Chapter II

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History of the world is replete with incidents of man subjugating woman. Man takes upon himself the right to have control over woman as if it is a divinely ordained one. Philosophers and thinkers down the centuries have attributed to men all qualities good for society, and to women characteristics not so good. All these have created an exploitative structure that is reinforced by governments, religions and social practices. Eventually, this sense of male superiority is deep rooted in social beliefs. It is this belief in male supremacy that has instigated societies to justify the oppression of woman just because she happens to be a woman. This feeling of male superiority is called patriarchy. Webster's Dictionary defines patriarchy as "Social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line. Broadly, the control by men of a disproportionately large share of power." Adrienne Rich defines patriarchy as

... the power of the fathers: a familial, social, ideological, political system in which men by force, direct pressure or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education and the division of labour determine what part women shall or shall not play and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.(57).
Be it in economic, political, religious, social or domestic life – man has asserted his supremacy, and in his desperate attempt to affirm his power, he has caused untold miseries to the psyche of woman. He has tried to establish a kind of ill feeling or hatred towards woman, which is misogynistic. Rules, whether social or political, have been carefully drafted to ensure that woman remains oppressed. She is harassed, pursued and hunted by social customs and beliefs. Atrocities are unleashed on her, and she is taught, down the ages, to be mute and stomach everything without protest. This kind of male domination can be termed misogynistic patriarchy.

Germaine Greer in The Female Eunuch locates the cultural status of woman as equivalent to the eunuch. Attributing some deficiency to women, men think of themselves as uniquely qualified to supplement it provided women show them their gratitude by their submissiveness. The subjugation of women, therefore is not due to their biological difference but because they are forced to live in a male-dominated culture.

Feminist criticism as Showalter sees it, tends towards the active exposure of power relations and explosion of patriarchal thoughts. Speaking aloud the painful reality of suppression, it aims at rescuing women from their present position of inferiority. As patriarchy is a social order in which male interests and powers are privileged and women are subordinated to male authority, feminism questions this, and claims that women should be on par with men politically, economically and socially.

Feminism takes cognizance of social deprivations, and physiological, cultural and psychological oppression experienced by women all over the world. It calls the
intersection of these structures, patriarchy. As Ruth Robbins says, "Feminist theories, in literature and beyond, identify patriarchy at work in the home, the state, religious institutions, the law, educational systems, the work place, in culture at large and even in women themselves, since, women as well as men are formed under patriarchy"(15). Feminism as a social and political force must try to change the existing power relations between men and women. According to Ruth Robbins, "Feminisms are politicized discourses which uncover symptoms of oppression, whatever their ground, diagnose the problem, and offer alternative versions of livable realities"(7).

Alice Duer Miller in 1915 rightly said, "A Feminist, ... is any woman now who cares to think about her own affairs as men don't think she oughter" (qtd. Jane Mills 88). In this sense, Sylvia Plath, Alice Munro and Arundhati Roy are feminists. They have written novels, setting their characters against social backgrounds, beliefs and values that are basically patriarchal. They have thought about the condition of women, and many of their women characters exemplify what Simone de Beauvoir said about women: "She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, the Absolute - she is the Other"(16).

Commenting on the pattern of oppression of women, Ruth O'Saxton says, "Women are not all the same, but they do share similarities in subject positions related to the cultures in which they live"(14). Patriarchy is the fundamental oppressive force, though different classes and ethnic groups suppress women under various power relations. When we read the fictions of Plath, Munro and Roy, we agree with what Kate
Millett said in Sexual Politics: "While patriarchy as an institution is a social constant so deeply entrenched as to run through all other political, social or economic forms, whether of caste or class, feudality or bureaucracy, just as it pervades all major religions, it also exhibits great variety in history and locale"(25).

Plath’s The Bell Jar that is intensely personal presents how the woman in American society of the fifties was trapped and oppressed. Oppression and suppression appear to be more intense, as it is presented through the psyche of a female protagonist. The subjugation of women, as the reader encounters in The Bell Jar, is one experienced by or seen by or heard by Esther the heroine of the novel.

In this novel, men are presented as having vested interests. They want to ensure that women do not get empowered and thereby cut into their jobs, challenge their position of comfort in their family and take personal power away from them. Their intention seems to be that man’s world does not get disturbed by determined women. What Plath presents is an institutionalized system of oppression in which man wields his power and strength. Plath wrote The Bell Jar at a time when American women, becoming aware of their rights, were yearning to become liberated from the clutches of male domination. Betty Friedan describes the late fifties and early sixties for American women as a "comfortable concentration camp" - physically luxurious, but mentally oppressive and impoverished. In The Feminine Mystique, Friedan refers to “the sophisticated trappings”(38) in which women were caught. Society wants man as well as woman to believe that what a man needs is a mate whereas what a woman needs is security. Quite casually, Buddy’s mother endorses the male chauvinistic ideas. She
thinks, talks and acts like any male chauvinist. She appears a ventriloquist of the male chauvinistic world when she says, “What a man is an arrow into the future and what a woman is the place the arrow shoots off from”(74).

Male dominated society ensures that woman never becomes an arrow. Esther’s mother who very willingly accepts man as the arrow is herself an expert in shorthand and typewriting, and teaches them to college girls. She has accepted uncomplainingly the concept that woman has to be dependent on a man for her survival and sustenance. Girls with such attitude “looked awfully bored” to Esther and they make her sick, as they are “secretaries to executives and junior executives and simply hanging around in New York waiting to get married to some career man or other”(4). Esther’s mother advises her to learn shorthand and qualify for a job so that “Everybody would want her. She would be in demand among all the up-and-coming young men, and she would transcribe letter after thrilling letter”(79). But the daughter says, “The trouble was, I hated the idea of serving men in any way. I wanted to dictate my own thrilling letters”(79).

Plath’s novel speaks of the fight women had started, at least in their thought, against forces that are designed to make women play their secondary role. The novel suggests that the emancipated woman is one who is not at the beck and call of man, taking orders from him.

Misogynistic patriarchy uses different yardsticks in measuring values for men and women. Plath takes the example of chastity, and shows how the American society views the chastity of woman as different from the chastity of man. Treating the woman as a commodity and marriage as a necessary security for her, woman, down the centuries, has
been taught to value virginity and chastity as the highest form of virtue. Plath, though doesn’t rebel against this prescriptive chastity of women, emphasizes that it is equally important for man. Esther says, “And that’s how Buddy had lost his pureness and his virginity”(73). Attributing pureness and virginity to a male is iconoclastic in a society steeped in patriarchy: “It might be nice to be pure and then to marry a pure man, but what if he suddenly confessed he wasn’t pure after we were married, the way Buddy Willard had? I couldn’t stand the idea of a woman having to have a single pure life and a man being able to have a double life, one pure and one not”(85). The article “In Defense of Chastity” that Esther’s mother cut out from The Reader’s Digest, though written by a woman lawyer, reflects male oppressive thought. “It gave all the reasons a girl shouldn’t sleep with anybody but her husband and then only after they were married”(83).

The risk a woman encounters in having free sex is pregnancy. “What I hate is the thought of being under a man’s thumb.... A man doesn’t have a worry in the world, while I’ve got a baby hanging over my head like a big stick, to keep me in line”(234). The article Esther’s mother gives her to read ends with a warning to be safe rather than feel sorry later. It is this thought of fighting against pregnancy that makes Esther opt for birth control before experimenting with sex. According to her, a woman should never marry a man like Buddy Willard who looks for chastity in a woman whereas he himself has slept with a waitress several times. To her, deciding on birth control is the right step in getting emancipation from the oppressive forces of male society that uses sex as a tool to subjugate women: “I was my own woman” (235). What Esther gains is not a license
to permissiveness but rather freedom from the concept that man, however unchaste he may be, can demand virginity from woman at the time of marriage. In a letter to her mother young Plath wrote, “I love freedom. I hate constrictions and limitations” (Letters Home 40).

Plath ponders over various issues associated with virginity, marriage, sex and birth control. Speaking through Esther, she says that a man who appears flawless at a distance is in no way attractive at close quarters. This makes her take a negative attitude to marriage. Marriage appears to her a hollow institution that deprives a woman of her identity. She wouldn’t allow womanhood to be exploited by the institution of marriage. “And I knew that in spite of all the roses and kisses and restaurant dinners man showered on a woman before he married her, what he secretly wanted when the wedding service ended was for her to flatten out underneath his feet like Mrs. Willard’s kitchen mat” (88-89).

That marriage is oppressive is very much true of Esther’s mother too. “My own mother told me that as soon as she and my father left Reno on their honeymoon – my father had been married before, so he needed a divorce – my father said to her, ‘Whew, that’s a relief, now we can stop pretending and be ourselves’? – and from that day on my mother never had a minute’s peace” (89).

Esther remembers Buddy Willard telling her that after she has children, she might not like to write poems. This makes her think, “…may be it was true that when you were married and had children it was like being brainwashed, and afterwards you went
about numb as a slave in some private, totalitarian state" (89). *The Bell Jar* looks at sex and marriage as instruments of oppression perpetrated by the patriarchal society.

