her house. Her uncle, Amru, scolds her for the economic burden in the family. And in her in-laws’ house she is considered as root cause of the poverty, debts and continued drought. Gauri undergoes several traumatic experiences. According to her husband, Panchi, she is, “a girl whom he could fold in his arms at night and kick during the day, who would adorn his house and help him with the land” (11). Gauri’s presence in her house is resented by Kesaro, Panchi’s Aunt. Kesaro induces Panchi to quarrel with his wife in turn Panchi abuses Gauri. Panchi becomes a worse husband under the influence of Kesari who makes him believe that Gauri is loose in morals. Gauri becomes the victim at the hands of her husband in the family.

Like a confident and courageous woman, Gauri persuades Panchi to separate himself from his aunt Kesaro
and uncle, Mola Ram, so that they can make a fresh start of their lives, away from the poisonous allegations of Kesaro. Gauri persuades him during night time, “As their eyes met, she turned to him for the first time, bringing her soul into her naked body, and appealed like a little doe to the hunter: Do not beat me again—at her bidding!” (51). It is clearly seen that she is the victim of her own sex and she experiences untold suffering at the hands of her husband through Kesaro. Gauri is projected as a docile cow. During her marriage negotiations, her parents say, “Gauri is like a cow, very gentle and very good” (11).

Both Anand and Pillai bring out a powerful indictment of the brutal rigidity and authority of the Hindu social custom that reduces women into helpless victims. Everything is done in the name of marriage. The success of marriage will depend on the economic independence of the individuals who marry. In fact Anand and Pillai hold the same view that human life attains its meaning and perfection through the union of man and woman in marriage as true partners. Anand expresses this view through Dr. Shankar in The Private Life of an Indian Prince:
Every one has to marry... But in a wise marriage the ordinary life is transformed from the trivial detail to some exalted purpose which is the secret wish of both the partners. And then the couple sees their reflection in the mirror of this higher personality to which they are always aspiring.

(137)

Pillai also stresses that life would be incomplete unless the higher plain of life is reached through marriage, love and sex. Holding man-woman relationship as one of the most basic human relationships, both Anand and Pillai believe that sex has a vital role to play in making a good marital relationship. In their vision of a true marriage, the partners achieve oneness or communion through sexual union, which issues from mutual love and the strong urge for completion. Pillai expresses this idea through the consciousness of Sumathy in The Woman.

The male seeks to be absorbed into female; female seeks to be absorbed into male. Then the male wants to cease to be a male; the female wants to cease to be a female. Thus holding the
breath, the male and the female join together for self extinction. (78)

Pillai further enhances this idea of sexual union through Sumathy's realization of its spiritual meaning. The truth that Sumathy discovers about the sex union takes the form of a gospel in a language different from here.

In the beginning God created the creature of man out of soil. Then God divided that creation into two. He called the left half woman and the right half man... in each place. He made creation in such a way that though both these pieces join together, they do not become one, each piece thus attained individually. (79)

Anand too condemns the tendency of "emphasizing the old Indian idea of ascetic withdrawal from life, the denial of all sexual intercourse" (137). Sexual desire, in his view is something natural in all human beings and its wilful suppression is against the law of nature. At the same time, according to him, one has to exercise some restraint on one's
desires by the recognition of one's responsibilities. In the
words of Dr. Shankar:

The whole universe is a kind of Lila, sport, in the
expansive mind and heart of Brahman. The
manifold world began when desire arose in the
heart of the One Absolute, and now there is the
constant desire on the part of mankind to break
duality and attain absorption in the One. So that
desire is an essential element in us and all our
actions are motivated by it; and we feel that we
can choose to do this or that freely... we are really
bound by responsibilities, duties, even as we have
a certain number of rights. (137-138)

Such common views on marriage, love and sex expressed in
many novels of Anand and Pillai further reinforce their
contention that woman is an individual with an equal status
with man.

