CHAPTER FOUR

SEXUAL POLITICS

Women’s socialization into an implicit acceptance of their inferior and submissive status, and the “angel in the house” image of woman, have evoked the strong protest of women writers. Kamala Das in *My Story* has registered her protest against this sexual colonialization when she observes the necessity of “revolting against the rigid gender divisions according to which men are superior. God-like, while women are inferior, inert, afflicted with a natural defectiveness” (Jain 224). She further voices her restlessness with the fact that “the sex roles, as perpetrated by a society ruled and governed by men, trap women in wife-hood and mother-hood and do not allow them any freedom for self-actualization.”(224) Toril Moi believes that the patriarchal traditions imposed certain social ideals and standards on women and those who conform to it are called feminine and those who fail to
do so are unfeminine and unnatural. Women writers experience an anti-patriarchal rage which is given full vent to in their writings. Naturally the themes, characters, situations created by women writers differ from that of male writers. Toril Moi notes that the feminist writing has “a discernible anti-patriarchal and anti-sexist position” (qtd. in Jefferson. 220)

The past twenty years has witnessed vigorous developments in thinking about women and about their roles in society, which partly explain the reason for the renewed interest in women’s writing. Though not all women writers are feminist writers “many writers work conscientiously within the dominant ideologies of gender, race and class; after all that is the best way to make a living” (Cranny-Francis 1) and even those who are indifferent or critical of it, like Alice Thomas Ellis, live in a world where feminism is a force that cannot be avoided. On the contrary, for some writers like Angela Carter, Sara Maitland, Margaret Atwood. Suniti Namjoshi, Fay Weldon, Zoo Fairbairns, it has been a major influence and source of material. Female experience is significantly different from the male because of the inescapable fact that in our culture the female is treated differently from the male both in individual relationships and by society in general. As Flora Alexander in the preface to Contemporary Women Novelists observes “their gender has had some effect on their experience and their perceptions which is reflected in their writings”(x). Though feminists differ in their analyses of
women's oppression. Liberal feminists, social feminists and radical feminists unanimously agree on certain key concepts. Women are generally of the view that previously the world has been explained mainly by men who have ignored the differences that exist between men's perspectives and those of the other half of the human race. This patriarchal notion current today perceives that the world has been analyzed and controlled by men, which was based on the view that women were not fit to share power with men. Moreover, women are seen as "special in a way that makes it, in male judgement, unsuitable for them to have access to power, or to perform roles other than those which are domestic or which involve providing some kind of care or service." (3) This notion may be accepted only as far as societies, where power depends on the ability to use physical force is concerned. But in modern societies though it is unaccepted the notion that "the female typically characterize women as lacking, or unacceptable" prevails (3). Freud has given currency to ideas about female psychological development in terms of lack and negativity, or of not conforming to a norm derived from males. Feminists condemn Freudian theory as "conservative and determinist, and incompatible with their desire for change" (4) and "feminist revisions of psychoanalytic theory propose alternative explanation of development of identity" (4). Nancy Chodorow for instance, in The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender is of the view:
The mother-infant bond is different in the cases of female and male children, and this accounts for crucial differences in feminine and masculine personality. The girl comes to define and experience herself as continuous with others, and to have a sense of self which is flexible, whereas the boy defines himself as more separate and distinct. (169)

Sexist discourse defines how men and women must act in order to be considered masculine and feminine in a patriarchal society and also their sexual and social behaviour in both private and public areas of activity. Under this discourse as Cranny-Francis observes:

[F]emale power is limited to the private interpersonal spheres of nurturing and home-making or to areas where these skills might be seen to apply, such as education. As part of the formation of subjectivity of women and men from a very early age, sexist discourse (including its gendered component discourses) determines not only what they do, but how they think about themselves as well as others. (Feminist Fiction 2)

The specific characteristics of women's writing arise not in relation to their bodies or their infantile psychological development but out of the conditions in which they are socialized and the nature of their experience. Women as a group exist within a wider culture, so that the bonds between them co-exist with their
connections with men. Thus women are a muted group whose boundaries overlap with, but are not wholly contained by the dominant group. As a result of this overlapping there is a large area of common experience as well as areas of individual experiences—aspects of female experience exclusive to women and a male area outside women’s experience. Women hear of men’s experience but men are not aware of what is in the female “wild zone” (Alexander, 10) as ideas are controlled by men who often think that female experience is insignificant. Women’s experience has always been devalued.

Paul Lauter in Before reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation observes that “some of the most popular texts in the United States literature, present hunting— a whale or a bear— as paradigms for “human” exploration and coming of age, where menstruation, pregnancy and birthing, somehow do not serve as such prototypes” (Rabinowitz 221). Elaine Showalter in A Literature of Their Own recalls Elizabeth Hardwick’s argument that women writers would always be limited in comparison to men as they have much less experience of life than men. Margaret Atwood disagrees with this view as she feels that women with their skills of communication are good at finding things out and thus provide themselves with materials. Angela Carter’s writings bear ample proof that gender does not prohibit women from writing about a range of experiences from the squalid to the terrifying. Showalter in this context reminds
us that "we are discovering how much of female experience has gone unexpressed; how few women, as Virginia Woolf has said, have been able to tell the truth about the body or mind" (Showalter 317-18). Most women novelists in some sense or other make use of a female standpoint. A. S. Byatt with her gender-neutral approach shows "a breath-taking ability to conceptualize things about the life of the female body that have been almost inexpressible" (Alexander 13). Even Alice Thomas Ellis, who is not a feminist writer and antipathetic to feminists "selects material which is in some way traditionally female and domestic" (13). Anita Brookner and Margaret Drabble "make contrasting assertions of the value of ordinary female experience" (13). Drabble depicts "women physically and emotionally in their relations with husbands or lovers and children" (13). Brookner "dissects the most undramatic, solitary female lives with similar acuteness" (13). Fay Weldon and Pat Barker "both have the boldness and honesty to lay bare areas of life that were once too painful to be looked at" (14). Zoo Fairbairns makes "the politics of being female a subject for fiction" (14). Angela Carter, Emma Tennant and Sara Maitland, "produce penetrating diagnoses of problems from a female perspective and point towards new possibilities" (14). Feminists have been challenging patriarchal assumptions resulting in a large scale re-conceptualizing of the world to the account of the experience of women. Feminist discourse seeks to challenge the patriarchal mode of representation that has been accepted as natural and obvious. Cranny-Francis rightly observes:
In feminist fiction, including feminist genre fiction, feminist discourse operates to make visible within the text the practices by which conservative discourses such as sexism are seamlessly and invisibly stitched into the textual fabric, both into its structure and into its story, the weave and the print. (Feminist Fiction 2)

The idea of the cultural construction of gender, a key concept in feminist theory, which has been the basis for women’s liberation, has inspired a number of novels and short stories by women writers. Atwood, Carter and Namjoshi in their short stories have paid due attention to this significant concept. Valerie Bryson in Feminist Political Theory points out that according to Simone de Beauvoir “the greatest obstacle to a woman’s freedom is not her biological, political, legal or even economic limitations”, but it is “the whole process by which femininity is manufactured in society” (151) as is manifest in her celebrated phrase “One is not born but rather becomes a woman” (Second Sex 295). Now the situation of women has considerably improved and many of the issues for which feminists have fought in the past - the right of women to education, employment, the power to vote or the gross inequalities of the nineteenth century - have become part of the “common sense” assumptions of our society. However, in a few nations such rights have been denied. Modern feminists are of the view that these “apparent gains” (Bryson 261) have only represented a shift in “the nature of inequality or oppression rather than its ending” (261). So as Bryson observes:
Legal inequalities and private subordination within the family have been partly replaced by a more diffuse and less tangible form of public oppression in which economic dependency on the male-run state and manipulation of sexuality by a pornographic culture are key aspects. (261)

According to Walby “women are no longer restricted to the domestic hearth, but have the whole society in which to roam and be exploited” (qtd. Bryson 261) Despite all these changes even in the most advanced nations positions of public power are still wielded by men, while women work much longer hours with less financial reward, besides the fear of sexual violence and lack of full control over their reproduction that restrict their lives. This awareness has resulted in the rapid increase in the number of women writers during the past two decades giving expression to the “wild zone” of female experience that has hitherto been unrepresented in literature.

Like the innumerable women writers the majority of whom focus on feminist themes and female experience, Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter and Suniti Namjoshi have in their short stories written on feminist themes giving voice to the “muted” and bringing women to the forefront highlighting female power. The majority of female characters in their short stories are portrayed as resourceful and enterprising unlike the traditional patriarchal concept of women as essentially dependant, passive and docile. The female victims in these stories are not the
traditional passive victims, who undergo the sufferings, the cruelties and injustices meted out to them meekly but are resourceful enough to overcome their sufferings and find ways to overpower the victors. In their stories these writers examine mother-daughter relationships, relationships between other women and also their relationship with men. They also focus on a broader cultural transformation rather than political change. In *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions of American Feminism* it has been remarked while recognising the importance of critical thinking and self-development:

[These writers] also stress the role of the non-rational, the intuitive, and often the collective side of life. Instead of emphasizing the similarities between men and women, they often stress the differences, ultimately affirming that feminine qualities may be a source of personal strength and pride and a fount of public regeneration. These feminists imagined alternatives to institutions; the liberal theorists left more or less intact religion, marriage and the home. (Donovan 31)

Women have all along been trained to learn their rule from without and not to unfold according to their natural dictates as “each individual is born as a seed with a unique design imprinted within” which “must be allowed to unfold through one’s life course” (Donovan 33). Women not only require the freedom to unfold their faculties but also require, collectively to discover who they really are.
Women writers stress the development of self-reliance, which is possible only through a matriarchal vision. “the idea of a society of strong women guided by essentially female concerns and values- most importantly pacifism, co-operation, non-violent settlement of differences and a harmonious regulation of public life” (Donovan 32). This matriarchal vision of a matriarchate or a period of mother-rule was postulated by anthropologists to have existed in pre-historic times. It was a period of peace and beneficence for during the matriarchate “all life was regarded as holy; even the sacrifice of animals was unknown. With the patriarchate, however, came a host of evils, prostitution, enslavement of women, family discord and war” (41). Women and in particular mothers have special experiences and capabilities that lead them to express a life-affirming, pacifist, creative world view. But that has been put in eclipse by the patriarchs, whose reign has been one of destruction, tyranny and war. For the creation of a new era, women and their perspectives must be integrated with the administrative and religious powers. A male-centred culture reflects the negative masculine concerns in nearly every area of expression, whereas a woman-centred one expresses the positive, benign character of women’s sensitiveness.

The portrayal of women as monsters is a construct of patriarchal culture. Woman’s special capacity is her electric nature for “there is an electrical intensity about women that men do not have.” (34) Patriarchal culture relegates women to the domestic sphere and to menial duties, hampering this electricity to find
expression: consequently, it goes awry in many women and often becomes
destructive, turning them into monsters. Carter also believes that a free woman in
an unfree society will be a monster. This is highlighted by Carter in her story,
“The Lady of the House of Love” (BC 93-107). The beautiful vampire eats men,
but not voluntarily “She loathes the food she eats’ (96) but as she is bound to the
patriarchal structures that confine her:

Wearing an antique bridal gown, the beautiful queen of the vampires sits all
alone in her dark, high house under the eyes of the portraits of her demented
and atrocious ancestors, each one of whom through her, projects a baillful
posthumous existence; she counts out the Tarot cards, ceaselessly
construing a constellation of possibilities as if the random fall of the cards
on the red plush tablecloth before her could precipitate her from her shill,
shattered room into a country of perpetual summer and obliterare the
perennial sadness of a girl who is both death and the maiden. (BC 93)

Women are reduced to the level of prostitution to survive, which is
frequently seen in a patriarchal set-up for “women’s economic profit comes
through the power of sex-attraction” (Donovan 45). The Narrator in Carter’s “Our
Lady of the Massacre” (BV 33-48) is a fine instance of a woman compelled to
become a prostitute by hostile circumstances rather than her innate will. A lonely
woman is never safe and is easily taken advantage of in a male-dominated society,
by men. As soon as the narrator is thrown out on the streets a man coaxes her into bed and sets her off into prostitution. "So I went on the common with my first fall, which was a fortunate one, and the Lancashire maid was soon in a fair way of trade as the Lancashire whore."(34).

