CHAPTER TWO

PATRIARCHY
Feminism has assumed an aggressive dimension in America. But India has only begun to witness the emergence of self-assertiveness by women. In spite of the emerging female power in the West, Indian women wear an interior mask, a kind of purdah for the self. Patriarchy with all its attendant vices has strengthened its grip. Nuclear families, consumerism and foreign mass media have fortified bourgeois values. Society stands by man and censures woman. Women's limited experiences in the world outside family prevent them from developing a properly socialized self. They easily become susceptible to victimization and are vulnerable to domestic abuse. Being apprehensive of social censure, they approach the problem of the equality of gender not directly but obliquely; they are always ready to strike a compromise.

Feminism being a predominantly Western concept, all its major theories are Western. But some of the ideas on which these theories are framed are also inherent in Indian perceptions about women. Indian society has been continually patriarchal, though historians like Ram Gopal think differently (440-44).

Western society has also been continually patriarchal, as pointed out by, among others, Frederick Engels, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millet and Betty Friedan. The patriarchal structure of ancient Hindu society has led to the
differential treatment of children and the preference of a son to a daughter. Sudhir Kakar analyses the spiritual, economic and social aspects of this discrimination (Ghadially 66). Conceived on mythic models, the Hindu woman is often regarded as the preserver of family and the protector of culture. The patriarchal family consolidates the position of man but relegates woman to marginal areas. Man demonstrates his superiority by controlling woman's life, action and behaviour. A woman is indoctrinated to be a dignified person, a pure and simple wife, a selfless and thoughtful mother. Indian attitude to women has been ambivalent: it varies between awe and contempt, respect and scorn. Woman is glorified as the divine mother on the one hand and branded as potentially dangerous on the other. This dichotomous perception explains the acceptance of a few women in positions of power even when institutionalised practices of oppression of women continue. Men control, as Vanaja Dhruvarajan points out, not only the means of production but also the means of reproduction. Domestication also means control of the reproductive function of women (116). This all-pervasive patriarchy is also reflected in Indian literature, including the literature written in English.

Under the influence of the Semitic culture and Christianity the Western society made patriarchal
oppression the order of a disciplined community. Women are treated as inferior to men and made to work in subservience to them. A woman is admired not for her wisdom but for her elegance. Acumen and intelligence seldom count as qualities of recognition for a woman. Patriarchal ideology curtails woman's autonomy and deforms her personality. According to Adrienne Rich the urge for self-knowledge in a woman "is more than a search for identity, it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society" (90). Man makes woman's life miserable, renders her powerless and helpless and forces her to seek his compassion and to accept subordination as her fate. A woman establishes herself through sex which circumscribes her self and her aspirations. Somone de Beauvoir and Kate Millet establish with diverse illustrations that patriarchy, which is sexual politics, operates in life and literature throughout the world. Patriarchy being a social reality, women's reactions to patriarchal oppression or exploitation remain almost identical everywhere.

Kamala Das is a victim of patriarchal prejudices. The author-narrator of My Story gives the account of her home as "a house of cards" (81). Her "father was an autocrat" (91) and her mother "vague and indifferent" (20). The "ill-assorted" parents put on a mask of domestic happiness (5). They considered Kamala "a burden and a
responsible" and married her off when she was still a school-girl (82). She was, thus, forced to become a premature wife and mother. She recalls this tragedy in her poem "Of Calcutta" where the speaker complains (C P D 56-60):

I was sent away, to protect a family's Honour, to save a few cowards, to defend some Abstractions, sent to another city to be A relative's wife.

As the narrator of My Story does, the speaker of the poem also confines herself to domestic routine. Das condemns the gender discriminations practised by her society and refuses to reconcile with the system in which man is the "Absolute" and woman the "Other." As it is impossible for a housewife to liberate herself from male control in a family, Das gives in to her miserable fate. She feels a sense of incompleteness about her personality. She turns to writing in order to find a new direction and meaning for her life, becoming a non-conformist in the process.