In the novels of Anand and Pillai, a woman is often
made to act the part of an unpaid servant and she is
considered an inferior creature, a pleasure-giving article or a
child-bearing machine. Anand’s *The Old Woman and the Cow* and Pillai’s *The Woman* trace the growth of Hindu married women, their innocence and sufferings. Both novels, despite the differences in local colours provided by certain customs and manners and others are alike in their realistic presentation of the travails suffered by the female protagonists in the process of their growth into selfhood. Each of them thus symbolizes the common plight of women in the contemporary Indian Society. There is a significant affinity between the two heroines, especially in their nature and temperament. Both of them are shown typical Hindu wives with great respect for traditional values and beliefs. Another striking similarity between them is their great strength of character that they display in protecting their honour and being faithful to their husbands.

The sufferings meted out to Gauri are revealed in this manner. Gauri whispered with a suppressed rage. “patience – how long can I go on being patient against the nagging of that woman and your shoe beatings on her behalf!”(39). But “Gauri, who believed in the worship of her lord and master, and wanted ultimately to conquer him with her devotion...
was willing to wait like the Hindu wife and go patiently through everything..."(87). It is clearly depicted that Garui suffers with patience like a Hindu wife. Commenting on this, M.K. Naik writes: "In Gauri...we find the Indian tradition at its best. She represents some of the finest elements in Indian womanhood" (91).

Gauri's pathetic position in the family is typical of the hopelessly low status of woman in traditional Hindu society. Even then she gradually succeeds in convincing her husband to break away from his jealous aunt and greedy uncle and to stay separately away from the joint family. She suffers and groans under several circumstances. She is accused of being an inauspicious creature responsible not only for the family misfortunes but even for the failing rains and withering crops of the whole village. When Kesaro, Panchi's aunt, comes there one day with her usual malicious charge that "our house would break up with the coming of an inauspicious girl" (39).

After becoming suspicious of her integrity, Panchi turns her out of his house and asks her to go to her mother's house. The circumstances that occur following her return to her mother accelerate the sufferings of Gauri. Ignoring all her
pleading and protestations, her greedy mother and uncle sell her off to an old lecherous banker, Seth Jai Ram Das, “in lieu of cash and the wiping out of the mortgage on their two houses as well as the cow, Chandari” (125). Lakshmi and Amru are heartless and they love their property more than their daughter. Gauri goes through all the ordeals. She is simply outraged and expresses her anger and frustration in the following manner: “Is this not murder? You will repent afterwards when you have to face your God! So don't do it! Mother, you who are mother! I am begging you. And she stretched her arms towards Laxmi” (127). Once again Gauri fights and curses and protests in vain.

Seth fails to obtain Garui through peaceful way and resorts to violence:

He turned on his side and put his left arm around her, with a desperation of desire. Garui shook his hold off her with a mad power...such was the violence of her recoil that his unsteady body rolled away. This enraged him and brought the lost resources of his manhood uppermost into his
defeated body. He rolled back like a colossus and enveloped her with his arms. (144)

Garui fights like a tigress woman and she foils the shameless attempt of Seth to outrage her chastity with a strong determination and courage.

Gauri once again experiences untold sufferings during her stay in Dr. Mahindra's nursing home as a patient and nurse. Her strength of character, moral integrity, sense of individuality and self respect are all again put to severe test when Dr. Batra makes his advances towards her. In spite of all his efforts, she does not yield to him. Dr. Batra out of frustration drinks heavily and frequently beats his wife, Savitri. Nurse Young warns Garui about the nature of the new crisis: "The quarrel upstairs has something to do with you, woman. The sinful soul of Batra is heading straight for hell. And that hell is you!... My advice to you is to go away from here and return to your mother's home" (161). Gauri meets suffering and cruelty everywhere.

Although Garui is eager and yearns to get back to her husband, she has fears that "Panchi might be more angry
and suspicious if he knew that she had been sold to money lender and had stayed two night in his house" (155). Garui’s assumption becomes true. Carried away by the vicious gossip of the village, Panchi’s jealousy is once again roused. He doubts her chastity as she has been away from him for some time. He resumes torturing her mentally and physically. Gauri is the same loving wife, and eagerly gets back to her husband when she is given a chance. But she is shocked when Panchi doubts her chastity. The marriage of Gauri and Panchi is doomed right from the beginning, because of an evil omen observed during the ceremony. That is the bridegroom steps over the threshold before oil has been poured on the door way.