Angela Carter as a feminist has crossed current theoretical boundaries in her writings. She has retold master accounts; her Red Riding Hood enjoys sleeping with the wolf, the mother of the bride shoots her new son-in-law, Blue beard. Unlike Margaret Atwood who believes in the interdependence of man and woman for a harmonious existence, Carter in her writings advocates absolute equality for women with men. In her attack of patriarchal structures, in her writings there is always a satiric tone evident. Carter in her early novels displays her preoccupation with the destructive effect of malist culture on human beings. This is also displayed to a certain extent in her short stories particularly "The Lady of the House of Love" (BC 93-107), "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter" (FW 13-22), "Puss-in-Boots" (BC 68-83) and "The Loves of Lady purple" (FW 23-38) In "The Lady of the House of Love"(BC 93-107) the vampire queen is chained to her fate by patriarchal structures, and finds liberation only when the "handsome bicyclist" (BC 105) kisses her injured palm. "How can she bear the pain of becoming inhuman?"(106) The young man on whom the vampire feeds also finds relief. In "Puss-in-Boots" Signor Furioso as well as Signor Panteleone's wife endure the destructive effect of patriarchal structures which only end with the
death of Signor Panteleone, the symbolic patriarch. The female body, regarded by
the masculine gaze, as a commodity is dealt with by Carter in some of her short
stories. In “The Bloody Chamber” the Marquis watches his new bride lustfully
“with the assessing eye of a connoisseur inspecting horseflesh” (BC 11). In “The
Tiger’s Bride” the Beast requires Beauty to reveal her nakedness. For Beauty,
taking off her clothes “involved a kind of flaying” (BC 66). In “Masters” (FW 71-
79) the tribal girl, exploited by the hunter to satisfy his lust, is referred to as
“brown meat” (74).

Angela Carter in her short stories portrays independent and active female
characters unlike the traditional passive ones. The Bride and her mother in “The
Bloody Chamber” (BC 7-41), Beauty in “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” (BC 41-50)
and “The Tiger’s Bride” (BC 51-67), Red Riding Hood in “The Werewolf” (BC
108-109) and “The Company of Wolves” (BC 110-118), the narrator in “A
Souvenir of Japan” (FW 1-12), Madeline in “Penetrating to the Heart of the
Forest” (FW 47-60), Anna in “Reflections” (FW 81-102), Jeanne in “Black Venus”
(BV 9-23), Tamburlaine’s wife in “The Kiss” (BV, 27-29), Poe’s Mother in “The
Cabinet of Edgar Allen Poe”, Lizzie Borden in “The Fall River Axe Murder” (BV
103-121) are fine portrayals of female characters who are not docile but active and
strong, the independent new women. Her female protagonists are never willing to
accept victimization passively, they are resourceful enough to find ways to
overcome it as is finely illustrated in “Masters” (FW 71-80) where the girl who has
been sexually abused by her master resolves to take her revenge. Her long and sharp fingernails urge her to “tear his back when he inflicted himself upon her and leave red runnels in his skin” (78). She soon learns to shoot and kills her master, and “only the flies crawling on his body were alive” (79). And in the concluding part of “The Erl King” (BC 84-90) the narrator plans her revenge, “with hands as gentle as rain” she will “strangle him” and “open all the cages and let the birds free, they will change back into young girls” (91).

Margaret Atwood has earned a distinguished reputation among feminist writers for the exploration of women’s issues in her novels and short stories alike. She concentrates on her female characters whom she has every intention of highlighting and portrays her male characters as stereotypical and representative of solely negative and destructive elements. As a representative of the culture and psyche of her country and the feminist viewpoint, Atwood in her writings makes use of dual themes and images. A popular combination that she frequently adopts is the search for identity coupled with a journey motif, particularly a journey into the wilderness like her “Polarities” (DG 38-64). Atwood advocates a simple and natural life style in order to liberate people from the roles imposed upon them by a commercial culture. In this way, she attempts to discover the real, hidden self and regain it. This attempt to break the bonds of role-playing; to overcome the accompanying pains and establish real relationships without illusion, forms the basis of the stories in her collection Dancing Girls and Other Stories. Atwood’s
focus in her short stories is mainly on her women characters, strong, resourceful and individual in their own right. Her female characters are women who are divided into separate personae – one half defined by the role that a phallocratic society has imposed upon them and the other half the real self attempting to liberate itself out of this imposed role and achieve absolute autonomy. Like the majority of characters that we generally find in contemporary fiction, the lives of Atwood’s female characters, are also without direction, as a result of lack of communication and the resultant failure to find satisfaction in their work. They are treated as fragmented parts of a human being rather than whole beings. This is particularly true of female characters that abound in her short stories. As Elspeth Cameron puts it:

Atwood’s central theme in Lady Oracle and “Dancing Girls” is the ‘self’ s complex and fascinating mixture of reality and fantasy. Playing a part, or as Atwood puts it, dancing a role involves difficult decisions. Mainly it means choosing between a private and public life. Both in Lady Oracle and Dancing Girls the ‘self’ competes with one or more ‘roles’ for centre stage.

(CLCl 3:44)

Louisa in “Polarities” (DG 38-64.), Sarah in “Resplendent Quetzal”, (DG 154-170) Jeannie in “Giving Birth” (DG 228-245), Mrs.Burridge in “When it Happens” (DG
125-137). Sally in “Bluebeard’s Egg” (BE 131-164). Susanna in “Uncles” (WT
131-156) are fine illustrations of fragmented selves.

Though she attacks patriarchal power structures Atwood does not
acknowledge radical feminism, as she firmly believes that harmony may prevail
only through the interdependence of the male and female. She does not advocate
the replacing of the patriarchal order with a matriarchal one as envisaged in
Namjoshi’s novella The Mothers of Maya Diip, but an order of both the male and
female, with the marginal brought to the centre to create a harmonious sense of
interdependence.

Both Carter and Atwood in their tales attack the patriarchal structures,
which are detrimental to the progress of women. Carter firmly believes in the
interdependence of the sexes at the same time stressing the fact that women ought
not to allow themselves to be exploited by these structures.

Sherry Simon’s observations in The Literary Criterion rightly sums up
Namjoshi’s contribution to the feminist cause, “what Suniti succeeds in doing in
the almost 100 short pieces which make up her collection of Feminist Fables is to
subvert the fable form making her pieces less the expression of preconceived
dogma than the occasion for provocation and questioning” (204). Through these
fables she interrogates the marginalization of women in a patriarchal society and
inspires them to struggle for self-identity and autonomy. Namjoshi’s Feminist Fables successfully transforms traditional misogynist wisdom of classical, biblical and eastern fables into a remarkable accessible, hilariously funny, feminist parodic idiom. Even though she brings in the stereotyped wicked step-mother, Suniti’s literary canvas is peopled with brave, strong independent princesses well equipped to rule the world. The damsel in distress rescues the poor prince charming; giantesses substitute the traditional giants. Namjoshi in her fables deals with the aspects of women’s lives that have been erased, ignored, demeaned and mystified. She also attempts to analyse the social and psychic mechanisms, that construct gender inequality and comes to the conclusion that the inequality between men and women is not the result of biological necessity, but is produced by the cultural construction of gender differences echoing Simone de Beauvoir’s view regarding gender constructions. She disagrees with Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley’s view in the introduction to What is Feminism that “woman is a biological, not an historical category, and she thus suffers from a singular oppression which knows of no historical period that precedes it” (1).

In Coomi.S.Vevaina’s interview with Suniti Namjoshi, the latter explains her feminist stance. For her feminism is nothing as idiotic as women replacing men. But her concern expressed in her writing is “considering the moral position of a human being” (Ariel 29:195). Women too are centrally human and therefore are also moral beings like men. Through her fables, she inspires women to
overcome feelings of isolation and inadequacy resulting from the domination of patriarchal structures and have firm faith in their own potential to remake their lives. Feminist Fables like Jorge Luis Borges stories is about self-definition and self-affirmation. They are unusual modern fables that explore feminist ideas. Namjoshi herself comments on Feminist Fables in her collection of poems Because of India:

[F]or me, they were a way of exploring feminist ideas and their implications for the patterns I had inherited through the mainstream literary tradition. The knowledge that an audience existed to whom I would make sense made all the difference. It released my imagination to try to make the patterns that were authentic to me. (79)

Unlike Carter and Atwood, Namjoshi is a radical feminist, who also takes up the theme of lesbianism in several of her fables, “The Example” (FF 52), “A Moral Tale” (21), “The Badge Wearing Dyke and Her Two Maiden Aunts” (11), “O Red Bird of Paradise” (SF 53-54), “Schooling” (67) and “Horror Story” (76-77). Here Namjoshi asserts that lesbians are not accepted in society as is seen in “The Example” (FF 52) where a wren, a tutor is dismissed on the ground that the wren’s sexuality was not what it should be and would be a bad influence on the Sparrow’s children. The Wren explains that she does not teach them sex and “What is private is private and what is public is public” (56). Again in “A Moral
Tale" she makes it clear that “It’s not that we disapprove of homosexuals as such, but people disapprove” (23). Namjoshi celebrates the love of women for women as an empowering force with a revolutionary potential in it. As Savita Goel in ‘Suniti Namjoshi’s Feminist Fables: A Minor feminist Classic rightly observes, “as escapees from the class ‘women’ which is constituted as identity only in its relation to the class ‘men’, lesbians explode a biological myth and reveal the socially constructed nature of gender.” (182)

Despite, subtle differences in their views on feminist ideas, Carter, Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi in their short stories have unanimously attempted to define the role of the New Woman as an active, independent and strong woman, deconstructing the traditional patriarchal concept of woman as essentially passive and weak. They have also focussed on a broader cultural transformation recognizing the significance of critical thinking and self-development, and affirming that feminine qualities may afford a source of personal strength and a fount of public regeneration. This is evident in several of their female characters like the narrator’s mother in “Significant Moments in the Life of my Mother” (BE 11-30), who saved enough money and “sent herself to the university” when her father refused to send her because “she was too frivolous-minded” (17); Emma in “The Whirlpool Rapids” (111-119) a physically brave woman, "a bit of a dare-devil" willing to put on a life-jacket and “swirl down the dangerous Niagara Whirlpool rapids” (114); Madeline in “Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest"
(FW 47-60), while on the search for the mythical Upas tree, with her brother Emile, urges him on even in the face of starvation with a “mysterious purposefulness” (57); and the woman in the fable “The Milk-White Mare” (FF 25) who becomes the subject of dispute between her husband and her father, outwits them by transforming herself into a beautiful milk-white mare and being “installed in the stables of the Prince” (25).