Society dictates the condition that only a male can opt for a career and woman has to take up the responsibility of home making at the expense of her career. “Of course, the famous woman poet at my college lived with another woman…. And then when I had told the poet I might well get married and have a pack of children some day, she stared at me in horror. ‘But what about your career?’ she cried” (232). When a woman who has a career gets married, she is burdened with domestic responsibility besides the demands of her job. This is evident from the description of Buddy Willard’s mother as well as the mother of Esther. “Cook and clean and wash was just what Buddy Willard’s mother did from morning till night, and she was the wife of a university professor and had been a private school teacher herself” (88). About her own mother she says,

At seven I had heard my mother get up, slip into her clothes and tiptoe out of the room. Then the buzz of the orange squeezer sounded from downstairs, and the smell of coffee and bacon filtered under my door. Then the sink water ran from the tap and dishes clinked as my mother dried them and put them back in the cupboard. (121)

Esther is a girl with fifteen years of straight A’s, and to her “this seemed a dreary and wasted life”(88). She tries to imagine what it would be like if Constantine were her husband.
It would mean getting up at seven and cooking him eggs and toast and coffee and dawdling about in my nightgown and curlers after he’d left for work to wash up the dirty plates and make the bed, and then when he came home after a lively, fascinating day he would expect a big dinner, and I’d spend the evening washing up even more dirty plates till I fell into bed, utterly exhausted. (88)

Plath, as an unmarried girl, feared getting married on account of this. She believed that once married she would be caught in the cage of male domination and would be crushed. This is clear from Sylvia’s scrapbook- Journal – her account of the summer of 1950, when she and her brother Warren took a farm job together.

At the present moment I am very happy.... Always I want to be an observer. I want to be affected by life deeply.... I am afraid of getting older, I am afraid of getting married. Spare me from cooking three meals a day – spare me from a relentless cage of routine and rote [I want to be free-] free to know people and their backgrounds – free to move to different parts of the world so I may learn that there are other morals and standards besides my own. I want, I think, to be omniscient... I think I would like to call myself “The girl who wanted to be God.” Yet if I were not in this body, where would I be – perhaps I am destined to be classified and qualified. But, oh, I cry out against it. I am I – I am powerful – but to what extent? I am I. (Letters Home 40)
Regarding this “relentless cage of routine” experienced by every housewife, Betty Friedan observes in *The Feminine Mystique*.

She is trapped simply by the enormous demands of her role as modern housewife: wife, mistress, mother, nurse, consumer, cook, chauffeur, expert on interior decoration, childcare, appliance, repair, furniture finishing, nutrition and education. Her day is fragmented as she rushes from dishwasher to washing machine, to telephone to dryer to station wagon to supermarket, and delivers Johnny to the little league field, takes Fancy to dancing class, gets the lawnmower fixed...She has no time to read books... even if she had time, she had lost the power to concentrate.(30)

Though Plath longed for love and sexual fulfillment, which Betty Friedan termed “the feminine mystique”, she also dreaded becoming a wife, fearing that marriage would obliterate her identity, destroy her talent and lower her to the level of a slave.

The modern feminist movement can be said to start with Betty Friedan's book *The Feminist Mystique*, which was published in 1963. Friedan describes in “The Problem That Has No Name”, one of the chapters in her book, how “no name” probably describes what thousands, or perhaps millions, of American suburban housewives felt. During the fifties this had been a personal and private problem, which one did not talk about. “As she (the woman) made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night – she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question – “Is this all?” (qtd. Schneir 50). Friedan quotes a Cleveland doctor having called it “the
housewife syndrome". Like a schizophrenic, the housewife is often reduced to screams and tears.

Plath who wrote before Women’s Liberation Movement came into being in the United States, has delved deep into the feminist problem. As a pioneer she opposed the institutionalized form of oppression based on male superiority. Men have been oppressors as they have vested interests, and the novelist herself was a victim of the sexist society. Her poetry has been considered choreography of female wounds, and her psychic autobiography The Bell Jar in this sense is an extension of her poetry. Like the writer, the heroine Esther too experiences a sense of entrapment. The very title “The Bell Jar” is garbed in a rich metaphor that suggests suffocation consequent to entrapment. The image of being confined under a glass enclosure alone in a vacuum for the purpose of being observed would surely be a negative experience. This image of confinement was to be used often by the later feminist movement, to show that women are looked upon as objects of their men and their culture.

In Plath’s novel, as in her many poems, we come across recurrent metaphors of entrapment and fragmentation. Even schizophrenia is a powerful fragmentation that is a necessary escape from the incessant heartless oppression of a patriarchal society. The mental aberration very sympathetically presented by the novelist is symptomatic of the physical as well as the mental torture meted out to the female soul by the male dominated society. As Marjorie G. Perloff points out in a web site, “Disease whether mental or physical is an index to the human inability to cope with an unlivable reality” (http://www.cqu.edu.au/arts/humanities/litstud/naff/naffch5plath.html). Unable to cope
with the ugly world of harsh realities, Esther finds schizophrenia an escape. Not only that, she sees death also as an escape from the sadism of life in a patriarchal culture. As Diane S. Bonds puts it,

> It should be noted that her encounters with men have been nearly devastating: her father deserts her by dying when she is very young; much more recently in the novel, she is knocked down in the mud, mauled, practically raped by a man who marks her face with blood; in another, a flashback to an occasion where she ends up inspecting Buddy Willard's genitals, all she can think of is "turkey neck and turkey gizzards." The man she sets out to seduce (Constantin) falls asleep unaroused by her, and the male psychiatrist to whom she turns for help practically electrocutes her. This pattern of pain and disappointment is merely confirmed by her experience with Irwin, who creates for her, in deflowering her, a possibly life-threatening medical emergency. (Gale Database: Contemporary Literary Criticism © 1999)

True, all the men whom Esther comes into contact with disappoint her. Buddy is a hypocrite, Marco is a woman-hater, Constantine is cold, and Irwin is unfeeling and smug. No wonder, these men remind her of animals – Marco of a snake she had teased in the zoo, Lenny Shepherd a horse, and Buddy Willard a panther.

> Sex, attitude of man to sex, and oppressing women using sex are all viewed with intensity in *The Bell Jar*. Perloff has rightly remarked, "Sylvia Plath's focus in *The Bell Jar* is not on mental illness per se, but on the relationship of Esther's private psychosis to
her larger social situation. Indeed, her dilemma seems to have a great deal to do with being a woman in a society whose guidelines for women she can neither accept nor reject“ (http://www.cqu.edu.au/arts/humanities/litstud/naff/naffch5plath.html.) Plath had realized that the American male is insensitive to the feminine beauty of a woman and adores her only as a sex machine. “Being born a woman is my awful tragedy,” she wrote in her Journal. “From the moment I was conceived, I was doomed ... to have my whole circle of action, thought and feeling rigidly circumscribed by my inescapable femininity”(qtd. Schneir 33).

She is convinced that like man, woman too has the right to enjoy life. “Some pale, hueless flicker of sensitivity is in me. God, must I lose it in cooking scrambled eggs for a man ... hearing about life at second hand?” (Journal 33). What she wants is the total annihilation of the man-made distinction between the male and the female. Plath had enjoyed reading A Short History of Women by Langdon Davies and she had underscored the following passage from the Epilogue.

Perhaps the world will be happier in the new regime. But all this is of only partial value as speculation on the future; for men and women are purely relative terms, and long before the tendencies of our times work to their logical conclusions, men and women, as we know them, will have ceased to exist; and human nature will have forgotten the ‘he and she’ ”. (Letters Home 33)

It is this view that gets reiterated when she describes Esther’s encounter with sex in the sexist society. She is not able to come to terms with the passivity and indifference of
Constantine to sex, nor with the aggressive sex of Marco the woman hater who is able to see only a “slut” in the pure woman. To her, Buddy’s expectation of one-sided chastity in woman is also totally disgusting. She feels that man should no longer be allowed to play the fool by taking upper hand in sex, nor should a woman be constrained to go begging for sexual favours within the confines of marriage. Sex with proper protection against pregnancy, Esther believes, is the symbol of female protest against male oppression.

Esther doesn’t like the age-old idea of man seducing woman. So, by obtaining security through birth control devices, she plays the role of a seducer. Reversing the role, she induces Irwin the known seducer to have sex with her. She doesn’t seem to regret the hemorrhage and the consequent excessive bleeding, but uses them to exert the right of the female over the male. Esther fights a battle against Marco when he attempts to rape her. Rape is the worst suffering meted out to a woman, and in this cruelty it is male superiority that is asserted. Susan Brownmiller in her book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* viewed the question of rape from a forthright feminine perspective. According to her,

Rape is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear.... A world without rapists would be a world in which women moved freely without fear of men. That some men rape provides a sufficient threat to keep all women in a constant state of intimidation.... Men who commit rape have served in effect as front-
line masculine shock troops, terrorist guerrillas in the longest sustained battle
the world has ever known. (qtd. Schneir, 272,282)

Plath has presented with force the rape attempt of Marco on Esther. It is said that
when men writers present rape it is seldom presented from the woman's point of view.
As Eileen O'Neil has pointed out, "The theme of rape is never treated from the point of
view of the victim, nor is the anguish of woman pressured into sexual service, nor the
distress of a woman bound sexually and emotionally by her own internal sense of
powerlessness"(80). But, in The Bell Jar that is considered the first feminine novel, the
female writer presents rape from Esther's point of view and she is made to narrate her
experiences.