Anne Sexton is a victim of feminine mystique, the fallacy of feminine fulfilment perpetuated by the patriarchal society. She limits her energies to domestic routine, seeking contentment in the "most rewarding and satisfying role" of a housewife (Friedan, Mystique 22). In her interview to Barbara Kevles, Sexton admitted:

I was a victim of the American Dream, the bourgeois, middle-class dream. All I wanted was a
little piece of life, to be married, to have children... I was trying my damnest to lead a conventional life, for that was how I was brought up... (McClatchy 3-4).

She felt a sense of dissatisfaction and incompleteness about her life. Domestic frustration and discordant relationships led her to ultimate insanity. Sexton turned to poetry on the advice of her therapist, Martin Orne, and this in effect changed the course of her life. In an interview to Patricia Marx, Sexton remarked: "I think probably I'm an artist at heart, and I've found my own form, which I think is poetry" (McClatchy 30). Poetry liberated her from the snares of the feminine mystique and placed her on the pedestal of freedom and individuality.

Many poems of Kamala Das and Anne Sexton reflect the seamy side of domestic life and the miserable state of women in contemporary society. A woman's humiliation begins in her childhood, moves to a peak in her youth, and ends only in death. The patriarchal society ignores a woman's aspirations and discourages her in her efforts to advance herself in society. The roles Indian women play and the images they create are drawn from myths and legends rather than from social situations and personal experiences. Rehana Ghadially locates its cause in the ancient educational system in India. Men controlled knowledge and interpreted classical texts to the disadvantage of
women (21). This is also true of present day America. The patriarchal culture gives masculinist definitions to matters pertaining to women. This is also evident in the practice of prescribing instrumental functions for men and expressive functions for women.

A woman's struggle for identity begins in her girlhood and is confounded by her marriage which is simultaneously an uprooting and a re-rooting. This critical shift in a woman's life, as Indira Parikh points out, is romanticised and the reality of its anxiety and apprehension remains concealed. Woman craves for a life-space where she can experience a fulfilling companionship, existential equality and creativity (35). The hope of this romantic encounter creates a sense of importance in woman. Kate Millet observes that marriage and romantic love obscure the realities of female life in a patriarchy (36-37). She considers romantic love "a means of emotional manipulation" of the female by the male (37). A woman's struggle with marriage revolves around the fantasy of becoming a partner in life's struggles. Trouble crops up when woman attempts to translate this romance and fantasy into living reality.

Kamala Das is conscious of the imbalance of power in sexual relationships as is evident from My Story (70-90). She refuses to reconcile with woman's position as an Object and wants for herself the status of a partner in the game. The menial domestic duties are nauseating and repulsive to
Das. She always describes domestic routine with a tinge of irony or in plain understatement. The poem "Gino" expresses the housewife's feeling of shame (B K D 56-57):

I shall be the fat-kneed hag in the long bus queue
the one from whose shopping-bag the mean potato must roll across the street.

The cumulative burden of domesticity and routine are expressed in the lines. She states with repulsion in My Story: "I would be a middle-class housewife, and would walk along the vegetable shop carrying a string bag and wearing faded chappals on my feet" (85). The monotonous and demanding routine deprives woman of any selfworth. Robbed of dignity and individuality woman sees herself as a slave doomed to obedience and conformity. Das expresses her will to leave the magic line of patriarchal control and create an autonomous and a fulfilling existence for herself. This resolution is courageously stated in the poem "I Shall Some Day" which is an amalgam of defiant hope and freakish desire (O P 48):

I shall some day leave, leave the cocoon
You built around me with morning tea,
Love-words flung from doorways and of course
Your tired lust.

The repetition of the title stresses the urge for freedom. The unresolvable ambivalence in the speaker's urge to flee and then return and again to go out for freedom illustrates
the Hindu wife's at once rebellious-and-submissive personality.