Women have been relegated to a subordinate status in family and society and consequently have become passive victims of male-oppression being denied a social identity. Patriarchy defines the precincts of women and even a partial infringement on their part is sufficient to arouse the wrath of men. Moreover, it is based primarily upon male violence and control of women’s sexuality. Valerie Bryson in Feminist Political Theory: An Introduction notes:

[T]he family is indeed a central part of society’s power structure: as such it both sustains patriarchal power in the ‘public’ world and is itself a source of women’s oppression. Far from being a ‘natural’ arrangement based on mutual love and respect in which the emotional, sexual and domestic needs of adult partners are met and their children cared for, it is a social institution in which women’s labour is exploited, male sexual power may be violently expressed and oppressive gender identities and modes of behaviour are learned. (198)
Women have been conditioned right from the beginning to meekly accept the roles assigned to them by patriarchy. All along there has been a conflict between her autonomous existence and her objective self, as Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* points out that “her ‘being the other’; she is taught that to please she must try to please, she must make herself object; she should therefore renounce her autonomy” (308). Women are taught to see the world as “masculine”, dominated by men, and women as “inferior and dependent” (609). They are never encouraged to react or question but always “shut up in her flesh, her home: she sees herself as passive before these gods with human faces who set goals and establish values”. (De Beauvoir 609) The fate of women is “a respectful obedience. She has no grasp, even in thought, on the reality around her. It is opaque to her eyes” (609)

Victimization and survival are the basic themes of women’s writing all over the world. They are an intrinsic part of the feminine psyche, and reveal themselves in women’s writing even if the authors do not directly engage in an open critique of a patriarchal society or present the woman’s attempt to achieve selfhood. Victimization includes anything that affects women’s survival, specifically, victimization through physical, psychological, and economic manipulation. Margaret Atwood in her *Survival* presents four Basic Victim Positions that may be applied to any form of victimization- of a country, a minority group or individual. Position one is one of denying victimization “To deny the fact that you are a
victim" (36). Position two is acquiescing in victimization where “to acknowledge the fact that you are a victim, but to explain this as an act of fate, the will of God, the dictates of Biology the necessity decreed by History, or Economics, or the Unconscious, or any other large general powerful idea.” (37), Position three is repudiating victimization “to acknowledge the fact that you are a victim but to refuse to accept the assumption that the role is inevitable” (37) and position four is becoming “a creative non-victim”. (38) Atwood’s initial two positions deal with the recognition of victimization, when a woman learns that she is a victim. The final two positions deal with the rejection of victimization when a victim learns to fight victimization and perhaps succeeds well enough to live as a fully functioning “creative non-victim.” (38) Carter, Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi in their short stories have taken up the theme of female victimization. All of them have adopted the final two basic victim positions rejecting victimization by fighting against it. Their female protagonists never accept victimization passively.

Angela Carter always disliked the victimization of women in a patriarchal society. She feared and loathed and found hilarious the spectacle of the suffering woman, and her cruelty is a measure of her fear. She firmly believed in the equality of men and women. In several stories in her short story collections Carter has highlighted this theme of female victimization. In “A Souvenir of Japan” (FW 1-11) the narrator is unable to tolerate remaining indoors for Japan is a man’s country and a wife is expected to occupy the inner room and
hardly come outside. Women are moreover, valued only as “objects of men’s passions” (7) She hardly ever remains indoors but on the contrary, goes outside, watching the fireworks display “while waiting for her husband to return. Once at home, she bitterly resents it that it was as if (she) occupied the inner room and he did not expect ‘her’ to go out of it, although it was (she) who paid the rent.”(8)

Gretchen, the beautiful girl in “The Executioner’s Beautiful Daughter” (FW 13-21) is a victim of an incestuous relationship. In accordance to the custom of that country, her brother is executed “for committing the crime of incest upon the body of his sister”. (16) Gretchen does not suffer but takes it in her stride when her father “in the immutable privacy of his leathern hood, upon the blood-bespattered block makes love to his beautiful daughter.” (20) She realizes that he alone will not be punished “because there is nobody to cut off his head.” (20)

“The Master” (FW 71-79) is a tale of an English hunter with a vocation to kill animals. In Latin America he bought a pubescent girl and taught her to say “master”. He moved deeper into the forest endlessly slaughtering wild beasts. He regarded the girl as no more than an “inexpensive”, “piece of curious flesh”. (75) and treated her with the same obliterating selfishness as he meted out to animals. She became a victim of sexual abuse and carnality as “at night, after she lit the fire, he would first abuse her with the butt of his rifle about the shoulders and, after that with his sex, then drink from a gourd and sleep” (76). The girl began to resent
him, but she does not meekly accept her sufferings she decides to take revenge. [She] learns to shoot and, like her ‘master’ to enjoy shooting the wild animals. As Day in Angela Carter: The Rational Glass rightly points out:

Under the influence of his attitude she becomes his negative image and as such she literalises the self-negating impulse of his destructiveness ‘and she grew more like him we are told “so she began to resent him” and in the end she annihilates him. ‘His prey had shot the hunter’. In his death, the man met the logical end of his egocentric compulsions. But the point of the tale is that such compulsions may engender only similar compulsions in their victims, so that a world defined only in these terms would be a world which endlessly repeats destruction, a world of pure negativity.” (9)

Carter’s collection The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories also highlights the theme of victimization, which is evident in the title story “The Bloody Chamber”(741), “The Courtship of Mr.Lyon” (41-51), “The Tiger’s Bride” (51-67), “Puss-in Boots” (68-84) and “The Lady of the House of Love” (93-108). In “The Bloody Chamber” the innumerable brides of the Marquis are the victims who have been tortured and killed and preserved in the chamber- the opera singer with “the blue imprint of (the) strangler’s fingers on her throat”, (28) the skull of another beautiful woman, “strung up by a system of unseen cords, so that it appeared to hang disembodied, in the still heavy air, and it, and it had been
crowned with a wreath of white roses, and a veil of lace, the final image of his bride;” (29) and the Romanian countess, his latest bride, “pierced, not by one, but by a hundred spikes”. (29) The narrator too would have met the same fate of her predecessors, but for the timely rescue by her mother. The daughter in “The courtship of Mr. Lyon” (BC 41-50) is another victim. Here Beauty chooses to be the victim. When she leaves him for a short while, and finds that he is dying, she instantly returns and covers him with kisses that transform him. She pleads, “Don’t die Beast! If you’ll have me, I’ll never leave you” (51). Similarly in “The Tiger’s Bride”, the daughter becomes the victim when her father loses her to the Beast at cards. The narrator was compelled to accept her fate as she watched her father, “fired in his desperation by more and yet more draughts of the firewater they call ‘grappa’ rides himself of the last scraps of my inheritance.” (52) Although the tiger only desired to see her naked, she ultimately becomes the tiger’s Bride. Again, the wife of Signor Panteleone in “Puss-in-Boots” is a victim who finds a way to overcome victimization. She is kept locked and securely guarded. Carter describes her plight:

[M]arried so young to an old dodderer with his bald pate and his goggle eyes and his limp, his avarice, his gore belly, his rheumatics, and his flag hangs all the time at half mast indeed; and jealous as he is impotent, tabby declares- he’d put a stop to all the rutting in the world, if he had his way,
just to certify his young wife don’t get from another what she can’t get from him. (BC 73)

In spite of all his precautions, Signor Furioso enters her very bedroom in the guise of a rat-catcher and makes love to her and ultimately after her husband’s death she instantly takes Furioso as her second husband. She boldly tells the old Hag that Furioso “is the young man who’ll be [her] second husband.” (83)

“The Lady of the House of Love” superficially appears to be about the sad fate of vampires and armies. Yet it is more about the fate of women in a patriarchal world. The very castle of Vampires contains not merely decay but relationships of subordination and subservience. Carter’s narrative concerns power— the power of a feudal class over peasants and servants. But when read more closely it is about an even more important hierarchy of subordinations – that of the male over the female. The beautiful Vampire dislikes killing, she would prefer to be human. Here is how Carter describes her state of mind:

All day, she lies in her coffin in her negligee’ of blood - stained lace. When the sun drops behind the mountain, she yawns and stirs and puts on the only dress she has, her mother’s wedding dress, to sit and read her cards until she grows hungry. She loathes the food she eats; she would have liked to take the rabbits home with her, feed them on lettuce, pet them and make them a
nest in her red-and-black chimoserie escritoire, but hunger always overcomes her. She sinks her teeth into the neck where an artery throbs with fear; she will drop the deflated skin from which she has extracted all the nourishment with a small cry of both pain and disgust. And it is the same with the shepherd boys and gipsy lads. A certain desolate stillness of her eyes indicates she is inconsolable. She would like to caress their lean brown cheeks and stroke their ragged hair. Afterwards, her governess will tidy the remains into a neat pile and wrap it in its own discarded clothes. This mortal parcel she then discreetly buries in the garden. The blood on the Countess’s cheeks will be mixed with tears. (BC 96)

The power that makes her do what she loathes is undoubtedly a patriarchal one, symbolized by “the leering, grinning ancestral portraits.” It is the weight of this male tradition that has chained her to her fate. The Vampire is subordinated within her decaying castle, dressed in her “antique” wedding gown to a patriarchal tradition. Robert Rawdon Wilson in “Slip page: Angela Carter In/Out/ In the postmodern nexus”, comments:

The wedding dress, seen from a contextualist’s perspective becomes more than a pathetic element in the theoretical setting of rot and decay, more even than a crafty allusion to other texts. Once the narrative’s feminist
preoccupations have been identified, the wedding dress emerges abruptly as the most poignant motif of all, the symbol of women's voicelessness. Subordination and narrowly limited expectations, their unelected social roles handed down in a patriarchal society. (112)

Angela Carter in her collection *Black Venus* also highlights the theme of victimization in a few stories like "The Kiss" (BV 27-29), "Our Lady of the Massacre" (BV 33-45) and "The Cabinet of Edgar Allen Poe" (BV 51-62). In "The Kiss" Tamburlaine’s wife becomes the victim. Tamburlaine’s wife had built the mosque for her husband. In order to complete the last arch of the mosque before Tamburlaine’s return, she was compelled to give in to the architect’s request for a kiss. Underlying this superficial story, there is the theme of victimization that women undergo in a patriarchal set up. Tamburlaine’s wife had tasted vodka and kissed the architect for which she had to leave the harem as “no woman will return to the harem after she has tasted Vodka” (29). Further, men have their way and do as they please, without facing any consequence. Tamburlaine’s wife who initially tries to turn down the request, has to ultimately give in. For having broken the rules she loses her husband and marital status, but even though the executioners pursue the architect, he simply “grew wings and flew to Persia”. (29) She boldly faces the consequences.
In “The Cabinet of Edgar Allen Poe” (BV 51-62) Poe’s mother, Mrs. Elizabeth Poe is again the victim in a male-dominated world where she is forced to earn a living to bring up her children as her husband David Poe hardly ever extended a helping hand. Finally after the birth of their daughter he coolly deserts her. As soon as her confinement is over “she posted down to Virginia with her howling brats because, she was booked for a tour of the South and she had no money put away. So all her babies got to eat was her sweat. She dragged them with her in a trunk to Charleston; to Norfolk; then back to Richmond.” (54) This theme of victimization is again taken up in “John Ford’s ‘Tis Pity she’s a whore” and “Ashputtle or the Mother’s Ghost” in the collection American Ghosts and Old World Wonders. Annie Belle in ‘John Ford’s ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore’ is a victim of an incestuous relationship from which she momentarily breaks when she marries the Minister’s Son. Johnny unable to come to terms with it shoots his sister and her husband and finally himself as well. Annie-belle is the sole victim according to patriarchal standards and is labelled “a lost girl” (27). Other labels follow “Bitch! Whore” (33) when her pregnancy is discovered shortly after her marriage.