Marco dashed his cigar underfoot
The ground soared and struck me with a soft shock. Mud squirmed
through my fingers. Marco waited until I half rose. Then he put both
hands on my shoulders and flung me back.
'My dress',
'Your dress!' The mud oozed and adjusted itself to my shoulder blades.
'Your dress!' Marco's face lowered cloudily over mine. A few drops of
spit struck my lips. 'Your dress is black and the dirt is black as well.'
Then he threw face down as if he would grind his body through me and
into the mud. (114)

A domineering male performs rape successfully when the submissive female
becomes totally incapable of preventing it, let alone registering a protest. Usually it is
the helpless cry or the pathetic pleading that is heard. But in the case of Esther who is aware of her feminine strength, fighting rape is like fighting a battle against male oppression.

‘It’s happening,’ I thought. ‘It’s happening. If I just lie here and do nothing it will happen.’

Marco set his teeth to the strap at my shoulder and tore my sheath to the waist. I saw the glimmer of bare skin like a pale veil separating two bloody-minded adversaries.

‘Slut!’

The word hissed by my ear. (114)

According to Linda W. Wagner, “Marco's brutal rape attempt and his marking Esther with blood from his bleeding nose are physically even more insulting than his calling her slut” (http://www.cqu.edu.au/arts/humanities/litstud/naff/naffch5plat.html). As Germaine Greer says in The Female Eunuch, “Unjustly, rape is the only crime of violence which throws more shame on the victim than on the perpetrator” (109).

Realizing this cruel impact of rape, Esther gets ready to fight the battle.

The dust cleared and I had a full view of the battle.

I began to writhe and bite.

Marco weighed me to the earth.

‘Slut!’

I gouged at his leg with the sharp heel of my shoe. He turned, fumbling for the hurt.
Then I fisted my fingers together and smashed them at his nose. It was like hitting the steel plate of a battleship. Marco sat up. I began to cry.

(115)

Plath suggests that male oppression in the form of rape cannot go on without being opposed. The message is clear and pointed. Not all men can rape all women. This oppression cannot go on forever. As Wendy Martin has rightly commented,

Sylvia Plath was one of the first American women writers to refuse to conceal or disguise her true emotions; in articulating her aggression, hostility, and despair in her art, she effectively challenged the traditional literary prioritization of female experience. In addition to being a novelist and poet, she was a pioneer and pathfinder. (Gale Database: Contemporary Literary Criticism © 1999.)

As a feminist who has been influenced by postmodern thinking, Linda Hutcheon says in an interview given to Kathleen O'Grady that Canadian feminism is different from that of British or American feminism, as the social situation of women in Canada is different even from that of women in Britain or the U.S. and there are legal as well as cultural differences. Their intellectual context is, for historical reasons, perhaps more of a hybrid than most other post-colonial nations. As she has stated,

Framed geographically and historically between two major anglophone empires (past and present), Canada has experienced an odd amalgam of British and American influences and both have played their role in shaping our intellectual heritage. When you add the Québec context, with its strong
links to French feminism - the hybridity increases. The mix of the Anglo-American activist strain with the more theoretical European focus has been fruitful, I think, for Canadian feminists. <http://www.english.ucsb.edu/faculty/ayliu/research/gradyhutcheon.ht>

In her book *The Canadian Postmodern*, Linda Hutcheon had suggested a shared pattern of irony and parody in texts by women writers generally and Canadian fiction in particular. While questioned by O'Grady what motivates this similarity, she said, "Marginalization - in a word. Just as women have traditionally been positioned on the fringes of male culture, so Canadians often feel as if they are watching the action (be it American or European) from the sidelines." It is this marginalization of women that Alice Munro is presenting in her works of fiction.

In "Alice Munro: Biocritical Essay" Thomas E. Tausky points out the predicament of Munro's protagonist Rose.

Beaten by her father, hearing tales from Flo about evil men, witnessing incest in the Entryway of the Boys' Toilet at school, Munro's protagonist Rose has one educational challenge before her: "learning to survive". As she moves from childhood by way of an unsuccessful marriage into a precarious middle age, she feels that it is her individual destiny, and the fate of her sex, never to be the free person, the one with that power. <http://www.ucalgary.ca/library/specColl/Munrobioc.html>

In *Who Do You Think You Are?* Munro presents oppressive masculinity through tyrannical fathers. Rose's father is "a king of the royal beatings"(1). When her father
beats her, she tries to run around the room and tries to escape, but he blocks her cracking the belt at her. Then he abandons the belt and uses his hand. “Bang over the ear, then bang over the other ear. Back and forth, her head ringing. Bang in the face. Up against the wall and bang in the face again. He shakes her and hits her against the wall, he kicks her legs”(21). At times, she has to run away from her father “What if he caught her? It would be terrible”(5). As Tausky rightly says,

Rose’s retreat from her father’s wrath is but the first of many abrupt physical movements to which she resorts as a way of handling male dominance. She surrenders to the ‘violent temptation’ to run into Patrick’s library carrel and reinstate their engagement; she is frustrated in her efforts to run towards Tom, the Calgary academic, and eventually runs away from the experience of being jilted by Simon, the Queen’s academic.... how many overblown excuses she had found, having to leave a place, or being afraid to leave a place, on account of some man. (http://www.ucalgary.ca/library/specColl/Munrobioc.html)

Becky’s old father was “A skinflint. A family tyrant”(8). The story was prevalent among the villagers that “The father beat them, had beaten all his children and beaten his wife as well, beat Becky more now because of her deformity”(8). Beating the womenfolk is, no doubt, a tactic men use to physically subdue them and keep them under their control.

Quite a few women characters of Alice Munro are exposed to the misbehaviour of men. A man whether young or old, takes it for granted that women can be teased and
even molested. Ageing does not bring about any change in the feeling of male superiority. Though physically tired and advanced in age, old men make obscene remarks on women or any young girl.

On the bench outside Flo’s store several old men from the neighborhood sat gossiping, … The fact is they were dying….They had worked all their lives at the foundry in town, and now they sat still, with their wasted yellow faces, coughing, chuckling, drifting into aimless obscenity on the subject of women walking by, or any young girl on a bicycle. (4)

Old men are also prone to misbehaviour with girls. While Rose is travelling in a train to Toronto, at Brantford, a man asks if she would mind if he sits down beside her. He keeps the newspaper on her lap and pretends to sleep. She starts feeling a pressure.

The minister’s hand was not, or not yet, at all welcome to her. It made her feel uncomfortable, resentful, slightly disgusted, trapped and wary… man older than her father would be…. The hand began, over the next several miles, the most delicate, the most timid, pressures and investigations. Not asleep…She did feel disgust. She felt a faint, wandering nausea…. She thought of cats in heat rubbing themselves along the top of board fences…. It was pitiful, infantile, this itching and shoving and squeezing. Spongy tissues, inflamed membranes, tormented nerve-ends, shameful smells; humiliation.(75,76)

This kind of misbehaviour which is the manifestation of male superiority happens in a public transport system, and to the man it is of no consequence. The old minister
gets out of the train with no assurance that he would not repeat the same disgraceful act. Though she never sees him again, she remembers it as an act of disgrace and an act of beggary.

This kind of misbehaviour is prevalent even among the educated. As if to prevent the safe use of a library by women, men hide themselves in the stack and misbehave with girls. To man it may be fun or a sexual touch that he enjoys. But to the woman it is disgusting. Munro pities the man for he doesn’t have the guts to face the consequences, but prefers to run away after an act of molestation.

Once a man grabbed her bare leg, between her sock and her skirt.... Only the faculty, graduate students, and employees had access to the stacks.... She had seen a man crouched down looking at the books on a low shelf, further along. As she reached up to push a book into place he passed behind her. He bent and grabbed her leg, all in one smooth startling motion, and then was gone. She could feel for quite a while where his fingers had dug in. It didn’t seem to her a sexual touch, it was more like a joke, though not at all a friendly one. She heard him run away. (89,90)

The novelist has utter contempt for the male who thinks it his prerogative to molest girls. To her, this instinct has nothing human about it. It is merely beastly. Rose had learned “to avoid the dark place under the steps and the place between the woodpiles; not to attract in any way the attention of other big boys, who seemed like wild dogs ...” (33). Once at school a big boy tripped and grabbed Rose “as she was coming down the fire escape, tearing the sleeve of her raincoat out at the armhole”(34).
The novelist shows that man is capable of stooping to any level, even to the level of exhibitionism. She writes about Flo’s experience with an eighteen or nineteen year old boy who is a total stranger. Once on her way back home from Hanratty, she sees at the town end of the bridge, a boy in a blue jacket. “Just as she came up even with him, what does he do but turn and display, holding his jacket open, also his pants.... When she first saw what he had in his hand, Flo said, all she could think of was, what is he doing out here with a baloney sausage?”(12).

