ABSTRACT

In the present study an attempt has been made to read Ayn Rand from a Marxist feminist angle. The study is divided into seven chapters.

The first chapter discusses how the last few decades have witnessed the growth of a number of subversive movements in the world of literature. These movements are subversive in intent and purpose but at the same time are emancipatory in spirit. Ideas and views about literature today are not the same as they were in the time of T.S. Eliot or F.R. Leavis.

Of these movements 'Feminism' is probably the most pervasive. Though not confined to academics, its impact on the way we read a text has profound implications. Its impact can be gauged from the fact that it has formed a kind of strategic alliance with other subversive movements namely Psychoanalysis, Deconstruction and Marxism.

The appeal of Marxism for feminist critics is the identification of capitalism and the modes of production which support it as the material base of a class system which is the source of oppression for men and more so for women. In the destruction of capitalism according to Marxist feminists, there would be emancipation from all forms of oppression – economic and patriarchal.

The central hypothesis of Marxist feminist critics stresses a kind of unholy alliance of capitalism and patriarchy. In other words Marxist feminists believe that capitalism creates the conditions for the growth of patriarchy and since most of the known writers happen to be men – women writers have been conveniently forgotten by an essentially male view – feminists turn their attention to women writers to 'find' the absence of patriarchal values or a critique of patriarchy.
However, Ayn Rand’s is a unique case in the sense that despite being a woman writer of great substance, she appears to be celebrating the idea of patriarchy. In all her fictional works – The Fountainhead, Atlas Shrugged, We The Living, Night of January 16th, and Anthem – there is a female protagonist who is active, independent, professionally successful, and sexually emancipated.

However, a critical analysis of Ayn Rand’s fiction indicates that far from presenting active, assertive, successful and sexually emancipated heroines, her fictional works are no less guilty of feminist charges. Her heroines and plots in fact do more harm than good to women’s cause.

Her novels are all about female servitude – intellectual, political and sexual which has been made amply clear by her views of femininity and the goal of her writing. Implicitly evident in her fiction and explicitly stated by Ayn Rand in her philosophy is the conviction that women should stand in divine awe of the primal force, the superior male.

A feature of Ayn Rand’s stories, and a highly petrifying one at that, is the depiction of the ‘rape-encounters’ between the heroine and hero at their first meetings. Despite their being active, assertive, professionally successful and sexually emancipated, the women characters in her novels are presented as brainwashed victims of patriarchy. They exist for their men and in the process appear masochistic. Thus, the male protagonists rape almost all her women characters but strangely the women seem to enjoy their rapes. These rape scenes completely ‘dehumanize’ women. Readers with a ‘raised consciousness about the nature of rape’, find this symbolism unpalatable. Ayn Rand’s glorification of rapes in a sense entitles men to access and annex women, for in a capitalist patriarchy women are defined by their biological sex and one of the social requirements of its heterosexuality is the institutionalization of male sexual
dominance and female sexual submission.

Thus in her best known work, The Fountainhead, the principal female character – Dominique Francon, is subjected to all kinds of insults including rape – unarguably the most heinous crime against a woman – by the male ‘hero’ who is a thinly disguised persona of the writer herself. In her other works also, the mystique of an all powerful male is unmistakably present. Was it all due to the pernicious influence of capitalism of which Ayn Rand was an unabashed or rather aggressive champion?

The present study probed the nexus of capitalism and patriarchy in the works of Ayn Rand. At the same time being aware of the fact that Ayn Rand does not find a place in the established canon of American literature, the study employing poststructuralist insights investigated the politics that goes into the formation of canon and the possible reasons for the neglect of Ayn Rand by literary critics.

The second chapter of the study deals with an introduction of the various literary feminist movements. It traces the ‘women’s movement’ from the eighteenth century, through the 1960s right upto the present day. We observe that feminism is composed of many ‘feminisms’, which abound in national, cultural and linguistic differences. The one denominator common to all the ‘feminisms’ is the dismantling of patriarchal assumptions and enlarging or replacing of the ‘canon’.

The third chapter contains an analysis of the feminist critique of patriarchy with special reference to Marxist feminist perspective. Marxism and feminism are both theories of ‘power’. They both try to explain the inequality in the distribution of power. Marxism equips feminists with insights into understanding their predicament and thereby find a solution to their unfortunate subjugation by patriarchal capitalism. Marxist
feminists focus on the representations of ideology in literature. They believe that texts reveal imaginary reproductions of unequal sexual power. ‘Consciousness-raising’ is one of the prime objectives of these critics, together with evaluation of literary texts and inaugurating oppositional practices of reading, writing and criticism.

The fourth chapter deals with an analysis of the celebration of patriarchy in Ayn Rand’s fictional writings. Employing Marxist feminist viewpoint, we observe in Ayn Rand’s fiction the legitimation of a patriarchal—capitalist social life and culture through her female characters ‘sense of life’ and hero-worship. One also observes how Ayn Rand in her fictional works thoroughly complements patriarchal repression of women and female sexuality by turning women into the raw materials that fuel man’s projects. Ayn Rand’s celebration of patriarchy treats women to be a slave to men’s desires and sexual needs. We also observe how the male sex assumes itself to be the generic civil subject and subordinates women to a hierarchical, patriarchal economy where women are destined to a ‘second class’ existence.

The fifth chapter presents an analysis of Ayn Rand’s non-fictional works. A brief survey is also made of capitalism and other related issues in her works. Through her six non-fiction books, Ayn Rand made an effort to expand her ‘philosophy of Objectivism’. The books far from presenting any systematic philosophy are in reality scattered collections of articles and passages from her novels, either in defense of her views or expanding upon her philosophy. Ayn Rand, through her six non-fiction books, attempted to proclaim the ‘philosophy of Objectivism’ as the only route to a ‘rational life’. Her call to Americans and other people at large was to ‘relearn individualism, have admiration for capitalism and productivity and evince belief in rational self-interest’. This for her was the only authentic ‘sense of life’.
The sixth chapter deals with the question of canon and Ayn Rand's place in it. A close scrutiny of the English literary canon reveals the politics behind the formation of the canon. One observes how the standard canon of great books, has been constructed keeping in view the ideology and political interests and values of an elite and privileged class. Marxist-feminists along with Black, Lesbian and post-colonial feminists have identified this elite and privileged class to be white, male and European, with the result that the canon consists mainly of works that manifest racism, patriarchy and capitalist imperialism. Ayn Rand's heroines are "exchanged and circulated" enforcing the idea of their being 'objects' or 'products' in a capitalist patriarchy. This probably resulted in her being omitted from the 'canon' of Women's Studies; and her 'atheism and libertarianism' ensured her not being part of the traditional literary Canon. Nevertheless, her exclusion from the canon brings to the fore the politics and play of ideology in a writer being included or excluded from it.

Thus a review of Ayn Rand's fictional and non-fictional works reveals that she unashamedly glorifies patriarchal-capitalism. A superficial reading of her works appeals for all the reasons she writes – celebration of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. However, a critical and focused reading reveals an altogether subversive and in particular anti-woman subject matter. It is for this reason that feminists far from invoking her because of her being a woman, actually despise her intellectual premises and thus by implication her works, both fictional and non-fictional. The final chapter is a recapitulation of the major points, which have emerged during the discussion on Ayn Rand and her works.