Ashputtle also called the “burned child”, “the orphan child” in the other variants, is a victim in a phallocentric society. Here she is the victim of the cruel ill-treatment of her step-mother, who even burns her face with “a red-hot poker” (111) the step-mother banishes her “non-daughter” (112) from the family and
"exiles her from the shared table to the lonely hearth among the cinders, removes her contingent but honourable status as daughter and gives her, instead, the contingent but disreputable status of servant."(111) But like Carter’s female victims, Ashputtle overcomes her victimization with the help of her mother’s ghost.

Angela Carter believed that the women who really nailed patriarchy were not generally the ones who had authoritative fathers, but those with troubled contradictory mothers. So in reality feminism was aimed less at men rather than women. Rosalind Coward generalizes the point in *Our Treacherous Hearts*:

Feminism is almost invariably seen as a struggle or head on collision with men. But the truth is that the deep struggle of feminism was with the previous generation of women. Feminism could be called the daughters revolt, so central has been the issue of women defining themselves against the previous generation and distancing themselves from their mothers. (91-92)

Carter initially began writing as a male impersonator, with a strong streak of misogyny which was characteristic of the period (sixties). But inevitably her works expose change and in her later writings she turns out to be boldly and honestly a materialistic, atheist, anti-tyrannical and feminist. Elaine Jordon in her
article "The dangers of Angela Carter" in The Storyteller: Illuminations asserts what she finds in Angela Carter’s writing as constructive, productive, positive for women and feminism:

The questioning throughout her work of the subject position of the virtuous victim, and its adequacy as a position from which to resist oppression, Carter’s position is a dangerous one, because given the actual situations of many women they are quite likely to speak or write against it as victims, in some degree. Nevertheless, she alerts us to the limitations of this mode of resisting the systems of power that produce suffering. (120)

Her friend Carmen Callil published Carter in Virago and her presence there helped establish a woman’s voice in literature as special, as a crucial instrument in the forging of an identity for post imperial, hypocritical, fossilized Britain. For in spite of her keen, even cynical grasp of reality, Carter always believes in change. Hence her interest in revising handed-down tales, in showing the possibilities for women in the old pedagogical vehicles, like Bluebeard and Beauty and the Beast in The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories and the revisited lives of celebrated men and women – Jeanne Duval, Edgar Allen Poe- in Black Venus.

Marina Warner in her ‘Obituaries- Angela Carter’ in The Independent opines with the American critic Susan Suleiman:
[Her fiction has been praised] as truly breaking new ground for women, by occupying the male, modernist voice of narrative authority and at the same time impersonating it to the point of parody, so that the rules are changed and the dreams become unruly, transformed, open to a different future. (25)

This rejection of victimization and becoming a creative non-victim is highlighted in the female characters in Atwood’s short stories. The narrator in ‘Hurricane Hazel’ (BE 31-60) does not allow herself to be a victim when rejected by her lover Buddy. Though she misses him, she has the relieving sensation “of having come unscathed through a major calamity” (58). Again in “Loulou; or the Domestic Life of the Language” (BE 61-82) we have Loulou who bakes for the poets and takes care of them but at no point does she allow them to take advantage of her or make her a victim. Not being highly educated there are many words used by the poets that she does not understand. She secretly looks them up in the dictionary. She also “reads their journals” (62) furtively wanting to keep abreast of things. She prides herself in the fact that she is indispensable to the poets. She is also very possessive of them and refers to them as “her poets” (69). At times some female poets are also present at discussions which “drives Loulou wild” (69). Loulou detests the female poets who “eat her muffins and condescend to her” and she “suspects them of having designs on the poets” (69). Moreover, what angers her “is that during these discussions the poets act as if she isn’t there” (69) Loulou.
takes revenge on the poets. She goes out and seduces the accountant. He points out that she is “allowing herself to be imposed upon”. (77) He also reminds her that she should not allow people to take advantage of her. Soon she realizes that she is indispensable to them and being herself “is what they require of her, possibly all they require: that she should be just like Loulou. “No more, but certainly no less”(81). In “Uglypuss” (83-110), Becka who comes back after a quarrel with her husband Joel, finds him absent. Every time she walks out on him and then returns. Joe accepts her calmly. But this time “he’s made his move. He’s shown her he’s not eager. Any effort put out this time around is going to be hers” (92). Becka is not prepared to accept defeat and become a victim of rejection. She takes revenge on him by throwing his favourite cat Uglypuss into a garbage can, making Uglypuss the victim, fully aware that it would be “what will really get to him His kidnapped child, the one he wouldn’t let her have” (106). She used to feel sick to watch him “pick it up by the tail and run it through his hands” (106). Having had her revenge, she tells herself “My heart does not bleed” (110). Sally in the “Bluebeard’s Egg” (BE 131-164) is a fine instance of a creative non-victim. Sally claims to love Ed for his “monumental stupidity” (132). In reality this is her strategy to reject victimization; she refuses to be a victim of her husband’s unfaithfulness. Christine in “Scarlet Ibis” (BE 179-200), is another female protagonist who refuses to be a victim of an irritable husband. She thinks to herself:
May be the pressure he was under, was her. Maybe she was a weight. May be he wanted her to lift up, blow away somewhere, like a kite, the children hanging on behind her in a long string. She didn’t know when she has first noticed this feeling: probably after it had been there sometime, like a knocking on the front door when you’re asleep. There had been a shifting of forces. unseen. unheard, underground, the sliding against each other of giant stones; some tremendous damage had occurred between them. (134)

But this does not stop her from taking the initiative for planning a holiday at Trinidad to see the Scarlet Ibis, “so fluorescent that they were like painted flames” (BE 196-7), and also executing all the duties of a wife. Alma in “The Salt Garden” (BE 201-28) rejects being a victim of a broken marriage and also the periodical black outs’ she experiences. As a way of this rejection of victimization, Alma frequently indulges where she is able to host Mort and his girlfriend and Theo and his wife, during the time of a strike. Alma likes things the way they are:

She’s decided that she prefers having two men rather than one: it keeps things even. She loves both of them, she wants both of them; which means some days, that she loves neither and wants neither. It makes her less anxious and less vulnerable, and suggests multiple futures. (224)
Alma’s optimism is evident when she finally says “after everything is over, she thinks, there will still be salt. Though she is initially concerned about her black-outs, she dismisses them as ‘acid flashes’ (205)

In “Hairball” (WT 39-56) when Kat discovers Gerald, her married lover/boss slouching away from her after her operation for the removal of an ovarian cyst and worse still that he has appropriated her job too, she is filled with rage and has her revenge on Gerald. She refuses to be a victim; she takes the formaldehyde soaked tumour that she has preserved and sets it into a box of chocolate truffles, to be delivered to her ex-lover Gerald’s home, “her gift valuable and dangerous. It’s her messenger, but the message it will deliver is its own. It will tell the truth to whoever asks. It’s right that Gerald should have it, after all, it’s his child too” (56). Like the red-haired bog-man and the frozen corpse, the pickled tumour opens up another dimension, revising the story of Kat’s life in a way over which she has no control. Hairball speaks to her, “without words. It is irreducible, it has the texture of reality, it is not an image. What it tells her is everything she’s never wanted to hear about herself. This is new knowledge, dark and precious and necessary. It cuts”. (54) In “Isis in Darkness” (WT 57-84) Selena, a poetess is seen through Richard’s eyes and hence the complete inability to understand the woman as writer or the writer as woman. Though she apparently fails in life and art, dying early in relative obscurity, loneliness and abject poverty, she gains recognition after her death. “there’s a move afoot to name a parkette
After her or else a scholarship a thin volume has appeared, of essays on her work" (82). Here Selena is able to overcome the difficulties that women writers encounter in gaining acceptance in a patriarchal set-up, where women are generally second class citizens in one way or another. Julie in "The Bog-man" (85-106) is a victim of an extra-marital relationship with Connor, an archeology professor, working in the University of Toronto. Initially, Julie does not think that Connor’s wife and kids will affect their relationship as “she did not think of him as having an existence apart from her: ‘the wife and kids were just boring subsistence details, like brushing your teeth” (89). She accompanies him to Europe, where he is studying a pre-historic man, whose body has just been discovered, almost perfectly preserved in a peat-bog, she endures boredom, “congealed oatmeal” and “rock-hard lamb chops” (91) just in order to be with her lover on his field trips. Julie enjoys her trip to the island of Orkney with Connor, “despite the sneers of the maids and the mnuendoes of the barmen” (91). When Julie feels that Connor’s love for her is waning, she abruptly breaks off her relationship with him, after an altercation when she locks herself in her room to see if he wants her badly enough to break down the door. He does not and she is sensible enough to put a stop. Later when she marries and has kids “Connor becomes an anecdote” (106). Moreover, she has realized that his “invisible wife has put on flesh, has gradually acquired solidity and presence (93) and cannot be brushed aside as:
She has the territory staked out. She has the home. She has the house, she has the garage, she has the doghouse, and the dogs to put into it. She has Connor’s children forming together with them a single invincible monster with four heads and sixteen arms and legs. She has the cupboard where Connor hangs his clothes and the washing machine where his socks whirl on washdays, ridding themselves off the lint they’ve picked up from the bathmats in the rooms he’s shared with Julie. Motels are a no man’s land: they are not a territory, they cannot be defended. Julie has Connor’s sexual attention, but the wife has Connor. (94)

Susanna in “Uncles” (131-56) is a victim of a male writer’s jealousy. Her slick rise to the top, from a mere obituary writer to a television interviewer, is not appreciated by her male counter-part, Percy Marrow. In his publication of his personal memoirs “Stellar Heights” he writes about Susanna in a disparaging manner, which is shocking to her but at the same time an eye-opener to her to re-examine her view. She thinks of her tap-dance in her childhood and wonders if she was “making a fool of her self, sassy and obsolete; a show off, an obnoxious brat. Was that how the uncles had really seen her all along?” (156)

Here the victims are not creative non-victims; they accept the third basic victim position and reject victimization.

In "The Man From Mars" (DG 13-37) Christine becomes the victim of being followed by a man belonging to another culture, probably an exchange-student. Here Atwood explores the interior landscape of Christine’s mind as she experiences the acute mental agony of being pursued by the foreigner in whom she is least interested. Though, initially Christine tries to ignore him politely she soon finds him an oppressive presence. She has a vague apprehension of a rape attempt that she suppresses "a quick impossible vision of herself pursued around the living room, fending him off with thrown sofa cushions and vases of gladioli" (21). However, he rapes her “but not in the usual way" (25). In taking her photograph “he had raped, rapeo, rapere, rapier, to seize and carry off not herself but her celluloid image” (25). He continues his pursuit of her undeterred by her indifference. Though he has made no attempt to touch her, she has strange, uneasy doubts that he may be deranged or a sex maniac. However, when Christine’s mother announces that she would be flying down to New York for the week-end, she panics:

She sees herself in the bath-tub with her throat slit, the blood drooling out of her neck and running in a little spiral down the drain (for by this time
she believed he could walk through walls, could be everywhere at once).

The girl would do nothing to help; she might even stand in the bathroom door with her arms folded, watching (31)

Christine’s fears are allayed and she is relieved when she learns that he has been finally deported for it.