All these clearly show that Munro’s world is peopled by men who are aggressive, violent, vulgar, obscene and sexy, who try to establish their supremacy over girls and women using their audacity. Oppression of woman is so intense that it has made many a man ruthless and heartless and many a woman frightened and unsafe. This male aggression is possible anywhere - in the train, on a bridge, under staircases, or in a library. This is indeed symptomatic of the male’s inability to bear the sight of the female coming to the open and moving about freely as any male would do. This is the reason why Flo instructs Rose to be careful even of the police. “‘Well I’m not scared,’ said Rose provocingly. ‘There’s the police, anyway.’ ‘Oh, them! They’d be the first ones to diddle you!’ ”(68). This is exactly why the mother in Lives of Girls and Women warned her adolescent daughter Del “that some degradation was possible, if ever you were persuaded to go off with boys”(Lives 47).

Munro seems to be of the opinion that the pattern of woman’s dependence and man defining woman’s life should be shattered. If woman fails to imbibe determination and will to live independently, she may be open to the worst of abuses, that is, sexual
abuse. Based on a study by Elizabeth Janeway on “Incest: A Rational Look at the Oldest Taboo” (Ms, Nov. 1981), Meg Luxton has recorded in Still Ain’t Satisfied that one out of every four women in Canada “is sexually assaulted by the age of eighteen. In vast majority of cases, these girls are molested by their fathers or brothers” (115). Rose has to be frightened of her own father.

‘Macaroni, pepperoni, Botticelli, beans’ –
What could that mean?....She could never ask him....
The cloud-capped towers, she heard him say once.
‘The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces.’
That was like a hand clapped against Rose’s chest, not to hurt, but astonish her, to take her breath away. She had to run then, she had to get away. She knew that was enough to hear, and besides, what if he caught her? It would be terrible. (4,5)

There are stories in Rose’s neighbourhood regarding Becky. “The reason that Becky was kept out of sight was now supposed to be her pregnancy, and the father of the child was supposed to be her own father. Then people said it had been born, and disposed of”(8).

This kind of sexual abuse doesn't confine to the home, and men in society try to use a woman as a common property for their sexual gratification. As Del’s mother tells her daughter in Lives of Girls and Women, women’s lives so far have been determined by their connection with men. “No more lives of our own, really, than domestic animals. He shall hold thee, when his passion shall have spent its novel force, a little closer than his dog, a little dearer than his horse. Tennyson wrote that”(Lives 193).
This tendency of the male is a cause for anxiety among mothers who want their daughters to use their brain and avoid men. If they are distracted their life will never be their own. "You will get the burden, a woman always does" (Lives 193).

In Who Do You Think You Are? the Shortie McGill and Franny McGill episode exposes the agony of being exploited physically. "One thing was certain: the idea could not be Franny's. She had to be caught for this, or trapped.... But she showed unwillingness, had to be dragged, then pushed down where they wanted her. Did she know what was coming?" (31). The episode of Ruby Carruthers abused by Del Fairbridge, Horse Nicholson and Runt Chesterton is equally agonizing.

Whose idea was this, for Del Fairbridge was a good-looking boy, conceited, and not very clever. He said he would go into the house and persuade Ruby, with no trouble at all, and if he could get her to do it with all three of them, he would. What he did not know was that Horse Nicholson had already arranged with Ruby to meet him under the verandah ... Runt who was in on the whole plan was sitting on the verandah steps keeping watch, no doubt listening attentively to the bumping and the breathing.

Presently Horse came out...Runt had crawled under the verandah and got to work on Ruby. (50)

The idea one gets is, as Munro herself puts it in Lives of Girls and Women, "Being female made you damageable, that a certain amount of carefulness and solemn fuss and self-protection were called for, whereas men were supposed to be able to go out
and take on all kinds of experiences and shuck off what they didn't want and come back proud." (Lives 193). In a patriarchal society, men seem to be insensible to the suffering and the humiliation undergone by helpless women when they are sexually harassed. In Still Ain’t Satisfied: Canadian Feminism Today, Barbara James says, “Rape perhaps more than anything else, exemplifies the uneven power relationship between men and women” (68). She adds that sexual violence is a logical outcome of sexism.

The society’s attitude in general against women is harmful, and the novelist resents this. In Who Do You Think You Are? Munro condemns the men who sensationalize such issues in books and magazines. When Franny was abused, she “let out howls made ripply, phlegmy, by her breathing problems” (32). Rose knew that such abuse would continue. “She would get pregnant, be taken away, come back, get pregnant, be taken away again. There would be talk of getting her sterilized, getting the Lion’s Club to pay for it” (32). Forgetting the feelings and sufferings of victims, male writers would use such incidents as pieces of sensationalism. “Men who made books and movies seemed to have a fondness for this figure…. They cheated, she thought….” (32).

Though lives of women are changing considerably in advanced countries like Canada, sexual harassment continues to be a grievous problem. Radical feminists see patriarchy as an expression of male power over all women in the world. In The Dialectic of Sex, Shulamith Firestone has stated, “Patriarchy is a system of power which exploits women’s biological incapacity, and it is this fundamental handicap that must be removed to transform our current social order” (qtd Whelehn 75). To transform the
social order, Munro suggests that women should be empowered and they should have a say and the right of choice. If they want to ease the pangs of life on earth, they must exercise self-respect and self-determination.

Socialists and liberals find the institution of family targeted as the primary site of repression for women. Marxist feminists say that for the working class, the household might be the site of major divisions where all men benefit from the privileges bestowed upon them by the fact of their masculinity. As Meg Luxton has said, "In recent years, the women's liberation movement has shown that the family is not a haven of love and security but is instead for many women a dangerous and violent place" (115). It seems universal that man subordinates woman and expects her to serve him at home. It is sheer male chauvinism that expects the woman to do all household work. There seems to be an unwritten law in the male dominated world that the male need not get involved in household duties. Whereas Rose is supposed to stay at home and help the mother, Brian her brother runs out to do what he likes. "Being a boy, free to help or not, involve himself or not. Not committed to the household struggle. They don't need him anyway" (15). Rose's father who is a typical representative of patriarchy in the suburban regions of Canada, has his clearly ingrained concepts about man and woman.

Flo was his idea of what a woman ought to be. Rose knew that, and indeed he often said it. A woman ought to be energetic, practical, clever at making and saving; she ought to be shrewd, good at bargaining and bossing and seeing through people's pretensions. At the same time she should be naïve intellectually, childlike, contemptuous of maps and long
words and anything in books, full of charming jumbled notions, superstitions, traditional beliefs.(5)

A woman, according to men, ought to be energetic and practical to be at their beck and call, but should be an intellectual pauper. When Rose's father is in sick bed he calls Flo often, and makes up reasons to get her upstairs. When he is going to London, to the Veterans' Hospital, Flo starts wondering how he would manage in her absence.

How does he think he'll get along without me down there? She said. 'He can't let me alone five minutes,' She seemed proud of this.... She told people in the store that he wouldn't let her alone for five minutes, and how she had to change his sheets twice a day. That was true. His sheets became soaked with sweat. Late at night she, or Rose, or both of them, would be out at the washing machine.(57)

After establishing friendship with Jocelyn in the maternity ward, Rose wonders at the sheer physical energy Jocelyn expends on her marriage. The fact that it is she who fixes the leaky taps and digs up the clogged drains makes Rose certain that Jocelyn is “wasting herself.”(129),

Male chauvinism in Canadian society is reflected in the domestic life and the husband and wife relationship that Munro exposes to the readers. The belief that man is more powerful and the woman has to be submissive is a cause for domestic violence. Since The Moons of Jupiter (1982), includes material originally destined for Who Do You Think You Are?, the two books have much in common. In many of The Moons of Jupiter stories, women like Rose, or at least in Rose's situation, find their lives defined
by unsatisfactory but inevitable relationships with men who insist on the wife to amputate all relationship with her people. A man is satisfied as long as his wife is solely dependant on him. He is snobbish and looks down contemptuously on her native place, her parents and relatives. In “Connection” in The Moons of Jupiter the narrator is married to Richard, and is living in Vancouver. Richard always mentions the name of his wife’s native town “as if it were a clot, something unpleasant, which he had to get out of his mouth in a hurry” (12).

If ever I said anything about my childhood or my family in their (Richard’s family) company, there would be a slight drawing back, as at a low level obscenity…. They were tactful with me. Richard could not afford to be so tactful, since he had put himself in a shabby baggage; he was on the look out for signs that the amputation was not complete; of course, it wasn’t! (The Moons 14)

The same idea is affirmed in Who Do You Think You Are? Rose takes Patrick to her native place and as they leave Hanratty on the bus Patrick comments,

‘It is a dump. You must be glad to get away’. Rose felt immediately that he should not have said that.