In Pillai’s The Woman, Sumathy, like Garui, in the early days of married life, is seen cow-like and docile and totally inexperienced in the marital as well as in domestic affairs. The short period of life with her husband, Divakaran, helps her to become the mother of a child. It does not contribute to the development of her womanly sensibility or consciousness. Her husband deserts her after one year, leaving her alone and turning her life to be a hopeless waiting
for the husband to come home. In his absence, she leads a starved life, and preserves her great wealth, that is, her chastity for him, being faithful to the thali her husband tied around her neck. Under such circumstances, other women of her social class may be forced even to take to prostitution or steal or commit suicide after killing her children. When the women of her neighbourhood came to know about her plight, they go to her help, provide her with food and take her with them to work as a labourer. Though she is given only a reduced rate of wage for her poor work, she does not show any sign of protest or even count the money. Thus her life appears to be a total failure in every capacity as a wife or mother or worker.

Sumathy, like Gauri, puts up a brave fight to save her honour from the clutches of Paraman when he advances towards her. She slaps him on his face. When he slaps her back, she hits him and scratches at him. Just as Dr. Batra in Gauri's life, Paraman enters the life of Sumathy at a crucial moment, though under different circumstances. Impressed by Sumathy's moral strength, Paraman turns out to be her mentor and benefactor. He gives her enough money and
proper instructions and puts her on the road to maturity, identity and independence. Her contact with Paraman makes her alive to her own inadequacies. Just as Dr. Mahindra advises Gauri, Paraman, after becoming a good man, does the same to Sumathy to lead a happy life.

Sumathy, who is highly sensitive and emotional and at the same time loyal to traditional morality, is doomed to live a life of sex starvation and suppress all her natural urge for union with man. “Though strong sexual desires are roused in her, she does not yield to any kind of temptation for sex union with a man other than her husband” (82-83). She becomes now highly critical of the outdated values. Similarly she thinks about the limitation of arranged marriage and questions its sanctity in a world dominated by men of hypocrisy and selfishness.

Sumathy starts thinking about the slavery of women to men. As a matured woman, she gets disgusted with the modern marital life which according to her is dull, mechanical and routine:
The living of married man and married women; that is what is there in all the small and big houses everywhere. He brings, she sits waiting for it, stretching her nose. Then she cooks all and gives him. She too fills her belly. Is it not that happens in all these houses? When the light is off, the process begins for procreation (144).

Sumathy realizes that there is nothing that relates her to life. Though she does not hate life, she feels that to her life is something unnecessary. While she spends days contemplating suicide, Paraman suddenly returns to her and brings her again back to life. He defines his relationship with her as that of a brother and lives with her. At last, one day when her husband comes, she does not accept him and asks him to go away.

At the end of the both novels *The Old Woman and the Cow* and *The Woman*, the heroines emerge as free individuals. While Gauri turns away from Panchi liberating herself from the shackles of bondage and walks towards a world of freedom, Sumathy turns away her husband whom she has been all along waiting for. Her bold act of rejecting
her husband in favour of a new found brother in Paraman is a symbolic change in her. She prefers the brother in Paraman who has brought about a tremendous change in her life to the husband in Divakaran who has failed to carry out his responsibilities. As Dr. Mahindra is a god for Gauri, Paraman is Sumathy's god. This becomes clear from the feelings of gratitude and adoration Sumathy feels towards Paraman: "That man is the cause for all... While thinking of him Sumathy's eyes will close; hands will fold; head will bend. He is her God." (70) Through Dr. Mahindra and Paraman, both the novelists, represent a generous, selfless, new world with a modern outlook towards women.

As a true Hindu wife, Gauri remains submissive to Panchi, despite the ill-treatment and she is prepared to wait like the Hindu wife and go patiently through everything, to get to the source of that antagonism...For, in her inner being, she believed that he, who was capable of tenderness once, had an inexhaustible well of love in him, if only the shell of suspicion could be removed and the heart-source could be cleansed. (100)
Gauri and Sumathy have been faithful and traditional Indian wives who want to dedicate themselves to the selfless service of their husbands. But they are not cowed down by the false accusations.