Louisa in “Polarities” (DG 38-64) is a victim of a fragmented self who seeks completeness in a fragmented world ends up as a mental wreck in a hospital. According to Paul, Louisa is “crazy as coot” and has to be taken to “the loony bin” (54). Viewed from society’s perspective she is insane but from Morrison’s viewpoint her utterances and notes in her notebooks are only indicative of another level of reality that the reader is inclined to accept. The title “Polarities” is not only suggestive of the polar landscapes and the polar opposites, Morrison and Louisa but also the polarities with Louisa and other individuals. As Louisa in what is considered mad raving confides, “I am the circle, I have the poles within myself” (DG 59) Atwood’s “Polarities” is a fine illustration of such degrading treatment of women. Here Atwood takes an unusual way of presenting the equation woman, nature, body from a male perspective of Morrison, a teacher in the university. The story focuses on the discoveries he makes about himself and his chauvinistic attitudes to women, which is representative of the deep-seated misogyny inherent in western culture. Morrison is seen right from the start as an
isolate; a typical academic who is more comfortable in an abstract world of ideas. Though he feels ill at ease with his own body and the world of nature and is eager to find a girl friend to relieve his physical isolation, he rejects the most obvious candidate available—Louisa an assistant. He fails to find her sexually attractive and moreover, he finds her intelligence and model of efficiency too intimidating. The kind of girl he desires is “some nice loosely structured girl with un groomed, seedy breasts, more thing than idea, slovenly- and gratitious” (43). Later on in the narrative Louisa is dumped into a hospital for a mental breakdown, where she is heavily sedated with drugs which terribly transform her intellect and looks, her muscles slacken, she puts on weight and she almost resembles an inert sprawling doll. The climax of the story occurs in Atwood’s account of Morrison’s response to her changed state. He is shocked to discover that rather than being repelled by her degraded state, he finds her sexually attractive. He recognizes that she is:

[O]nly the hopeless, mad Louisa he wanted, the one devoid of any purpose or defence. A sane one, one that could judge him, he would never be able to handle. So this was his dream girl then, his ideal woman found at last: a disintegration. mind turning to its component shards of matter, a defeated formless creature on which he could inflict himself like shovel on earth, axe on forest, use without being used, know without being known. (DG 62)
The passage is a disturbing and shocking one. The words "inflict", "axe", "use" bring up images of rape and violence. Paulina Palmer in *Contemporary Women’s Fiction* observes:

The Platonic dichotomy of body/mind, signalled by the phrases “shard of matter”, ‘earth’, ‘formless’ and ‘know’ corresponds to Irigaray’s description of the phallocentric picture of woman as ‘the opaqueness of sensible matter. A phallocratic culture sees woman as a being who, though lacking in all power of logos, nonetheless offers unawares an all-powerful soil in which the logos can grow. (27)

In another story “When it Happens” (DG 125-37) Mrs. Burridge becomes a victim of her silent fears and anxieties that something is about to happen soon, though she is rather vague about it. She feels rather insecure in a patriarchal society. She thinks to herself “He [Frank] can’t protect me and it isn’t only him, its all of them, they’ve lost the power” (129). She knows for certain that “they are all waiting just as [she] is, for whatever it is to happen” (121). She has noticed this at the Dominion Store where she has seen the look on the faces of the women, “an anxious closed look, as if they are frightened of something but won’t talk about it” (129). Perhaps “they’re wondering what they will do, perhaps they think there’s nothing they can do” (129) Mrs. Burridge who has always been practical is exasperated by this air of helplessness that prevails.
In a patriarchal society women are victims of the male gaze and very often become victims of rape and exploitation. This apprehension is present in all females, which finds release in rape fantasies. Atwood in her “Rape fantasies” (DG, 93-104) recounts rather parodic accounts related by Chrissy, Darlene, Greta and Estella of rape experiences imagined by them. In all these fantasies Atwood does not allow her female characters to become pitiable victims of rape, but they are either able to overpower the men with their resourcefulness or come to terms with it. As Estella in her fantasy “squirts him in the eye” (97) with a plastic lemon or as Chrissy who “just lies there while he gets into the bath-tub.”(97)

Marriage sometimes becomes an instrument of oppression or victimization in a patriarchal society. Kate Millett also sees marriage as an instrument of patriarchal oppression and exploitation. Nicholas Davidson in The Failure of Feminism cites Millett’s views:

[Marriage is essentially an exploitative rather than a co-operative institution. It is a one-sided pact that works to the benefit of the husband and the detriment of the wife. Although the exchange of goods and services, the pooling of resources, and the sharing of responsibility have usually been seen as the basis for marriage, Millett can see nothing in marriage except the exploitation and degradation of women: She describes]
wives as ‘domestic servants’ and ‘slaves’. Women’s ‘chattel status’ is degradingly apparent in ‘the general legal assumption that marriage involves an exchange of the female’s domestic service and (sexual) consortium in return for financial support. (qtd.21)

Sarah in “The Resplendent Quetzal” (DG 154-70) becomes a victim of an unsuccessful marriage. Sarah finds herself getting tired of him “he was omnipresent, he pervaded her life like a kind of smell, it was hard for her to think or act except in reference to him” (161). Moreover, she blames her husband Edward for the death of their baby soon after birth, though both of them knew perfectly well that it was nobody’s fault “the cord was twisted” (166). Yet she continues to blame him may be because it was not there “when she was told; she’d had to take the news alone” (166). Although she never accuses him directly he could feel the reproach “hanging around her like a fog” (166) and widening the gulf between them. In all these cases, the female protagonists do not accept victimization passively but boldly reject it; they are never overpowered by it.

Suniti Namjoshi, like Margaret Atwood and Angela Carter, has taken up the theme of victimization in her fables particularly her collection Feminist Fables. Her female victims also attempt to overcome victimization and hardly ever accept it passively. Being a very strong critic of patriarchial domination and oppression, most of her feminist fables are written in a satiric vein. Victimization of women is
a common phenomenon in a patriarchal set up. As Sandra Lee Bartkey in *Femininity and Domination* remarks:

>[Victimization is] the blatantly unjust treatment of women, which enforces a stifling and oppressive system of sex-role differentiation. For some feminists, this hostile power is ‘Society’ or ‘the system’; for others it is simply men. Victimization is impartial, even though its damage is done to each one of us personally. One is victimized as a woman, as one among many. (15)

Namjoshi in a number of fables highlights the passive role that women are expected to play in a patriarchal set up. Very often the passive females become a prey to victimization. As Simone De Beauvoir points out in *The Second Sex*:

>[T]he world is defined without reference to (women) and its aspect is immutable as far as she is concerned. This lack of physical power leads to a more general timidity: she has no faith in a force she has not experienced in her body: she does not dare to be enterprising, to revolt, to invent; doomed to docility, to resignation, she can take in society only a place already made for her. She regards the existing state of affairs as something fixed. (355)
Namjoshi’s “The Anthropoi” (FF 9) is a strong attack on patriarchy. In this fable Namjoshi presents men as “handsome athletes and noble warriors [who] hunted and drank and were exceedingly clever” (9). Each sentence in this little tale brims with the author’s bitter satire on the patriarchal domination of men over women who are referred to here as “a species that was very like man, but quite evidently inferior” (9). She proceeds with the story of their conquest as the men “trained them into slavery, transferring to them the burden of child-bearing and child-rearing, and the more troublesome tasks which had no prestige or required no intellect” (9). The plight of this weaker section of humanity is pathetically rendered when she says, “some they raised like thorough-bred horses, purely for their pleasure.” (9). The author makes an attack on the women who display a commendable loyalty to men masters. But the fable ends with the author’s ironic remark “after the domestication of this species, the civilization of man advanced apace, indeed, it is still advancing at a break-neck rate” (9). As it has been pointed out in the introduction to What is Feminism for patriarchy “woman is a biological, not an historical category, and she thus suffers from a singular oppression which knows of no historical period that precedes it.” (1)

The fable “The Little Prince” (FF 15) is an overt attack on the patriarchal value that only “men may rule.” Although the wicked step-mother brings up her daughter promoting all manly qualities in her with the intention that she should be the heir to the throne; is disappointed when the subjects rebel against this idea and
consequently they are exiled. The ending of the fable is highly satiric; "order was restored and justice done" (15) The emancipated new woman is referred to as brought up with manly qualities.

The fables “Broadcast Live” (FF 58) and “Next time Around” (59) are satires on the traditional role of women which is quite difficult to erase away completely. As Simone De Beauvoir in The Second sex rightly comments:

Woman herself recognizes that the world is masculine on the whole; those who fashioned it, ruled it, and still dominate it today are men. As for her, she does not consider herself responsible for it; it is understood that she is inferior and dependent; she has not learned the lessons of violence, she had never stood forth as subject before the other members of the group. Shut up in her flesh, her home, she sees herself as passive before these gods with human faces who set goals and establish values. In this sense there is truth in the saying that makes her the ‘eternal child’. Workers, black slaves, colonial natives, have also been called grown-up children as long as they were not feared: that meant that they were to accept without argument the verities and the laws laid down for them by other men. The lot of woman is a respectful obedience. She has no grasp, even in thought, on the reality around her. It is opaque to her eyes. (609)
In “Broadcast Live” (FF 58) the author states:

The Incredible Woman raged through the skies, lassoed a planet, set it in orbit, rescued a starship, flattened a mountain, straightened a building, smiled at a child, caught a few thieves, all in one morning and then, took a little off to visit her psychiatrist, since she is at heart a real woman and all she wants is a normal life. (58)

In “Next Time Around” (FF 59) too the traditional role of the woman has not changed much in spite of advancements, even after a long period of thousand years. “In 1,000 years man has advanced to the planets and stars. Our children are well-fed, our women looked after; and every single man has a house of his own and a reasonable income” (59). People inevitably ask the woman “What is your status? Are you married or are you divorced”(59). The woman has no life of her own. “A Room of His Own” (64) is another fable that satirizes the docile woman who is prepared to accept her subordinate role as a slave to man. Namjoshi’s fable ‘Jewel’ (51) is a very powerful fable that satirizes the worth of the girl child in a patriarchy. She is like a commodity to be bought and sold. Nobody cares what happens to a girl after she is married off, not even her parents. The “jewel” may symbolize several things- the dowry, the intelligence or virginity. “Rescued” (87) is another satirical fable where Namjoshi makes use of a fairy-tale character Rapunzel who desires to escape, but in this fable Rapunzel wants to be rescued by
a strong and handsome prince, only to be safely imprisoned in his castle—“She dreams of a castle with a very wide moat and four strong walls and a room of her own where she’s perfectly safe” (87) Namjoshi’s fables “Experts” (90) and “Heart” (93) are undoubtedly satiric in tone as their very titles imply. Though the fable “Experts” is superficially about birds “the incomparable fliers”, they actually represent the women who are experts in leading a monotonous life like birds and when they can go no further, “they fold their wing, and then they die.” (90) “Heart” symbolizes the lamentable state of women “The headless woman” in fact refers to the unintelligent woman or an unthinking one—the traditional one whose sole role is to serve others. When this foolish woman became a widow, she accepted her plight and could not persuade the government to give her a pension. Women are relegated to be sentimental fools, who simply toil and in Simone De Beauvoir’s view, ever ready “to lie down at her master’s feet and kiss the hand that strikes her” (The Second Sex, 615) The fable “Man-eating Mammal” (96) portrays the idea of usurping male space.

"Further adventures of the One-eyed Monkey” (FF 79) and “Complaint” (85) are satires on the victimization of women. The former tells about the story of a woman Sage who was raped by God Indra. No less a person than Lord Vishnu, himself comes down to mete justice at the plea made by the poor woman’s angered husband. The wronged husband’s request is heard. The guilty God Indra gets salvation by sacrificing a stallion for his purification. Ultimately the raped woman
alone remains the sole victim, in this case with no redressal, “And so it came about that a horse was killed, a God purified, a Brahmin appeased, a woman ruined and a monkey left feeling thoroughly puzzled.” (79) In a male-dominated society, the woman necessarily suffers victimization for no fault of hers, as seen in this fable.