‘Of course that’s not your real mother,’ Patrick said. ‘Your real parents can’t have been like that.’ Rose did not like his saying that either, though it was what she believed, herself.(108)

When Patrick takes Rose to his house in Vancouver, Rose finds a terrible amount of luxury and unease there. “She had never known before how some places could choke
you off, choke off your very life”(103). Compared to Patrick’s family, everyone in Rose’s family “seemed jovial and content”(106). Still, when Rose begins to live with him in Vancouver, Patrick considers her the Beggar Maid: “You’re like the Beggar Maid”.... “King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid” (93). Though the husband and the wife have periodic fights, Rose is in general docile with Patrick. She tries to keep in favour though he gives reproving lectures in response to simple observations. She wants to admire him and give him the respect due to a human being. But nothing she does to win his favour makes him happy. As a consequence, “Her feelings were as confused as anybody’s can get. She was humiliated, she was ashamed of Patrick”(134). As Anne Koedt says, “One of the elements of male chauvinism is the refusal or inevitability to see woman as total, separate human beings. Rather, men have chosen to define women only in terms of how they benefited men’s lives”(qtd.Schneir 340).

In the title story in The Moons of Jupiter the pregnant wife kisses her homecoming husband, and serves meat and potatoes and one of the four vegetables he permits. He eats with a violent appetite, and then falls asleep in the living room sofa. The wife becomes so frustrated that she calls themselves “a cartoon couple”(The Moons 257). In “Dulse” in The Moons of Jupiter, there is the imagery of a monster. “She and Duncan were monsters with a lot of heads. Out of the mouth of the head could come insult and accusation, hot and cold, out of another false apologies and slimy pleas, out of another just such mealy reasonable true and false chat ... not a mouth had the sense to shut up”(The Moons 65). In “Hard Luck Stories” from the same book, narrator meets Julie who tells stories. She says her husband Leslie is “coldhearted, superficial,
stubborn, emotionally stingy, loyal, honest high minded, and vulnerable. She says she never really wants him" (The Moons 212). The narrator’s comment is significant: “I listen, and think this sounds like the complaints that many women make” (The Moons 213).

Pregnancy and childbirth which cause enormous pain and suffering to a woman are not properly understood by men. In the title story in Lives of Girls and Women, Del says that she read of a poor farmer’s wife in North Carolina throwing herself under a wagon when she discovered she was going to have her ninth child. She also read about “women dying in tenements from complications of pregnancy or childbirth or terrible failed abortions which they performed with hatpins, knitting needles, bubbles of air” (Lives 182). What perplexes Del is that many women in various countries have gone to jail for advocating birth control and popularizing different devices favourable to women.

The novelist holds that marriage is an inevitable evil and it is a ritual through which everyone goes. Having chosen a partner, the woman is constrained to live with him allowing all damages to take place. In Who Do You Think You Are? Rose’s relationship with Patrick is strained, and it is said, “Most people went through the same things like this, in a marriage, and indeed they seemed to know mostly people who did. They could not separate until enough damage had been done, to keep them apart” (120). In their ten years of marriage, Rose sometimes flew at Patrick; “sometimes he beat her” (117). “Once in the kitchen of this house, Patrick had tried to choke her. Once she had run outside and knelt in her nightgown, tearing up handfuls of grass” (167). When
her friend Dorothy asks her what makes Rose want to come out of marriage, Rose doesn't know what to mention first. "The scars on her wrist? The choking in the kitchen, the grubbing at the grass?"(175).

Rose's father as well as Becky's is a king in royal beatings. They freely beat the women at home. Susan G. Cole has observed that one out of ten women in Canada is nursing broken bones and tending the bruises that are caused by their husbands or live-in partners. She says, that the male "is given reinforcement, cultural permission for the assault. He is reminded that women are objects to be seen and not heard, voiceless receptacles for his sexual pleasure or for release of his own violent tension"(57).

The hostility of men for women finds various forms of expression in Canadian society. Any change is possible only with the elimination of sex roles, transformation of the family ideologies and a non-dependent domestic situation for women. In Munro's novels, the women who struggle and suffer are those who depend on men for their physical and emotional needs. Rose continues to suffer the tyranny of subjugation until she is dependent on men. However, as Tausky writes in "Alice Munro: Biocritical Essay",

In her two final responses to men (involving Simon, and then Ralph Gillespie, her former schoolmate), Rose shows signs of freeing herself from this pattern of dependence. Running away from Simon represents a disinclination to pine away on the spot, and Rose is eventually rewarded by a renewal of emotional contact with the tangible world. In talking to Ralph, Rose finds a bond of feeling that is not based on 'sexual warmth';
recognizing Ralph's self-sufficiency, she moves closer to achieving independence for herself.

If women are subjugated today, it testifies not to the frailty of women but to the strength of sexism. If sexism is to be conquered, women should, with their capacity, fight their way back to independence.

We see a repetitive pattern of oppression being portrayed in many of the short stories of Munro. Though women are still battered and abused, it is evident that a protest and a determination have started brewing in their hearts. The novelist makes it clear that such abuse and oppression cannot go on forever. The protest has to come from women, and the feeling of empowerment will emerge only when they get a feeling that they can live in the society without the support and patronage of men. Liberal feminists everywhere concentrate on individual autonomy and the right to self-determination. In Betty Friedan’s words, if this is not achieved, “women only have themselves to blame” (qtd Whelehan 36).

Among the Indian novels in English, Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things can be described as a protest novel as it very vividly lashes at the atrocities against the minorities and the marginalized – the untouchables and the women. Inseparable from Roy’s personal themes of love and loss, is a thorough denunciation of patriarchy that is strongly felt in a backward, capitalist society. As Kalpana Wilson says in “Arundhati Roy and Patriarchy - a Rejoinder”, “Her anger at the crushing and destructive effects of
patriarchal oppression runs through the novel.” (http://www.indiaworld.co.in/home/rde/index/html).

Roy has spent her whole life fighting tradition, and her bold views against the oppressive forces of Indian society find expression in her novel. Questioned in an interview whether she thought that women in India are still under the dominance of men, she said,

Of course, they are. There are few women who are able to work and support their families in India. Indian women need more economic independence. One absolute certainty in India is that women are born to get married. And marriage means getting a dowry. And getting a dowry means staying with your parents. And staying with your parents is to get social acceptance. Or else your daughter will not get the right bridegroom. This is the biggest hurdle that women face in India today.

What we need is mental and financial independence for women so that they can exist as Indian citizens with equal rights with men.

(www.bookpages.co.uk)

For feminists, the effects of patriarchal ideology are most keenly felt in the family environment. They pinpoint family as the crucial site of women’s oppression. In Sexual Politics, Millet calls the family “a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole”(45). In The God of Small Things, Roy presents domestic violence as a means of asserting male superiority and subjugating women. Three generations of women who appear in the novel in flesh and blood suffer ignominy of being subjected to untold physical and
mental torture, and Ammu, to some degree, becomes a victim of sexual abuse too. Of these three generations, the finest example is that of Pappachi – Mammachi relationship. Pappachi, the educated Entomologist, despite his position and exposure to Western culture, is seen beating his wife as if it were his right. His cruelty and inhuman behaviour towards his wife are so severe that “Ammu had endured winter nights in Delhi hiding in the mehndi hedge ... because Pappachi had come back from work out of sorts”(181). He tears down curtains, and destroys domestic articles like lamps and furniture. An hour after the lights go out, Ammu creeps back into the house to save her new gumboots that she loves very much. Unfortunately Pappachi catches hold of her and causes psychological and emotional wounds on his daughter.

He flogged her.... When he finished beating her he made her bring him Mammachi’s pinking shears from her sewing cupboard. While Ammu watched, the Imperial Entomologist shred her new gumboots.... The strips of black rubber fell to the floor.... When the last strip of rubber had rippled to the floor, her father looked at her with cold, flat eyes, and rocked and rocked and rocked. (181)

This tyrannical attitude of Pappachi is symptomatic of male-dominance. As his violence always goes unchecked and unquestioned, he inflicts physical torture and also indulges in acts aimed at terrorizing his wife, with his “cold, calculating cruelty”(181). “Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase. The beatings weren’t new. What was new was only the frequency with which they took place” (47).
Pappachi's torture extends beyond the physical domain. He acts as a big bully, and finds a malicious pleasure in inflicting mental harassment on his wife, maintaining at the same time a high public profile.

He was charming and urbane with visitors.... He donated money.... He worked hard on his public profile.... But alone with his wife and children he turned into a monstrous, suspicious bully, with a streak of vicious cunning. They were beaten, humiliated and then made to suffer the envy of friends and relations for having such a wonderful husband and father.(180)

Pappachi destroys that which is most loved by the womenfolk in the family, to cause mental harassment, all the time maintaining a posture of male superiority. Just as he cuts his daughter's gumboots into strips, he breaks the bow of Mammachi's violin and throws it away.

Ammu too receives rough treatment from her husband, though, because of her childhood experience, she has "learned to live with this cold, calculating cruelty. She developed a lofty sense of injustice and the mulish, reckless streak that develops in Someone Small who has been bullied all their lives by Someone Big" (181,182).