Anne Sexton too realizes that the patriarchal society will not give serious consideration to a woman's intellectual ambitions and spiritual aspirations. For Sexton household objects often act as symbols of a life in confinement. They drive her protagonists to violence and even madness. Sexton's poem "Consorting with Angels" begins with the explicit expression of fatigue at the sight of domestic articles (C P S III-12): "I was tried of being a woman, / tired of the spoons and the pots." Sexton's special sense of herself as a woman leads to the inevitable feminist concerns which are central to most of her poems.

Patriarchal tradition imposes inhibitions upon a woman's life and activities and deprives her of free movement. A woman, in a patriarchal culture, is reduced to the despicable position of dolls. Both Kamala Das and Anne Sexton present the image of a doll to delineate a woman's wretched condition. Their speakers remind us of the character Nora of Henry Ibsen's The Doll's House. In the poem "Of Calcutta," Das describes the predicament of the speaker-housewife (C P D 56-60): "yet another nodding / Doll for his parlour, a walkie talkie one to / Warm his bed at night." The poem describes the speaker's transformation from a girl into a frustrated housewife. She graces the man's drawing-room as a doll and imparts a
womanly voice and warmth to his bed. The loss of the soul due to the stifling domestic routine is a matter of great concern for the poet. In poem after poem Das ridicules the male ego which enslaves woman and keeps her in nets of domesticity. The poem "The Stone Age," for example, presents the indifference of man to woman's miseries (B K D 97-98):

You turn me into a bird of stone,
a granite dove,
You build round me a shabby drawing room
and stroke my face absentmindedly while you read.

The speaker addresses her man who builds around her a stony wall of comfort and turns her into an inanimate object. The man creates a domestic stone age and the mystique of femininity that goes with it.

Sexton's poem "Those Times" portrays the "childhood cruelties" a woman experiences early in her life (C P S 118-21). The speaker is locked in "a graveyard full of dolls" that she cannot break. The dolls signify not only the speaker's sense of confinement but her sense of alienation from her body also.

I think of the dolls,
so well made,
so perfectly put together
as I pressed them against me,
 kissing their little imaginary mouths.

She lives amidst the dolls and finally becomes one among
them. The girl's fantasy life among the dolls ends in the woman's revised view of her life as one of entrapment. The speaker's torment springs from memories of victimization and her mute suffering matches with the perfection of the dolls. In the poem "Self in 1958" Sexton gives expression to a woman's feeling of imprisonment in home and consequent helplessness (C P S 155-56). The speaker is a "plaster doll" who reminds us of Sylvia Plath's poem "The Applicant." She complains:

I live in a doll's house
with four chairs,
a counterfeit table, a flat roof
and a big front door.

The "big front door" indicates the innumerable people she has to attend to and serve while the "counterfeit table" signifies the facade of domestic happiness she puts on. Deceived into her indoor menial activity, the speaker forgets her identity. The emancipation of woman is still an elusive reality.

What is reality
to this synthetic doll
who should smile, who should shift gears,
should spring the doors open in a wholesome disorder,
and have no evidence of ruin or fears?
The narrator knows what is expected of her: she must entertain others and attend to their needs. The poem expresses the writer's anguish at the destruction of individual identity in contemporary society. The poet is averse to the standard faces, counterfeit courtesy and synthetic comforts which dominate human life. The "doll's house," a confining and inhospitable world where the speaker feels herself as a free-floating element, suggests total alienation from the world technology has created. The speaker does not want to be a woman, but a rare and detached creature. Sexton's Snow White is also a doll: "a lovely number . . . rolling her china-blue doll eyes / open and shut"(CP S 224). The doll symbolise the immaturity of the protagonist as well as the passivity of the female body.

Patriarchal customs and conventions bury a housewife in domestic drudge. The frustration and discontent of a woman in a patriarchal family is portrayed in Kamala Das's poem "The Old Playhouse"(B K D 100-01):

You called me wife,
I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and to offer at the right moment the vitamins.