In the fable “Complaint” (85) also the damsel in distress who is abducted by one of the knights is the victim. Her lover hesitates to marry her as she has been raped. The fable “The Lesson” highlights the limits that patriarchy sets for women and the silence or passivity that is expected of them. When a little girl having seen the Emperor making a nude appearance in public, returns home, removes her clothes and tells her mother “I am an emperor” (8) Her mother simply retorts “Only little boys grow up to be Emperors. As for little girls they marry Emperors, and they learn to hold their tongues.” (8) A role that patriarchy has assigned for women. Again “The Loathly Lady” (FF 19) highlights the passive role assigned to women in a patriarchal society. Queen Guinvera calls for women volunteers to find the right answer to “What women most want?” A few women step forward, “but their husbands object, their fathers object, their children are too young, and besides it is most improper.”(FF 19) The fable “Sheherazade” (42) based on the story of Sheherazade in The Arabian Nights is a feminist tale of victimization where women are compared to mares. Both are the victims who yield to the pleasures of their exploiters- men and stallions:
Watch how the stallion mounts the mare. Watch how the mare submits to the stallion. So, the Caliph at night will mount the princess. The princess will give much pleasure to him. This is the law. It pleases Allah. Caliph and stallion abide by it.

Both become instruments of pleasure. Mares “do not exist save for him.” Women “live or die as his whim decrees” and become preys to victimization.

The Oyster-child” is a tale highlighting the lamentable plight of women in a patriarchal society, where she is destined to lead a silent existence in absolute oblivion, carrying out “the” role assigned to her, “nourishing the child” represented by the pearl inside the oyster. When the oyster was discovered by a diver, who took out a very beautiful pearl from inside the oyster; the oyster remained silent. The fable ends with three suggested answers to the question “Why did the oyster say nothing?” The suggested answers are:

From habit.

Because by this time she was already dead.

Out of sheer modesty.

Namjoshi’s “Her Mother’s Daughter” is a satiric fable of some women who meekly accept this passive role. Here the mother represents the women who are
content to remain passive. Her daughter on the contrary is a feminist and represents the New Woman. She tells her mother, “I am going to avenge the wrongs that you have suffered. I will not hurt or hate or kill, but I will try to change things.” (99) The mother tries to reason with her “I haven’t suffered much. I have, on the whole, been perfectly happy, and your father has been good and gentle and kind to me.” (99) The daughter sardonically comments “But as much could be said of our cat ---Doesn’t it bother you that you and I are dependent on him” (91)? She further comments in a good patriarchy the women are dependent, but they are not allowed to know it.” Yet the mother is unable to see the logic “But we are all dependent on one another.....that’s how we live in human society.” (99) In vain the daughter attempts to reason with her mother, “But mother,” cried her daughter, “can you not see that in society as it is, women only exist in relation to men and that men are primary?” But the mother persists in her belief “That’s how it should be.” (99)

In “Philomel” (FF102), based on the mythical Philomela who was transformed into a nightingale, Namjoshi stresses the passivity that is imposed on females. Tereus having raped Philomela, cut off her tongue in order to silence her, “she had her tongue ripped out; and then she sang down through the centuries”(102). She was then transformed into the poetic nightingale, which sings so sweetly through the western tradition. The fate of women in a male-dominated society is akin to that of Philomela; to bear in silence the wrongs and injustices
by their male counterparts. The same theme is taken up in the fable “The Doll”, where two girls are engaged in making a fragile doll out of sticks. An irate boy comes and smashes up the doll. The girls are furious “they would very much like to smash the boy. But they say to themselves that the boy is fragile. They pick up the sticks and start over”. (108) Women are not permitted to question men even if their acts are unreasonable.

The greater value placed on external beauty in females rather than on their real worth is highlighted in the fable “the Disinterested Lover” (113). Shepherd Narcissus looked for the reflection of the beautiful woman who came before him to the lake everyday. On being questioned by the beautiful lady as to what he was doing he replied “looking for your image.” When she asked him to look at her directly he frankly replied, “It isn’t you I want only your image.” (113) The abrasions that working women generally encounter at their workplaces is highlighted in this fable “The Amazon” (110) The career woman gets up in the morning and drives to work, encounters aggression where, “the owner overflows with insistent charm”. He tries to flirt.... The salesman calls her “dear”....She courteously tells him that she prefers not being called “dear” (110). Though she suffers these daily abrasions, she has the consolation that “she hasn’t been wounded, and she hasn’t been raped” (110); owing to the strength of character. As Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* points out:
Women are constantly harassed to the limit of their strength because of the moral tension. Because of all the tasks they assume, because of the contradictions among which they struggle. This does not mean that their ills imaginary: they are as real and destructive as the situation to which they give expression. (706)

Besides, the overtly feministic fables in *Feminist Fables* there are a handful of fables that are thought-provoking and written from a feminist perspective. In “From the Panchatantra” (1) based on a fable from the Panchatantra the preference for the male child that is customary in a patriarchal society is highlighted. The Brahmin prayed to Lord Vishnu to bless him with a son, but “the Brahmin was disappointed” when he was given a daughter instead. This preference for the male child is all the more poignant in an Indian context. As Sudhir Kakar in the article “feminine Identity in India” in the collection *Women in Indian Society* rightly observes, “the birth of a male child (is viewed) as an essential step in the parents’ and the family’s salvation.” (Ghadially 66)

Suniti Namjoshi’s “The Solidarity Fables” in her collection *Saint Suniti and The Dragon and Other Fables* also takes up the theme of victimization in her fables “Manners” (SF 52) and “Bluebeard’s way” (98-101). In “Manners” which deals with the theme of passivity in females and its consequent victimization, a red fish that symbolizes the plight of the helpless female in a male-dominated society...
chooses to sidle rather than swim in order to avoid occupying space. This was ignored by the others as a minor eccentricity, “a bright red fish crept about on the ocean floor, sidled past sea-weeds and apologized if any other fish so much as looked at her.” When asked what it was she was apologizing for, she humbly replied that “it was for occupying space.” (52) Once a bully rudely demanded, “What are you sliding and slithering for?” (52) The red fish was so overcome that she tipped over on one fin and floundered in the mud gasping “Oh!, that I, who am so distinguished for an exquisite courtesy should be treated so.” (52) But, the Bully unperturbed “simply occupied space” and looked on, “The red fish writhed, wriggled, and buried herself deep in the mud. And the bully smiled: sat least the red fish had tidied up after herself, and left no trace of an awkward existence.” (52)

Women, in a patriarchal set up are considered as possessions like other objects. This is highlighted in Namjoshi’s fable “Bluebeard’s Way” (98-101) where Bluebeard is regarded as a miser, who hoards not only gold and furniture but also women. Patriarchy adopts Bluebeard’s way insisting on the victimization of women, where women are not given freedom but are confined within the restrictions prescribed by patriarchy. Women are kept “barefoot” symbolizing the hardships and turmoils that they have to undergo. They are kept “pregnant” which is “the” role that patriarchy has assigned to women.
In the fable “Stumbling Block” (BDF 100-101) Namjoshi once again takes up the theme of victimization of women. It is in a conversational style; a conversation between a caterpillar and the Blue Donkey. Women are the “caterpillars” in a male dominated society, being ruthlessly crushed by the dominating male species. “Big, bullying, beastly and brash.” (100) “You crush caterpillars” (101). When the Blue donkey points out “that caterpillars are a wholly unnecessary nuisance?” the caterpillar objects “We are not...........And in any case we undergo a transformation” (101) highlighting the various roles that women play in society. The Blue Donkey tries to make a compromise “Is there no way then we can be friends?” The caterpillar retorts “Not until you change” (101) From the female viewpoint it is imperative that changes be made in a patriarchal set up.

Women can hope to become complete human beings only if they reject the old feminine image and become a different kind of woman. They can break out of the housewife ‘trap’ only by learning to compete directly with men in professional work. As Nicholas Davidson in *The Failure of Feminism* aptly remarks that, ‘women, as well as men, can only find their identity in work that uses their full capacities. A woman cannot find her identity through others- her husband and children. (15) This innate desire of women to break out of the ‘housewife trap’ is highlighted in Namjoshi’s fable ‘The Three Piglets’ (30-31) Here the three female piglets express their ambitions to become a poet, a saint, a business woman
respectively. The fable reveals that women are not content to stay at home and lead a quiet life, a role that patriarchy has designed for them. On the contrary they desire to hold respectable professions.

Women’s writing has gained greater significance today as women, struggling against internalization of role models thrust on them by patriarchy have learnt to express the untold narratives of being a woman. Moreover, as Virginia Woolf points out to the paradox of a woman’s life in *A Room of One’s Own* that “imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. she pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history.”(75) Women are aware of this and have registered their protest in their writings, and have attempted to do justice to the female point of view, concerns and values. The prevailing concepts of gender are largely cultural constructs generated by the patriarchal biases; being male-centred and organized in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains-familial, religious, political, economic, social and artistic. Women in their writings have strongly protested against this prevailing system particularly in the twentieth century. Santhosh Gupta in “The Epistemology of Inequality: A look at the Second Sex” observes:

The Twentieth century has seen an unprecedented upsurge of women’s resistance to collective male authority both in theory and praxis. Reacting
strongly to the Victorian age’s imposition of gendered roles pushing women into frozen, static images of femininity the women have pushed back state-supported male-dominated hegemony of patriarchal ideology. The concerted efforts of women to change their cultural situation and their enquiry into the meaning of gendered identities have been strengthened immensely in the initial stages by the theoretical formulations of writers like Virginia Woolf and Simone De Beauvoir concerned with re defining the nature, role and status of women in society. (Jain 134)

Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi in several of their short stories have voiced their protest against the inequality and the inferior treatment extended to women in a phallocratic society. Carter voices her protest against the subordination of women by male supremacy in some of her short stories – “A Souvenir of Japan” (FW 1-12), “The Executioner’s Beautiful Daughter” (13-22), “Puss-in-Boots” (BC 68-83), “The Erl-King” (84-90), “The Kiss” (BV 27-29). Carter’s narrator in “A Souvenir of Japan” registers her protest by refusing to remain indoors. “It was as if I occupied the inner room and he did not expect me to go out of it, although it was I who paid the rent” (8). The narrator is also disapproved of by the older women, because she is older than Taro; as conventionally the wife is expected to be the younger. She finds things difficult because Japan is a man’s country where patriarchy prevails. The Boy’s Day is an annual festival in Japan. As the narrator points out “our polarity was publicly
acknowledged and socially sanctioned” (6) She further quotes a sentence in a textbook that she came across, when translated read “In a society where men dominate, they value women only as the object of men’s passions” (7). In “The Executioner’s Beautiful Daughter” (FW 18-22) Gretchen the beautiful girl becomes an object, a victim of incest of both her brother and father. In the case of the brother he receives punishment for according to the custom in that country he is executed “for committing the crime of incest upon the body of his sister.” (16) But the father, the symbol of the patriarch will not be punished “because there is nobody to cut off his head” (20) and ·he has become an object who punishes. “He is an object of fear. He is the image of retribution” (15). Carter, again raises her protest against the rigid structures that curtail women’s freedom and chain her in a patriarchal prison. Such an imprisonment is seen in “Puss-in-boots” where the Signor Panteleone, “an old dodderer”, who “is jealous as he is impotent”, keeps her securely guarded by an old hag, just to ensure that his young beautiful wife does not “get from another what she can’t get from him.” (73) Despite all his precautions. Signor Furioso enters her very bedroom in the guise of a rat-catcher and makes love to her and ultimately after the old man’s death he instantly makes her his wife. She boldly dismisses the hag, pointing out to the young man who’ll be (her) “second husband.” (83) “The Erl-King” is another example of women being confined by rigid patriarchal structures. Here Carter voices her protest. Erl king keeps the women he has transformed into birds in “little cages he has woven.
out of osier twigs" (88). The narrator knows that she too would meet a similar fate. She has no wish to join "the whistling congregation he kept in his cages." (80) She plans to murder him "very softly......with hands as gentle as rain" (91) and then "open all the cages and let the birds free, they will change back into young girls, every one, each with the crimson imprint of his love-bite on their throats". (91)