Mr. Hollick, the English Manager had suggested that Ammu's husband is blessed with "such an attractive wife"(41) and that "Ammu be sent to his Bungalow to be 'looked after'"(42), and when this is presented before Ammu by her husband with a hint to comply with the request, as a silenced woman in a male dominated society, she says nothing. The husband does not think that this suggested sexual abuse is anything wrong
on his part, but rather is not able to tolerate his wife’s silence. He too, though a Bengali, like the Ayemenem male, takes the upper hand. “He grew uncomfortable and then infuriated by her silence. Suddenly he lunged at her, grabbed her hair, punched her and then passed out from the effort”(42).

The sexual harassment does not stop with this, and Ammu is presented as one who is pestered again and again and then subjected to physical violence. “He apologized abjectly for the violence, but immediately began to badger her about helping with his transfer. This fell into a pattern. Drunken violence followed by post-drunken badgering”(42).

Wife battering goes unchecked in Indian society, and by presenting the men from Ayemenem and Bengal as wife beaters, Roy presents the pan-Indian nature of cruelty meted out to Indian women. As we look at the characters belonging to three generations, in the case of Pappachi and Mammachi, it is a daily routine performed as a domestic ritual to emphasize male superiority, and to ensure that male authority goes unquestioned. But when it comes to the next generation, there is a slight resentment from Ammu who has been tolerating it for some time, like her mother. But, when it comes to the question of pawning her chastity, the Indian woman rebels. “Ammu took down the heaviest book she could find in the book-shelf – The Reader’s Digest World Atlas – and hit him with it as hard as she could. On his head. His legs. His back and shoulders” (42).

Whereas Mammachi helplessly puts up with wife battering, her daughter revolts. “Ammu left her husband and returned, unwelcomed, to her parents in Ayemenem”(42).
But, in the wedded life of Rahel, there is no reference to wife battering - may be because she is more educated, and more empowered due to her exposure, and financial independence.

Roy ironically presents the trait of wife battering ingrained in Indian men, when she makes a reference to the performers of Kathakali. She seems to say that the Indian male goes home with a determination to beat his wife. "The Kathakali Men took off their make-up and went home to beat their wives"(236). The irony touches its peak when Roy says that the male Kathakali performer who takes the role of the female Kunti goes home with an urge to beat his wife. "Even Kunti, the soft one with breasts"(236). The novel seems to give the message that whatever be the role men play in real life - Entomologist, Tea Estate Official, or male or female character in a Kathakali presentation - man goes home to beat his wife, for the Indian home is a place where the male domination has its manifestation in the form of wife battering.

The novelist highlights the fact that man beats his wife only as long as it goes unchecked, unchallenged and unquestioned. Pappachi’s physical violence against Mammachi is stopped on the day “Chacko strode into the room, caught Pappachi’s vase-hand and twisted it around his back”(48). This could stop only the physical violence, but no one is able to put an end to real domestic violence. “Late at night he went into his study and brought out his favourite mahogany rocking chair. He put it down in the middle of the driveway and smashed it into little bits with a plumber’s monkey wrench..... He never touched Mammachi again. But he never spoke to her either as long as he lived “(48). The mental torture given to Mammachi is systematic, well planned
and regular. “In the evenings, when he knew visitors were expected, he would sit on the verandah and sew buttons that weren’t missing on his shirts, to create the impression that Mammachi neglected him”(48). He would never allow Mammachi or his family members to use the sky blue Plymouth that he bought. “The Plymouth was Pappachi’s revenge”(48).

The God of Small Things also discusses marriage as an institution, and seems to say that instead of making a woman happy, it seals her fate as one who has to play a subservient role to men. Regarding marriage, Simone de Beauvoir has rightly observed, “It has been said that marriage diminishes Man, which is often true; but almost always it annihilates Woman…. The tragedy of marriage is not that it fails to assure woman the promised happiness … but that it mutilates her; it dooms her to repetition and routine”(496).

Luce Irigaray says, “The family has always been the privileged locus of women’s exploitation”(142). Whether educated, employed or otherwise, a married woman has to play the stereotyped set roles, be at the service of her husband, bear his taunts and insults, carry out slavishly the uttered and unuttered orders, put up with his tortures, and can never question his authority. Kate Millet delineates the situation effectively:

Traditionally patriarchy granted the father nearly total ownership over wife or wives or children including the power of physical abuse….Women’s chattel status continues in their loss of name, their obligation to adopt the husband’s domicile and the general legal
assumption that marriage involves an exchange of the female’s domestic service and sexual consortium in return for financial support (46-47).

As Nirmala C. Prakash says in “Man-Woman Relationship in The God of Small Things”, “Lack of love coupled with unhappiness seems to be the fated lot of Arundhati Roy’s married women characters” (80). This is evident from the first three generations of women who are presented in the novel.

Reverend E. John Ipe and Aleyooty Ammachi the great grandparents of Estha and Rahel, who do not figure in this novel as active living characters, have a pervasive impact on the actions, as throughout the novel they witness the happenings in Ayemenem House as portraits kept in the house. Rev. Ipe is a legend in Ayemenem, and to this day he is remembered as Punnyan Kunju, having received the blessings from the Patriarch of Antioch, the Sovereign Head of the Syrian Christian Church. One wonders whether it was a bond of love that had united Rev. Ipe and Aleyooti Ammachi, and whether Aleyooti Ammachi was comfortable in her wedlock with the blessed Reverend. From the portrait that adorns the Ayemenem house, one deduces that Aleyooti Ammachi herself was getting suffocated under the pressure of wedlock.

Reverend Ipe smiled his confident - ancestor smile out across the road instead of the river. Aleyooty Ammachi looked more hesitant. As though she would have liked to turn around but couldn’t. Perhaps it wasn’t as easy for her to abandon the river. With her eyes she looked in the direction that her husband looked. With her heart she looked away. (30)
"Male aggression" as Jacob George says in "The God of Small Things: Humour as a Mode of Feminist Protest" "obviously gets suggested in this laughter evoking scene"(72).

Mammachi's married life is also a life of torture and suffocation. She is a nonentity. She endures all the torture not because of the love for her husband but because she has to accept it as the life of a woman. This is evident from the way she responds when she attends the funeral of her husband who had stopped talking to her ever since he lost his freedom to beat her. "At Pappachi's funeral, Mammachi cried and her contact lenses slid around in her eyes. Ammu told the twins that Mammachi was crying more because she was used to him than because she loved him. She was used to having him slouching around the pickle factory, and was used to being beaten from time to time"(50). In the words of Jacob George, Mammachi is "a typical entrapped female who regards her husband as the inevitable oppressor." In his opinion, the passage quoted above "... exposes obliquely the discrepancies between the realities of women's lives and the images of women promoted by culture"(76).

Ammu, may be, in her desire to be away from Ayemenem, relents and enters wedlock with Baba. To her, it is a marriage of convenience, and not one of conviction, or a result of any romance. But to her shock, she realizes that she is caught in the cage of an alcoholic. She never receives any respect, love, or even recognition.

Male chauvinist attitude is part of any male in Ayemenem that when Chacko marries the British Margaret, he is not able to come out of this rut. Chacko, despite his
exposure to the Western culture, behaves like a typical Indian male expecting the woman
to take care of all the work connected with housekeeping.

It no longer amused her that while she went to work, the flat remained in
the same filthy mess that she had left it in. That it was possible for him
even to consider making the bed, or washing clothes or dishes. That he
didn’t apologize for the cigarette burns in the new sofa. That he seemed
incapable of buttoning up his shirt, knotting his tie and tying his shoelaces
before presenting himself for a job interview. (247)

The Indian male in Chacko doesn’t allow him to cultivate the simplicity to take up the
responsibility of running the home, and he expects Margaret to be a Mammachi or a
Kalyani, and this naturally wrecks his marriage even when Margaret is pregnant.

A marriage that has a deceptive semblance to success in The God of Small
Things is the marriage of Comrade Pillai and Kalyani. Kalyani allows herself to be
bullied and unquestioningly surrenders her Self to male domination. “She referred to her
husband as *addeham* which was the respectful form of ‘he’, whereas ‘he’ called her ‘edi’
which was approximately, ‘Hey, you!’”(270). Comrade Pillai with all his Marxian
ideologies is ever ready to wield his “authority of the Man of the house”(272). The wife
in this context is seen as serving her husband as a vassal. “Comrade Pillai took off his
shirt, rolled it into a ball and wiped his armpits with it. When he finished, Kalyani took
it from him and held it as though it was a gift. A bouquet of flowers”(272). The
husband in Comrade Pillai asserts that the role of the wife is to offer a servant-like
service to her husband, and the wife in Kalyani, in turn, unquestioningly believes that
this is the role destined to her. Roy sketches the character of Kalyani rather with sarcasm, as it suggests that only a woman who is mute and silent to the taunts of the husband can survive as a wife. As Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan have said, the long tradition of male rule in society has “silenced women’s voices, distorted their lives, and treated their concerns as peripheral....To be a woman under such conditions was in some respects not to exist at all”(527).

Rahel’s marriage is of her choice. Still, she is not able to put her heart and soul into wedlock. Having experienced trauma even as a child when Ammu was beaten, Rahel finds it difficult to participate in married life as her American husband expects. When he makes love, “He was offended by her eyes. They behaved as though they belonged to someone else. Someone watching, looking out of the window at the sea”(19). Larry is puzzled at this.