Anand’s The Old Woman and the Cow differs from his previous novels as far as his treatment of myth is concerned. Anand has re-created the Indian classical myth of Ramayana in a modern context to depict the character of Gauri. As in Sita’s case, the society doubts Gauri’s chastity because of her stay with unknown people away from her husband. Panchi’s friend, Damodar asks him “to look after her! She has come back, after her exile, like Sita who had stayed with Ravana!”(220). Similarly, at the end when she leaves her husband and walks towards the city to begin a new life as a nurse in the hospital of Dr.Mahindra, “I will go away ...I shall go and work in Daktar Mahindra’s haspatal and have my child there. And I will not come back again” (263). Hoor Banu persuades her to remain home, she protests, weeping and sobbing: “They are telling him that Ram turned out Sita because every one doubted the chastity during her stay with Ravana... I am not Sita that the earth will open up and
swallow me. I shall just go out and be forgotten of him” (263).

In this connection Meenakshi Mukherjee opines:

Gauri at the end conquers her difference and acquires the courage of self-assertion. It is in this final development that the analogy of Sita breaks down. The novel is not a saga of suffering and patience but is intended to be the portrait of a woman who through suffering and misery finally discovers herself as an individual, not merely as a wife or daughter. (158)

In The Woman also, there is a mentioning of Seelavathy myth towards the end. At first, being a devoted, faithful and self-sacrificing wife, Sumathy is seen as a modern version of Seelevathy. “The philosophy of Seelavathy which she got hereditarily”(27) enables her to remain faithful to her husband even after he has deserted her, to reject the offer of a second marriage and preserve her chastity under the most trying circumstances. Gauri's inflexible belief in her religion and in her role of Hindu wife enables strength to ward off the banker and later, Dr. Batra. It is the very same belief that enables Sumathy also to protect her honour. The writings of
Meenakshi Mukherjee on *The Old Woman and the Cow* are apt: “this novel is unique among Indian novels in rejecting rather than extolling the time-honoured womanly virtues of patience and submission” (159). Similarly, it may be said of Pillai’s *The Woman* that it is a novel which rejects the dictates of the philosophy of Seelavathy.

Both Anand and Pillai highlight the need for women to break away from the restrictive and conventional ways of life and assert the individuality for the purpose of creating a new world free from traditionalism. Anand himself has said: “I think it is not the lot for woman to become Sita any more...Woman in our society has been so much humiliated that there is no way by which you can restore her dignity, except by rejecting the *Ramayana* myth, as I have done in Gauri” (114-15).

At the same time, it is to be noted that both of them are not against such traditional beliefs or the lessons that are to be drawn from the myths and legends. They suggest that belief in myth and religion may provide sustaining power for the individual. Cowasjee’s views, in *So Many Freedom*, perhaps reflect the dilemma any creative artist would
encounter in his efforts to strike a balance between the ideal and the desirable through the use of myth:

A total reliance on myth and its application to everyday life would be foolhardy. There comes a point when one must give up myth and face actuality. That point occurs when the myth can no longer be applied or when its application becomes a retrogressive act. (157)

Both Anand and Pillai, by their effective and skilful use of myth, achieve great success in their forceful presentation of the theme of women's struggles. But this is applicable to the heroines of The Old Woman and the Cow and The Woman only. The majority of the women in India may not know how to escape from the male domination. Anand and Pillai indicate that women must rely on themselves for their livelihood rather than on luck or God.

Anand and Pillai reveal striking similarities towards the sufferings of women and their status. They portray the man-woman relationship in all its bewildering complexities exploring the various internal and external factors that govern this relationship. Through their skilfull presentation of
the miserable position of women in marital relationship, both writers make a two-pronged attack against the hypocrisy and selfishness of men-folk in their treatment of women and against the age old conventions that deny women their right to be free individuals. As victims of a tradition-bound and man-dominated society, women do everything according to the whims and fancies of the men-folk.

Anand and Pillai expect women to be treated on an equal footing with men. As writers with progressive outlook towards women and great faith in humanistic value system, they have always championed the cause of the suppressed women in India. They highlight the miserable plight of women in the contemporary society and make fervent calls for their welfare and liberation. They share the view that social transformation can no longer be achieved in India until the condition of women is improved. This is evident from the fact that various women's organisations have come into existence to enhance the betterment of women.

The last chapter sums up the similar but individual perceptions of Anand and Pillai in regard to the social evils deliberated in the previous chapters