Cowering
beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and

became a dwarf.
If the word "wife" is subtracted from the poem, this ode to the male protector can be applied to all women—daughter, wife, mother, mistress, maid, lover. The protest poem addressed presumably to her husband enumerates the constraints of married life which Das finds abominable. The poem, according to Devindra Kohli, describes "the fever of domesticity, the routine of lust, artificial comfort and male domination" (117). In a fairly convincing argument Vrinda Nabar asserts that but for the half-line "You called me wife," the poem is addressed to a lover (63-65). Irrespective of the speaker's relationship to the addressee, the poem underscores the unpleasant aspect of the relationship. The narrator protests against the aberrations of married life as well as the casual display of male ego with all its horrid manifestations. Man's indifference reduces woman to a dwarf and the family to a little room. The male ego transforms the woman into a grotesque creature with diminished personality.

The beginning of the same poem is a thesis in the domestication of woman.

You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her in the long summer of your love so that she would forget not the raw seasons alone and the homes left behind, but
also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless pathways of the sky.

The man wants to tame the woman, metaphorically presented as a swallow. In the long process of domestication, she is deprived of her "urge to fly." The verbs "tame" and "fly" point to the conflicting urges in man and woman. Part of the poem "Of Calcutta" also portrays the picture of the domestication of woman (C P D 56-59). The husband transforms the speaker into the contemptible canine status of a housewife: "Here in my husband's home, I am a trained circus dog / Jumping my routine hoops each day."

Interestingly, the same image of domestic dog is attributed to the moon in another poem, "The Moon" (C P D 21): "It is a trained circus dog / That shall never miss its hoop."

That the unprotesting housewife finds a companion in the moon can also be read as a woman writer's implicit attack on a male-oriented aesthetic for which the moon for a long time was the ideal metaphor for womanhood.

Anne Sexton's "The Moss of His Skin" is a classic illustration of the male barbarity on woman (C P S 26-27). The poem is about the ancient Arab practice wherein young girls were buried alive next to their dead fathers. The premature burial is analogous to the situation of the modern housewife who is forced into an acceptance of the
stillness and silence of marriage: "It was only important / to smile and hold still." The restrained life of a housewife, deficient of all prospects, is as bleak and as quiet as the merciless burial of the unfortunate girl. A family is a veritable grave where the woman holds her breath and experiences the congestion and constriction of domestic routine.

In the poem "Housewife" Sexton ridicules the housewife who drowns herself in homemaking, which drains her potentials and diverts her attention away from meaningful activities (CPS 77):

Some women marry houses
It's another kind of skin: it has a heart,
a mouth, a liver and bowel movements.

The poet says ironically that a woman's preposterousness prompts her to identify her house with a human being who deserves passionate attention. The image of the housewife, as Ben Howard points out, evokes "the horror of... the suppressed violence and irrational fear of a woman enmeshed in domestic routine" (McClatchy 182). The poet blames the housewife who exchanges her life with the building. She lives on to lead a narrow and shrivelled life. Sexton also points an accusing finger at mothers whose vicious influence entraps their daughters in houses:

Men enter by force, drawn back like Jonah
into their fleshy mothers.
A woman is her mother.
That's the main thing.

Paul A. Lacey correctly observes that the poem is built on two equivalences: woman equals house, and woman equals her mother (22). The identification of the house with the body is complete and irreversible. Sexton projects, as Diana Hume George observes, the alienation of the self and body through this identification (62). There is at once identification and mutual alienation of the self and the body.

The identification of the home with the body recurs in the poem "January 19th" (CPS 593-94). In the poem the speaker calls her home "Bethlehem," "my mental hospital," "my husband," and "my womb." The speaker identifies her body with her home and the mental hospital where she temporarily lives. The female body is again compartmentalised into "womb" and "skull" linking them to herself and her husband. Home is also identified with her daughters and her future:

Home is my daughters
pouring cups of tea,
the dumb brown eyes
of my animals, a liqueur
on the rocks, each a guarantee
of the game and the prize.
The submissive and subservient females, like the speaker's daughters, are seldom better than dumb beings chased and killed in a hunt. "Liqueur" juxtaposed with "rocks" pictures the harsh realities of life which women have to face when they are cleverly won over in a playful manner.