He didn’t know that in some places, like the country that Rahel came from, various kinds of despair competed for primacy. And the personal despair could never be desperate enough. That something happened when personal turmoil dropped by at the wayside shrine of the vast, violent, circling, driving, ridiculous, insane, unfeasible public turmoil of a nation. (19)

No wonder, when Ammu looks at her marital experience through her photo album, she finds the extravagant decorations and gorgeous bridal make-up, highly ridiculous. She can only smile a “small, bitter smile at the memory” (43). After all, marriage to her is like “being led to the gallows. It seemed so absurd. So futile. Like polishing firewood”(44).
Roy agrees with Ammu. The society presented by her is patriarchal where man is the controller of power. As Annis Pratt says, patriarchy creates for women an "enclosure through marriage" (37). Madhumalathi Adhikari, in "Power Politics in The God of Small Things", while commenting on the structure of society in the novel, observes, "Unfortunately a woman is generally truncated, maimed and enfeebled by the institution of marriage" (44). Roy presents in her novel, the experiences of women in wedlock as one of taunt and torture. The woman in India is taught to bear with it silently and unquestioningly if she wants to avoid a “Man-less” life.

The belief that a woman cannot exist in society without the help and patronage of a male member is ingrained deep into the social structure. This is the reason for hasty marriages arranged even without the concurrence of the woman. As in the case of Ammu, with the retirement of the father, nothing but the daughter’s marriage is of prime importance. “There was very little for a young girl to do in Ayemenem other than to wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with the housework” (38).

Baby Kochamma is a typical example of a “Man-less woman”. She “resented Ammu, because she saw her quarrelling with a fate that she had graciously accepted. The fate of the wretched Man-less woman. The sad, Father Mulligan-less Baby Kochamma”(45). The fate of a divorced woman is still worse. In the Ayemenem house, when Chacko the divorced man enjoys respect and dignity, Ammu the “Man-less” woman finds her existence miserable. Even Baby Kochamma finds a malicious pleasure in taunting Ammu. To the people of Ayemenem, the divorced Ammu is an unwelcome guest in her parental home and an object of curiosity.
Within the first few months of her return to her parents’ home, Ammu quickly learned to recognize and despise the ugly face of sympathy. Old female relations with incipient beards and several wobbling chins made overnight trips to Ayemenem to commiserate with her about her divorce. They squeezed her knee and gloated. She fought off the urge to slap them. Or twiddle their nipples. With a spanner. (43)

This clearly shows that the society expects the woman to be with her husband, however cruel he may be.

When Rahel comes back to Ayemenem, as a “Man-less” woman after divorcing her husband Larry McCaslin, Comrade Pillai is not able to comprehend the fact that she too has decided to be alone like her mother. Being a divorcee reminds him of the end of life, and to him divorce is nothing but death. “‘Die-voiced?’…. He even pronounced the word as though it were a form of death”(130).

The fact that a “Man-less” woman is looked down upon by anyone is clear from Ammu’s experience in Kottayam Police Station. The police inspector thinks that he can fearlessly insult, humiliate and even molest Ammu as she is a divorcee. “Inspector Thomas Mathew’s moustaches bustled like the friendly Air India Maharajah’s, but his eyes were sly and greedy. ‘It’s a little too late for all this, don’t you think?’ he said…. He stared at Ammu’s breasts as he spoke”(7). Commenting on the police inspector’s treatment of Ammu, Mohit Kumar Ray rightly points out the society’s attitude to a “Man-less” woman, in his essay “‘Locusts Stand I’: Some Feminine Aspects of The God of Small Things”.
The treatment that she received at the hands of the Station House Officer shows how pitiable is the condition of women in the society, particularly when a woman is a divorcee and has loved an untouchable. The author drops a large hint that the police officer knows that he can freely insult this woman without any fear or compunction; he has the sanction of the society.

Shulamith Firestone says in *The Dialectic of Sex*, “Patriarchy, is a system of power which exploits women’s biological incapacity, and it is this fundamental handicap that must be removed to transform our current social order” (qtd. Imelda Whelehan 75).

Education and employment are means of empowering women. But the Ayemenem family, which is a microcosm of the Indian society, nurtures the belief that education is not necessary for a woman. When Ammu wants to go for higher education, she is not sent, as Pappachi feels that “College education was an unnecessary expense for a girl” (38). A girl has to specialize in the nuances of housekeeping, for the Indian male believes that only the female is cut out for household work. While Chacko is at Oxford, what amazes Margaret is the way he keeps his room. “His room was always filthy. Books, empty wine bottle, dirty underwear and cigarette butts littered the floor. Cupboards were dangerous to open because clothes and books and shoes would cascade down” (244). The Ayemenem men expect women to stay at home and serve men, and so, are not favourably disposed to women who go for work, may be because male chauvinism does not accommodate economic freedom of women.
A woman with an intellectual or artistic ability that is equal or superior to that of a male member, is also not tolerated. This is exactly the reason why the bow of the violin of Mammachi who would have become a concert class violinist, is broken. That is why Mammachi’s ability in pickle making is not recognized, and why Ammu’s toil in the pickle factory is not appreciated. Any attempt by the female to come close to the male domain becomes a cause of male jealousy, and also the cause for oppressing them. “Though Mammachi had conical corneas and was already practically blind, Pappachi would not help her with the pickle making…. He had always been a jealous man, so he greatly resented the attention his wife was suddenly getting”(48). One way of oppressing women is by not recognizing the abilities displayed by them. The social structure has taught the male and the female alike that women have fewer talents. Quite naturally, Pappachi or Chacko does not appreciate the contributions of Mammachi and Ammu to the Paradise Pickles and Preserves.

As in the rest of the Indian society, the patriarchal Ayemenem family also swears by the patrilineal inheritance of property. The male members oppress women in the family by denying them their share in the property. This is a pet theme with Arundhati Roy, for her mother Mary Roy is hailed as a champion of women’s cause as she fought for the Christian women trapped in an inequitable patriarchal social order, and relentlessly waged a crusade against the provisions of the 1916 Travancore Cochin Christian Succession Act which made the daughter eligible for a quarter of a son’s share or Rs. 5000/- whichever is less when the father dies intestate. This Act was unjust not only towards the daughter but also the wife who was entitled only to maintenance. It
was Mary Roy who single handedly fought to wrest equal property rights for Christian women and won a long legal battle in 1986 when the Supreme Court of India gave Christian women an equal share in their father’s property.

Roy’s novel is replete with the concept that women in Ayemenem are victims of this patriarchal approach. This has its manifestations in varied ways in the novel. Ammu is not emotionally comfortable and financially secure when she gets divorced from Baba and comes back to her parental home. The conviction that she has no claim whatsoever to the property of her father, is so deep in Mammachi and Ammu that there is no protest when Chacko gets the pickle factory registered with Mammachi as the sleeping partner. Chacko easily ignores Ammu’s right or toil.

Though Ammu did as much work in the factory as Chacko, whenever he was dealing with food inspectors or sanitary engineers, he always referred to it as my factory, my pineapples, my pickles. Legally, this was the case because Ammu, as a daughter, has no claim to the property.

Chacko tells Rahel and Estha that Ammu has no Locusts Stand I.

‘Thanks to our wonderful male chauvinist society,’ Ammu said.

Chacko said, ‘What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine.’ (57)

Roy as a champion of women’s cause seems to obliquely suggest that women like Mammachi helplessly bear the torture of the husband, as her fate would be pathetic if she were to be thrown out. When Mammachi doesn’t even take cognizance of this legal disparity, Ammu the next generation woman, realizes that she has to quietly bear with it. But, when Rahel comes back and enters Ayemenem house as a divorcée, she doesn’t
have hesitations like her mother. This may be a hint that the modern woman is moving towards self-realization and emancipation.

Roy also points out the double standard the society has towards sex. Sex is considered rather as “Men’s Needs.” The society is misogynistic in that it is not able to comprehend the feelings of a woman, leave alone appreciating it. Chacko a divorcee, according to the society, has “Man’s Needs”. Even his mother endorses this. “She was aware of his libertine relationships with the women in the factory, but had ceased to be hurt by them.... ‘He can’t help having a Man’s Needs,’ she said primly”(168). This “enigmatic, secretly thrilling notion of Men’s Needs gained implicit sanction in the Ayemenem House”(168). So, all facilities are offered to Chacko to satisfy his “feudal libido”(168). Naturally, the financially underprivileged female workers are made the targets of his “libertine relationships”(168). Luce Irigaray has pointed out in This Sex Which Is Not One: “If there is such a thing –still– as feminine pleasure, then, it is because men need it in order to maintain themselves in their own existence. It is useful to them; it helps them to bear what is intolerable in their world.... Women don’t have a soul: they serve as guarantee for man’s”(96,97). It is Chacko’s mother who understands his “Need” and exploits the financial depravity of women.

