The impact of literary theories on English studies has been reportedly ‘cataclysmic’ or ‘redemptive’ depending on which side of the academic debate one positions himself. Nevertheless, the reputation of some writers of the English ‘canon’ is at stake and some lost writers as also literary traditions are being ‘discovered’ by a radical element which questions not only the status of some writers but also the ways of reading a literary work, or simply writing to use a preferred term.

Of these radical voices ‘Feminism’ is probably the most pervasive and persistent. Though not confined to literary studies, its impact on the way we read a text has profound implications. Since feminists see literature as a political act/construction, ‘at its best feminist criticism is also a political act whose aim is not simply to interpret the world but to change it by changing the consciousness of those who read and their relation to what they read’ (Fetterely viii).

A major interest of feminist critics has been to reconstitute all the ways in which we deal with literature. While originally they were more concerned with exposing the inequities of a ‘patriarchal bureaucracy’, their alliance with Psychoanalysis, Deconstruction and Marxism has helped in their intellectual emancipation, regeneration and in the making of their own literature.
By and large the feminist movement has drawn a lot from Marxism and in fact it will be safe to assume that Marxism in general has influenced ‘literary theories’ extensively in the construction of intellectual predications of their discourses. Marxists view literature not as something separate from the world nor do they view literature as reflecting the world in a passive and mirror-like way. For them literature is a part and product of the world as any other ‘signifying process’.

The present study has sought to probe the writings of Ayn Rand from a Marxist-feminist angle. The central hypothesis of Marxist-feminist critics stresses a kind of unholy alliance between 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 celebrates the idea of patriarchy. Born Alice Rosenbaum on February 2, 1905 in St. Petersburg, Russia, Ayn Rand is the name she took when she came to USA in 1924. Ayn Rand and her advocacy of egoism and capitalism arouse violent extremes of admiration and antagonism. She originated a philosophical framework of her own, for in her view, man and his existence were in conflict with the existing philosophical theories of the time. She called her creed ‘Objectivism’. The essence of her creed was ‘dogmatic atheism in Religion, objective reality in Metaphysics, reason in Epistemology, self-interest in Ethics and capitalism in Politics’ (O’Neill 18).

She fancied herself a philosopher and she tried to impress the efficacy of her philosophy by presenting it in works of fiction. Her five
fictional works are the compendium of her philosophy, which she expostulated about ad infinitum in her non-fictional works. However, what makes Ayn Rand’s works exceptional is that despite being a woman writer of great eminence, she appears anti-woman in thought and deed. Feminist critics can indict her in general and Marxist- feminists in particular for having an unabashed and unapologetic anti-woman view, and for a malafide celebration of ‘patriarchy’ and ‘capitalism’ in her fiction and philosophy. These two ideologies have systematically brought about the subjugation of women.

The basic philosophy in Ayn Rand’s novels is the presentation and the projection of ‘the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, his productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute’ (For The New Intellectual). For her, novels were a viable instrument for the presentation of her ‘sense of life’, which was the presentation of ‘an ideal man’.

Ayn Rand’s second postulate was ‘capitalism’. For her ‘it is the only economic system based on reason, the most practical and productive moral system known to man. Those who practice it are the brightest, most ethical of men’ (Baker 126-27). In all her fictional works the heroes strive for the ideal of, ‘capitalism’ and the heroines strive for their ideal, ‘hero-worship’.

The mystique of an all-powerful male is unmistakably present in all of Ayn Rand’s five fictional works. Whether this was all due to the pernicious influence of ‘patriarchal capitalism’ of which Ayn Rand was an unabashed or rather aggressive champion is a moot question, and a review of her non-fictional prose will unarguably help. Ayn Rand’s philosophy, which she terms ‘Objectivism’, is perhaps most eloquently expressed in her works of fiction and particularly in her two major novels:
The Fountainhead and Atlas Shrugged. With Atlas Shrugged, she enhanced and completed her portrayal of ‘an ideal man’ in John Galt, who filled in the blanks, which Howard Roark in The Fountainhead left incomplete. After the publication of Atlas Shrugged, Ayn Rand did not write any novel, her destiny metamorphosed from an imaginative writer to a public philosopher. This career change was a natural result of the interest her works of fiction aroused in readers for whom the thought content was as important, if not more, than the plot and characters.

The present study also proposes to study the nexus of capitalism and patriarchy in the works of Ayn Rand. At the same time aware of the fact that Ayn Rand was one of only a handful of successful American female novelists of the twentieth century and one of an even smaller group of successful female philosophers, one may be left wondering as to why she does not find a place in the established ‘canon’ of American literature. The present researcher, employing poststructuralist insights, also plans to probe the politics that goes into the ‘formation of canon’ and the possible reasons for the neglect of Ayn Rand by literary critics. Needless to add that even a cursory reading of certain stands of contemporary literary theory will be of great help to understand the reasons for Ayn Rand’s exclusion from the canon.

As with any research undertaken, this study endeavours to explore ideas, probe issues, solve problems or make an argument that compels us to rethink, rework and reconstitute the premises of our learning.