In the poem "The Farmer's Wife" Sexton portrays the lustful life of a suburban farmer from whose stranglehold his wife struggles to escape (CPS 19-20). Though keen and intelligent the woman fails to establish herself as an independent person. She finds it difficult to escape the "country lust" of their "local life" in the "broom factory" where "she has been his habit." The rural housewife is confined to her house. The sense of isolation she feels indicates the problematic position of women and the neurotic reality of the time. Depressing as her life is, she finds strength in her loneliness: her separateness from him is part of her strength: "...living / her own self in her own words / and hating the sweat of the house." The rural housewife dreams of her liberation from "the sweat of the house." In her pathetic situation she wishes that had her husband been maimed or dead, she would find an outlet for her sensibility.

The poem "Consorting with Angels" has references to Joan of Arc who was burnt alive "in man's clothes" after a long period of miserable imprisonment (CPS 111-12). The
poet conveys the idea that the inquisition of Joan of Arc is the predicament of every housewife. The speaker is a woman tired of her femaleness, of "the gender of things." She travels into the dreamworld where people irrespective of their sexes turn into angels: "each one like a poem obeying itself, / performing God's functions, / a people apart." Sexton's disgust arises primarily from man's reluctance to recognise woman as a rational companion, a partner who can make his life complete and meaningful. She, however, is aware that the genderless world is only a dream and that there is no escaping the gender. Kamala Das also speaks of a genderless world attained not through dream but through love-making. In "Conicts" the lovers lose their gender through the heat and passion of love (B K D 38): "When he and / I were one we were neither / male nor female."

Kamala Das resents traditional sex roles assigned to women by the patriarchy and refuses to find total fulfilment in submissive domesticity. "An Introduction" is a powerful expression of this resentment and refusal (B K D 12-13):

... Then I wore a shirt
and a black sarong, cut my hair short and ignored all of
this womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl or be wife,
they cried. Be embroiderer, cook or a quarreler with servants.
The speaker defies the patriarchal definitions of femininity and refuses to fit into any schemes or to play the role of an ensnared housewife. The narrator transforms her specific alienation from "the categorizers" into an alienation of universal dimension. The second part of the poem provides an account of the process of growing up. The hermaphroditic instincts of adolescence which begin with the search for identity is presented as a defiance of womanliness. Ultimately the woman transcends her individuality and becomes a symbol of universal power. The poem, as Ramachandran Nair remarks, asserts the speaker's individuality and feminine identity against patriarchal conformity (18). Das's ability to create poems out of ordinary events is evident in this poem. As the female body oppresses the speaker with its unwanted femaleness, she wants to ignore her sexual identity.

Mary Ann Fergusson observes that images of women are conditioned by the reinforcement of social stereotypes by archetypes. All images of women are, therefore, defined in relationship to man (4-5). Women of classical texts become archetypes. But they are not living realities in any social context. In traditional literature classical prototypes are abundant. But, they are also abstract. In literary practice
social stereotypes follow the model of and strengthen archetypes. Patriarchal society demands that women must follow the abstract models provided by classical and traditional literary texts. This demand is a heavy burden on women. They are forced to follow prescriptive role models. In Das's poem "Suicide" the speaker complains (B K D 27-31):

I must pose,
I must pretend,
I must act the role
Of happy woman,
Happy wife.

Growing up is a painful experience for woman. The poem "Composition" is an expression of the complexities of the experience (B K D 76-85): "The tragedy of life is not death but growth, / the child growing into adult." The speaker experiences the pleasures and pains associated with each phase of her life. She is painfully conscious of her sexual incompetence:

I asked my husband,
am I hetero
am I lesbian
or am I just plain frigid?