Mammachi had a separate entrance built for Chacko’s room, which was at the eastern end of the house, so that the objects of his “Needs” wouldn’t have to go traipsing through the house. She secretly slipped them money to keep them happy.... The arrangement suited Mammachi, because in
her mind, a fee clarified things. Disjuncted sex from love. Needs from Feelings. (169)

This urge for satisfying “Man’s Needs” grows to such monstrous proportions that women in general are totally misunderstood by Mammachi. She slips in money into the pockets of the dresses that Margaret Kochamma leaves in the laundry bin with the fond hope that she would also, like the financially needy women, bestow favours on her son.

Roy seems to highlight the fact that in a male chauvinistic society, even women can become misogynistic, and be a source of oppression of women. Baby Kochamma is a female member of a misogynistic patriarchal society, who is cunning, cruel and crooked, and functions as an instrument for oppressing women. Mary Wollstonecraft, while explaining such characters, says, “From the tyranny of man, I firmly believe, the greater number of female follies proceed; and the cunning, which I allow at present a part of their character, I likewise have repeatedly endeavoured to prove, is produced by oppression” (qtd. Whelehan 31).

Baby Kochamma nurses deep-seated bitterness for a lifetime of unrequited love, a bitterness that plays out slyly against everyone in the family. As an elderly spinster, she spits venom on Ammu, and goes to the extent of physically confining Ammu to a room and conniving with the police in liquidating Velutha. In a male dominated society, such a woman not only oppresses other women but also develops a pathetic attitude about herself. Even as a young girl, she learns to accept what the society expects her to accept. As she grows older, she forcefully suppresses many of her intimate feelings and desires. Sebasti L.Raj while analysing in “Women’s Liberation: A Philosophical Perspective,”
how the attitude of a girl is conditioned by the established norms of behaviour and values, comments: “She thus grows up as a stunted and male dominated personality and develops a value pattern that will keep her in a subjugated status”(211). Even in old age, Baby Kochamma dyes her hair, makes up her face and spends hours in front of the television inside a closed room. Mary Wollstonecraft relocates much of the blame for such an enslaved condition of woman on the tyranny of patriarchal culture. In “Vindications of the Rights of Women”, she says,

Taught from their infancy that beauty is women’s scepter, the mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adore its prison…. But were their understanding once emancipated from slavery to which the pride and sensuality of man … has subjected them, we should probably read of their weakness with surprise. (qtd Whelehan 30)

Mammachi is so much soaked in the male chauvinistic society that she thinks of sex as “Man’s Need”. She even feels that the need for money can prompt a woman to a sexual relationship with Chacko. When it comes to the matter of Ammu’s relationship with Velutha, Mammachi is not able to see it as a counterpart of “Man’s Needs”. The misogynistic society was not able to understand the “infinite tenderness of Motherhood”(44) in Ammu that makes her admire the highly talented, manly man Velutha who is a hero for her children. Normally, our society does not understand the feelings of a young divorcee who does not find any recognition or security in her own parental home. The society that is able to see sex and sexual needs only from a male point of view pillories a woman. Coupled with her casteist feeling, Mammachi can think
of the union of Veutha and Ammu only in terms of animals. "Like a dog with a bitch on heat" (257 – 258).

The repressive force in society is always at work and is ready to gag a woman. Mammachi’s thoughts go back to her father Rev. John E. Ipe and to her husband Pappachi. She believes that her family prestige is tarnished due to her erring daughter. “She had defiled generations of breeding (the Little Blessed One ..., An Imperial Entomologist, a Rhodes scholar from Oxford) and brought the family to its knees” (258). She even thinks that the great Rhodes scholar Chacko’s reputation is also at stake because his sister Ammu has a relationship with Velutha. But, quite ironically, the reputation of none is at stake, when women come into Chacko’s room to satisfy his "Needs". When Ammu is found to have an affair with Velutha, the table is turned against her. The three women who are indoctrinated with male chauvinistic ideologies join together. “They did what they had to do, the two old ladies. Mammachi provided the passion. Baby Kochamma the Plan. Kochu Maria was their midget Lieutenant” (258). Ammu as the hunted woman becomes helpless. She is tricked into her bedroom and locked inside before they send for Velutha. The law of the society says that woman is to be oppressed, and her feelings suppressed. The three women act on behest of a male dominated society and like a pack of wolves embark on their hunt on the female victim. As rightly emphasized by Emma Goldman in *The Traffic in Woman and Other Essays on Feminism*: “Society considers the sex experiences of man as attributes of his general development, while similar experiences in the life of a woman
are looked upon as a terrible calamity, a loss of honour and all that is good and noble in
a human being” (qtd. Pratt 71). In a feminist analysis of the novel, Bimaljit Saini says,

Seen from a feminist perspective, the novel is about the violence inflicted
on women and the paternal tyranny enveloping the unfortunate children.
It exposes the double standards of morality in society regarding men and
women, the passive, docile role of a wife in man-woman relationship, and
the malicious role of a woman in perpetuating the humiliation of another
woman by a male. (172)

Roy as a feminist writer seems to suggest that misogynistic patriarchy is well
ingrained into the fabric of Indian social structure that anyone – be it the male characters
like Pappachi, Chacko, Baba or Comrade Pillai, or the female characters like
Mammachi, Baby Kochamma or Kochu Maria – becomes a part of the defective socio
cultural structure that oppresses woman. Consequently, women like Mammachi, Ammu,
Kalyani and even the unnamed wives of the Kathakali artists suffer the brutality of male
domination. Mary Wollstonecraft in “Vindication of the Rights of Women” has
uncovered the systematic inequality of women in all areas of life – family, work, culture,
economics, law and education. She suggests that society is to be blamed for female
oppression and for the general weakness of women. Women are often subjected to
tyannical family life and inappropriate marriages to unsuitable husbands from which
there is no escape. Her argument is that if women are not educated, and if marriage is
not reformed, the sufferings of women will persist. As Andrea Dworkin has said, “The
feminist project is to end male domination. In order to do this, we will have to destroy
the structure of culture as we know it, its art, its church, its laws; its nuclear families
based on father right and nation states, all of the images, institutions, customs and habits
which define women as worthless and invisible victims" (qtd. K.K. Ruthven 6).

Kate Millett has pointed out that when a system of power is exposed and
challenged, “it becomes not only subjected to discussion but even to change” (58). Roy’s
exposure of the oppressive patriarchal Indian society should lead to a change for the better. As pointed out by Madhumalati Adhikarai, “Power still concentrated in man is
not due to his physical strength or the diktats of tradition but his capability in being the
manoeuverer in the power-game. A woman has not emerged yet as a strong manipulator
but her tenacity to fight the odds has demanded a change in the perception and creation
of re-integrated females” (48). Though Rahel has not proved to be a successful female
member of the society who has raised her voice against oppressive structure, through
this character, Roy seems to say that there is hope, when she boldly tells Comrade Pillai
that she has decided to live a “Man-less” life as a divorcee.

Women’s subservience to man is a universal factor. According to the difference
in the social, political, religious, and cultural arena, the oppression may vary in degree,
but the spheres of oppression remain the same. Plath, Munro and Roy belong to three
different cultural milieus. But, observing the themes and characterization of these three
feminist novelists, one could say that they have become aware of the systematic
oppression of women by the male chauvinist society. Their female characters pass
through a phase of oppression that clearly indicates that the writers are well aware of this
misogynistic patriarchal attitude of the society. They have shown how institutionalized
male dominance operates, as Pam Morris says, “through social structures like law, education, employment, religion, the family and cultural practices”(4). Not only the male characters but also the women have become indoctrinated by these male chauvinistic ideologies inbuilt in social structures. A few of their characters, like the mothers of the protagonists, may quietly and unquestioningly submit before the authoritarianism of the male, but underneath lies the fact that the writers come out with a social protest, and a determination to expose the realities, with a view to get justice for women.

As Marlene Kadar has written in Still Ain’t Satisfied: Canadian Feminism Today,

> Women have worked alongside men for centuries. They have worked as hard as men, sometimes instead of men. They have done ‘men’s work’, and they have done ‘women’s work’, and sometimes they have done both at the same time. They have worked in our homes, keeping and nourishing our families. Their work has protected our traditions, through the labour of childbirth they have connected our generations, one to the other – and our cultures. Women have even given birth to men who run our governments and our unions. Women deserve their respect. (179)

Feminists, be they writers or critics, strive to find ways and means to restore human dignity to women, and to make them realize their self worth. Greer and Millett see solution to the problem of oppression as a revolution in consciousness which can also serve to awaken men to their internalized position as oppressors. By contrast, Mary
Daly opines, “It is women ourselves who will have to expel the Father from ourselves, becoming our own exorcists” (qtd. Whelehan 77). Gloria Steinson who devoted decades of her life to empowering women says, “We have learned that women can and should do ‘men’s jobs’... but we haven’t yet established that men can and should do ‘women’s jobs’; that homemaking and childbearing are as much as man’s responsibility” (qtd. Schneir 408).

As it has become natural for men to subjugate women and for women to be submissive, any change, even if it is change for the better, may appear difficult and painful. However, change is essential, and it will require tremendous courage on the part of women to join together and work towards empowerment.