Like Carter, Atwood too in her stories, "Hurricane Hazel" (BE 31-60), "The Sunrise" (BE 241-262), "Loulou, or the domestic life of the language" (BE 61-82), "The Man from Mars" (DG 13-37), "Weight" (WT 177-194) – has voiced her protest against the male domination of the female prevailing in a patriarchal set up. In "Hurricane Hazel" (BE 31-60), Buddy gives his girl friend the narrator an identification bracelet which, "everyone knew that getting a boy’s ID bracelet was a privilege, not a degradation" (51). The narrator feels that Buddy was handing over to her "his identity, some key part of himself" that she was expected "to keep for him and watch over." (51) But Atwood sees it as a symbol of male dominance and satirically gives another interpretation for the ID "that Buddy was putting (his) name on (her) like a Reserved sign or an ownership label or a tattoo on a cow’s ear, or a brand." (51) In "Loulou, or The Domestic Life of the Language"(BE,), Loulou is indispensable to the poets as she bakes for them and generally takes care of them. But the poets in turn assert their male supremacy, by taking her duties for granted. They even go to the extent of taking advantage of
the fact she is uneducated and deliberately make use of words that Loulou does not understand. What irritates her is that in the presence of female poets, “the poets act as if she isn’t there” (69). Loulou registers her protest and seduces the accountant just to take spite on the poets. In “The Man From Mars” Christine is followed by a stranger, a man from an alien culture, probably an exchange-student. Here Atwood focuses on the unpleasantness that women experience, in becoming the object of the masculine gaze and in the curtailment of their individual liberty. Here she voices her protest against this form of male domination that makes women feel inferior. In “Weight” (WT 177-194) a smart female advocate Molly is murdered by her husband Curtis with a “claw hammer”. (180) The narrator recalls how she and Molly while law students “had big ideas”. They had decided to “break the code, circumvent the old boys’ network, show that women could do it whatever it might be.” (182) Moreover, Molly an adept at handling men of any type, “any toad could be turned into a prince if he was only kissed enough by her.”(182) But, she fails miserably in handling her husband, Curtis. “Molly was a fixer. She thought she could fix things that were broken” (189). Here Atwood, voices her protest that resourceful, smart or enterprising females are not tolerated in a patriarchal set up. They are either subordinated or destroyed completely, as Molly was murdered by Curtis, “in her sleep”. (192)

Suniti Namjoshi too, like Atwood and Carter, has raised her protest against male domination in some of her fables. “The Anthropoi” (FF 9) is a strong protest
against patriarchal domination of men over women who are referred to as “quite evidently inferior” (9), and who were burdened with child-bearing and child-rearing, and the more troublesome tasks which had “no prestige or required no intellect” (9) Namjoshi here also raises her protest against women who display absolute loyalty to men masters. In the fable “The Little Prince” (FF 15) Namjoshi registers her protest against the patriarchal notion that only “men may rule” (15) even though the wicked step-mother brings up her daughter promoting all manly qualities. In “Next Time Around” (FF 59) too Namjoshi protests against the traditional role of woman that remains unchanged even after a long period of a thousand years. The woman has no life of her own. In ‘A Room of His Own’ (FF 64) Namjoshi condemns women who are ready to accept a subordinate role as a slave to man.

The foregoing analysis reveals that Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter and Suniti Namjoshi are very much similar in voicing their protest against patriarchy’s subordination of women and the treatment of women as commodities or objects. Sex is the creation of God and though sexual differences are vital for procreation, gender is not God’s creation but a patriarchal one. Such structures based on oppression rather than mutuality assert men’s superiority over women. Though women are significant actors in history and have played a vital role in the creation of society, patriarchal attitudes have always tried to marginalize them “to obscure their history.” Gerda Lerner has observed, “women had no history-so they were
told and so they believed and because they had no history they had no future alternatives". (Lerner 222). This subordination of women to men is older than civilization itself. The image of woman was thus created by man; an image of what he wanted her to be and he never wanted her to be his equal, a co-sharer of all the privileges enjoyed by him. This image of women did not offer them a clear perception of themselves. So, “woman, presented with an image in a mirror has danced to that image, in a hypnotic trance; and because she thought the image was herself, it became just that”. (Figes 13) Patriarchy thus undermines woman’s sense of self-worth and makes them believe that their inferiority is pre-ordained. But with the rise of feminism and the consequent awakening of woman, they became aware of the fact that their inferiority is not pre-ordained, but a patriarchal construct that may be deconstructed. Women became intolerant of their exploitation and victimization by men and began to revolt against their marginalization questioning the sexual politics and gender arrangements and challenging patriarchal role prescriptions as “there was no logical connection between the anatomy of a woman and roles she was expected to play except that of child-bearing” (Gender and Literature xiv). Women began “struggling to dethrone the myth of femininity, to reject the constructs of the patriarchal thought and to re-order the world” (xiv).

The changing perceptions of man-woman relationships have been depicted in current writings. Literature now portrays the New Woman who is no longer a
puppet in the hands of men and who falsifies the outdated belief that a woman’s place is in the home. Many texts now “depict women who are trying to deconstruct the myth of male sovereignty, who are trying to come out of the margins and to occupy the subject positions” (Gender & Literature xv). Changes in the socio-economic conditions have also effected alterations in patriarchal attitudes to gender. Subjectivity has been redefined and the traditional myths about male and female no longer prevail.

Eisenstein defines sexual politics as “the system of interpersonal power by means of which individual men dominated individual women.” (Palmer 43) This has been central in the writing of early feminists- Kate Millett and Schulamith Firestone. Groups who dominate by birthright are dwindling, but “there remains one ancient and universal scheme for the domination of one birth group by another- the scheme that prevails in the men of sex” (Millett 24) and the situation between the sexes is what “Max Weber defined as herrshaft, a relationship of dominance and subordinance. Referring to this Kate Millett in Sexual Politics observes:

Through this system, a most ingenious form of “interior colonization” has been achieved. It is one, which tends moreover to be sturdier than any form of segregation, and more rigorous than class stratification, more uniform, certainly more enduring. However muted its present appearance may be,
sexual dominion obtains nevertheless as perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power (25)

Male domination operates in different areas like the family, sexual relations, the labour market, the media, the medical profession, regarded by feminists as sites of feminist struggle which become themes of novels and short stories; overtly political themes illustrating women’s struggles to transform their lives and resist male power. Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi in their short stories have taken up the theme of sexual politics to transform women’s lives and enable them to resist male dominance in its myriad forms.

Carter gives emphasis to sexual politics in her short stories particularly in a few of the stories in the collection Black Venus- “Our Lady of the Massacre” (BV 33-48) and “The Fall Axe Murders” (103-121) and “Lizzie’s Tiger” (AG 3-19) in the collection American Ghosts and Old World Wonders and “The Donkey Prince” (Don’t Bet on the Prince 62-72). In her collection Fireworks too she has portrayed powerful female characters, who are able to resist male domination.

The narrator in “A Souvenir of Japan” (FW 1-11) is a powerful female character who herself remarks, “we fought a silent battle of self-abnegation and I won it, for I had the stronger character.” (3) In “The Loves of Lady Purple” (23-
28) the puppet Lady Purple based on the famous prostitute and “the wonder of the East” is powerful enough to kill the Asiatic professor sucking “his breath from his lungs” (36) In “Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest” (47-60) Madeline is cleverer and more resourceful than her brother Emile. In “Master” (71-80) the powerful girl, Friday who has her revenge on her master who abuses her. She shoots him with his own gun. Anna in “Reflections” (81-101) is another powerful female who has the narrator captive under her necromantic power.

The narrator Sal, in “Our Lady of the Massacre” is a very powerful female character who on the death of her benefactress is thrown out onto the streets where she soon becomes a prostitute, the “Lancashire whore.” (34) Her trials and tribulations begin when she is sold to work in the plantations in Virginia for seven years for having stolen a gold watch. Her master taking a liking for her employs her as his personal servant. Here she cuts off the overseer’s ears when he attempts to rape her; and she leaves the place for good. She undertakes the arduous journey on foot and faces the hardships stoically. Ultimately she meets a Red Indian Woman who accepts her as her own daughter. She lives contentedly for a short while as one of the tribe. She marries a young man Tall Hickory and gives birth to a son Little Shooting Star. But unfortunately she loses her husband and Red Indian Mother in the English attack, where she and her son are spared.
Carter’s “The Fall River Axe Murder” (BV 103-121) is a portrayal of a strong female character Lizzie Borden, who has meticulously planned the murder of her father and step-mother. She intends to kill them with the very same hatchet with which Old Borden killed her pigeons. As Bridget, the servant maid describes her character- “She doesn’t weep, this one, it isn’t her nature, she is still waters, but when moved, she changes colour, her face flushes, it goes dark, angry, mottled red.” (120)

Lizzie in “Lizzie’s Tiger” (AG 3-19) from the collection American Ghosts and Old World Wonders is a portrayal of “a fearless girl” (7) of four years. Her desire to visit the Circus and see the tiger is thwarted by her stern father who turns down her request and instead orders her to bed. But Lizzie is adamant. “She had a whim of iron. She swung her feet on to the stool upon which the girls climbed out of bed, thence to the floor.’ (5-6) Unobserved she made her escape through the kitchen door. “She was off- off and away’ trotting down ferry street, her cheeks pink with self-reliance and intent” (6) Lizzie’s character has even the power to subdue the tiger:

The svelte beast fell to its knees. It was as if it had been subdued by the presence of this child, as if this little child of all the children in the world might lead it towards a peaceable kingdom where it need not eat
meat............................. It stopped roaring. Instead, it started to purr.

(14)

Carter's "The Donkey Prince" (62-72) from the collection *Don't Bet on the Prince* by Jack Zipes is a fairy tale written from a feminist perspective. Though this tale ends in the marriage of Bruno and Daisy, it suggests that gender roles are not biologically determined and that power can be used for the liberation of both the sexes. The story focuses on a magic apple that had been given to the Queen by her father as a wedding gift. "Keep the apple safe and you'll never lose your looks or have a day's illness" (Zipes 63) Unfortunately, the Queen loses the apple and "at once the colour faded from her face and besides losing her looks she became so ill that everyone said she would die" (64) The donkey she brings up as Prince - Prince Bruno, sets off on a quest and retrieves the magic apple with the courage and skill of Daisy, whom he ultimately marries. Here, the liberation of the Queen from her illness, the transformation of Bruno into a man and the restoration of "the Brown Men of the hills" (63) who were transformed into donkeys by a cruel enchantment of the King, is in the power of Daisy, whose courage, skill and resourcefulness stands her in good stead and enables her to endure all the hardships through fire and water to retrieve the magic apple that instantly sets everything right. In the magic mirror Bruno sees his foster-mother "waking as if from a refreshing sleep" (71) and Bruno himself "beginning to look more like a man" soon sees himself as "a young prince in a suit of green velvet" and a "throne
of Wildmen. Brown men of the Hills in their true shapes (small of stature and brown of hue) and the men and women of Bruno’s Kingdom” (71).

Atwood like Carter, in her stories like “Significant Moments in the Life of My Mother” (11-30), “Hurricane Hazel” (31-60), “Scarlet Ibis” (179-200), “The Sunrise” (241-262), “The Bogman” (WT 85-106) and “Hack Wednesday” (223-247) has depicted the strong woman who is able to resist male dominance or tyranny. In “Significant Moments in the Life of My Mother” Atwood portrays the narrator’s mother as a strong character who has “led a life of sustained hilarity and hair-raising adventure” (16) and was not the usual docile female generally seen in a patriarchal set up. The grandfather who was a doctor is portrayed “as severe, and in charge of things.” (12) The narrator relates how her mother very ingeniously bobs her hair. At a time when women were bobbing their hair, the narrator’s mother was not permitted to cut off her long hair. Her grandfather who was very strict “forbade her to cut it.” (14) But she seizes her opportunity while her father is at the dentists’ “white with pain” (15) He gives his permission to “do anything in tarnation as long as she would stop pestering him” (15) Later, he becomes furious, but he could do nothing. Likewise, her father refuses to send her to the university “as she was too frivolous-minded. She liked ice-skating and dancing too much for his (patriarchal) taste” (17) but she earns money as a teacher and sends “herself to the university with it” (17). She lives in a world where “guile less flirtation was possible, because there were many things that were
simply not done by nice girls, and more girls were nice then.”(18) Despite, the patriarchal set up, during her mother’s days women were basically stronger than men: Men, “are not to be told anything they might find too painful; the secret depth of human nature, the sordid physicalities, might overwhelm or damage them”. She relegates men to a very insignificant position. “Men must be allowed to play in the sandbox of their choices, as happily as they can without disturbance; otherwise they get cranky and won’t eat their dinners. There are all kinds of things that men are simply not equipped to understand, so why expect it of them?” (22)

“Hurricane Hazel” (BE. 31-60) depicts the narrator and her mother as powerful female characters. Her mother endures life stoically in her husband’s long absences. “on a remote farm, with a three year old, no telephone, no car, no electricity”. (33) She is a person, who preserves her equanimity in the midst of crises. “she is such a person who ‘in the middle of crises, such as cars stuck up to their axles in mud would suggest we sing a song.” (34) Moreover, she is not merely a housewife engaged in the household chores, but an educated woman who spares time amidst the domestic drudgery to read books “novels of historical times or account of archeological expeditions.” (34) The narrator in contrast to her boyfriend, Buddy is certainly a stronger portrayal. In her brother’s opinion, Buddy is “dog-like” and she too admits that . “affability, the dumb faithfulness about the eyes, the dutiful way he plodded through the rituals of dating”. (37) She
also accepts that even if she attempted to be smarter Buddy would not object because, “he was the kind of boy for whom cleverness was female” (38) The narrator in her relationship with Buddy always maintains a certain degree of maturity and rationality. She always knew when “she was supposed to stop him”. (41) When Buddy gives her an identification bracelet, she is not unduly elated though “everyone knew that getting a boy’s ID bracelet was a privilege” (51) She maintains her equanimity and is not carried away by her passion when she refuses a dinner date on a stormy night. Even when Buddy accuses her saying that if she “wouldn’t go out with him during a hurricane (she) didn’t love him enough” (57) She simply says that “he was being stupid” (57) Neither is she heart-broken when Buddy ends the relationship and asks her to return his ID bracelet, “she has only the sensation of having come unscathed through a major calamity”. (58)

In the “Scarlet Ibis” (BE 179-200), Atwood portrays a powerful female character – Christine. Christine takes the initiative in planning the trip to see the scarlet Ibis during a vacation at Trinidad with her husband Don and daughter Lillian. The idea is met with a derogatory comment from Don, “in a swamp? Probably crawling with mosquitoes.” (183) Again when the boat strikes something hard which makes a hole, one of the passengers suggests that they go back, but it is Christine being more rational suggests that they get it fixed and then start again. Christine’s ministrations are hardly noticed by Don- the cold wash clothes for his headaches, the trips to the drugstore, the hours of tiptoeing
around intercepting the phone, keeping Lillain quiet. All this is merely taken for granted in a patriarchy where all these tasks are generally expected of a woman. Atwood in “The Sunrise” (BE 241-262) depicts another powerful female artist Yvonne, who “follows men” (241) and makes her living drawing sketches of them. Handsome men do not interest Yvonne. She chooses men, “who look as if things have happened to them, things they didn’t like very much, men who show signs of the forces acting upon them, who have been chipped a little, rained on, frayed, like shells on the beach.” (242)

Yvonne is daring enough to mount a show of her drawings when no gallery would dare to mount the show. She is one of “the first artists in Toronto” (245) to have a show of her paintings closed down by the police on the charges of obscenity. Yvonne is an independent artist who owns a studio of her own and lives all by herself. She takes good care of herself and is healthy like a rare plant “which can flourish and even live only under certain conditions a transplant” (247) Yvonne lives on the top floor of a house owned by a youngish couple, Al and Judy. Though she is social with them and even at times takes care of their one-year old Kimberley, she remains a mystery to them. Al and Judy attribute Yvonne’s frequent absences for days to either secret meetings with her lover or visits to her child or children, whom she is allowed to see at infrequent intervals. Yvonne is also an energetic woman, and the secret of her energy as she confides to one of her lovers is that she get(s) up every morning to watch the sunrise (255)
Though she is generally healthy and energetic, she has occasional black outs which cannot be explained. “There’s no trigger for them, no early warnings. They’re just something that happens to her, like a sneeze” (253)

Atwood in her collection *Wilderness Tips* has portrayed strong and resourceful female characters who are able to transform their lives and overcome patriarchal victimization. Katherine in “Hairball” (WT, 39-56) has her revenge on Gerald and overcomes victimization when she sends her “pickled tumor” to him in “a box of chocolate truffles” (55), Selena in “Isis in Darkness” (WT 57-84) constructs her own identity as a poet and wins the admiration of Richard who writes about the brilliant woman poet, who once had him under her spell. Julie in “The Bogman” (85-106), who is in love with her professor Connor and when she finds his interest in her flagging, she abruptly ends the relationship. Later when she marries and has kids, Connor “becomes an anecdote” (106). Lois and Lucy in “Death by Landscape” (107-130) symbolize vitality and self-assertiveness, Marcia, a middle-aged newspaper columnist in “Hack Wednesday” (223-247) who has the uncanny ability to size up men in an unusual way, “she can look at a face and see in past the surface to that other child’s face which is still there.” (241) These heroines are fine illustrations of the “new woman”.

Atwood’s collection *Good Bones and Simple Murders* takes up sexual politics in a number of pieces. In “Gertrude Talks Back” (BAM 15-16) Gertrude
justifies herself telling Hamlet to sit down and shut up, pointing out that his “Dad just wasn’t a whole lot of fun. Noble, sure, I grant you. But Claudius, well he likes a drink now and then. He appreciates a decent meal. He enjoys a laugh, know what I mean?” (16) Some of the voices in the pieces blame men for the problems of this world although they seem to poke fun at women too as in “Let Us Now Praise Stupid Women” (BAM 31-38) which apparently celebrates females who cannot keep themselves out of trouble, because “without them there would be ‘no plot, no stories” (32) But the whole piece is delivered with a wink as though it were not meant to be taken seriously. Very often when Atwood writes about men she sounds as if she were making a wicked joke to an audience of women, conspiring over a shared truth. The narrator of “Cold-Blooded” (BAM 65-70) talking of the human race says that “the leaders are for the most part male, which may account for their state of relative barbarism” (67) In “Making a Man” (BAM 53-58) several tongue-in-cheek recipes are given for whipping up a man in a kitchen pointing out that “although men are made of dust, women are made of ribs” (54) Here the male is pictured as a trifling commodity to be devoured. In “Alien Territory” (BAM 103-116) men are pictured as having:

[n]othing to offer, none of the usual things. They have short attention spans, falling apart clothes, old bent up cars. The cars break down, and they try to fix and don’t succeed and give up. They go on long walks from which they forget to return. They prefer weeds to flowers. They tell trivial
fibs. They perform clumsy tricks with oranges and pieces of string, hoping desperately that someone will laugh. They don’t put food on the table. They don’t make money. Don’t, can’t, won’t they offer nothing. (113-114)

Like Carter and Atwood, Suniti Namjoshi in her fables takes up sexual politics and presents powerful females who are able to resist male dominance, particularly in “The Milk-white Mare” (FF 25), the woman is resourceful enough to resist patriarchal domination by transforming herself into a mare; and “In The Forest” (95). where Gretel the “braver and the wiser”, is able to overpower the witch. Unlike them, she adopts a more radical form to transform female lives and enable them to fearlessly resist male oppression. In her fables “I See You What You are” (FF92) “ABC” (FF107) and “The Badge Wearing Dyke and Her Two Maiden Aunts” (FF11) she takes up the theme of lesbian feminism. The fable “I see You What You are” (92) is based on Shakespeare’s play Twelfth Night Viola, disguised as a page, is sent by Orsino to woo Olivia by proxy. The author is probably advocating lesbianism when she suggests- “But suppose that Viola had also been charmed, charmed to the point of a little indiscretion?” (92) A little later the author again suggests, “suppose she had said, “I see you what you are – but you, you are deceived by the disguise. In “The Badge Wearing Dyke and Her Two Maiden Aunts” (11) the author depicts the dual dimensions of lesbian feminism- the political dimension in the niece – the Badge wearing Dyke and the
erotic dimension in the maiden aunts who have been living as lesbians for a long time. “ABC” (107) at the superficial level is about a child playing with an educational toy – a set of dancing dolls. But the underlying ideas of this child’s play are certainly not childish. These dancing dolls of “A” type, “B” type and “C” type when properly paired will dance:

A’ type doll (which) may be happily linked with any A’ type doll or C’ type doll of the opposite sex. Any B’ type doll may be similarly linked with any B’ type doll, or C’ type doll of the same sex. C’ type dolls may also be linked with C’ type dolls. (107)

This pairing of dolls represents both the heterosexual and homosexual relationships. The child discovers that when the dolls are not properly paired “the dolls don’t dance”. It is the despair and annoyance of an innovator that is hinted at in the child throwing tantrums.

Carter, Atwood and Namjoshi in their short stories by projecting the stereotypes of wronged women and at once asserting the need to establish her voice and identity have in their unique ways tried to overthrow the patriarchal notion of “passive females” and present the New Woman or the Liberated woman, an image totally unencumbered by the conventional falsifying colours. Moreover, they have in their stories dealt with areas of female experience – childbirth.
menstruation, puberty, sexual abuse, victimization, alienation – that have been hitherto been ignored, erased or marginalized in a patriarchal regime. As Jasbir Jain in the introduction to *Women’s Writing* aptly notes:

With all its variety, timidity and marginality it has been moving through self-expression and self-questioning toward self-assertion and re-definition. It has projected alternative structures and meanings, and transformed disorder and chaos into enabling structures. It has attempted to dissolve polarities and move towards pluralistic meanings. (xvi)

Carter, Atwood and Namjoshi, in their short stories, have produced penetrating diagnoses of problems from a female perspective and attempted to point towards new possibilities by challenging patriarchal assumptions resulting in a large scale re-conceptualizing of the world to account of the experience of women. These writers have also specially focussed on the woman’s point of view, which is given greater importance in their essentially female stories of sexual politics to transform women’s lives and enable them to resist male dominance.