The narrator desires tenderness more than love. In her search for emotional security she skips from one sexual
escape to another. As "friendship / cannot endure" and 
"blood-ties do not satisfy," she cultivates abnormal 
relationships. Das's growth from girlhood to adulthood 
seems to be the most painful experience of her life, if we 
are to believe the sequence of events narrated in My Story. 
She was married when she was still a girl to a person whose 
sexual behaviour produced inerasable scars on her psyche. 
She became a premature wife whose pathos of the experience 
of being uprooted are expressed in her autobiography. Her 
marrige abruptly cut off all her adolescent relationships 
especially her relationships with her parents and 
grandmother. The strong bond of love that existed between 
Das and her grandmother to which she returns repeatedly in 
her writings is emblematic of her desire to recover her 
lost childhood. She often strategically brings in a 
granddame or an old lover in her stories to emphasize the 
childhood of the heroine who can be treated as her double. 
The hideous changes that followed the narrator's marriage 
are described graphically in My Story:

At the end of the month, experiencing rejection, 
jealousy and bitterness I grew old suddenly, my 
face changed from a child's to a woman's and my 
limbs were sore and fatigued (90).

Patriarchal ideology prescribes roles for women which 
results in a stifling of their individualities. Women
seldom transcend the roles; they give up their personal aspirations for the sake of the family. They can create new roles for themselves if they resolve the inner conflict caused by guilt and anxiety of being inadequate mothers and negligent housewives. But this is seldom achieved, as contemporary culture makes of women consumers of patriarchal ideology. The role of mothers is crucial in this matter. Mothers prevent daughters from fleeing the dark caverns of patriarchy. Anne Sexton believes that a woman has to wage a double battle; she should resist the external coercion exerted by the patriarchal structures of society on the one hand and the internal dissension produced by members of her own gender on the other. Only her success in this battle can ensure her liberation from the tortuous spell of patriarchal culture. The poem "The Red Shoes" contrasts the speaker's generation with her mother's (C P S 315-17). The title of the poem suggests the revolutionary fervour of the present-day women, which would usher in a new era, defying the forces of tyranny and subjugation:

All those girls
who wore the red shoes,
each boarded a train that would not stop.

Stations flew by like suitors and would not stop.
The present generation of women should march ahead even if
they have to face challenges and adversities at each step. The red shoes the girls tie are an uncomfortable legacy which bears the burden of sexual politics. Woman cannot escape this fatal, irresistible and inevitable legacy.

The society built on patriarchal values may find the unconventional ideas expressed by women foolish or mad. Barbara Segnitz and Carol Rainey remark: "Through Art the individual can express ideas the culture might designate mad and has freedom to speak the truth" (23). The society may disagree with women giving expression to their unconventional thoughts and emotions in art and literature. Sexton portrays herself as a witch in some of her poems to indicate her sense of alienation from society. The poet refers to herself in "The Gold Key" as "The speaker in this case / is a middle-aged witch, me" (CPS 223-24). The poems "Her Kind" and "The Black Art" present her creative energy as witchery. Sexton says in "The Witch's Life" (CPS 423-24):

> It is the witch's life,
> climbing the primordial climb,
> a dream within a dream,
> then sitting here
> holding a basket of fire.

The poet's life is as mysterious and as complex as the witch's life of her racial memory. She never bothered about
her strange and diabolic environment and moves about deliberately asserting herself and influencing housewives with her magic. In "Her Kind," the poet portrays herself as "a possessed witch, / haunting the black air, braver at night: / dreaming evil" (CPS 15-16). The poet is conscious of her distinction from ordinary women: she is both odd and evil. Her dreadful external appearance empowers her to realign the "disaligned" relationships. She may be misunderstood in her endeavours to redefine gender relations. But she is ready to risk anything, including her life, for this purpose: "A woman like that is not ashamed to die. / I have been her kind." The witch's is one of the unconventional roles the poet assumes in her relationships with men. The pressures of feminine expectation on a housewife torment her psyche and she counters these pressures by her creative energy. The witch's art is at once magic and housekeeping. Her inevitable execution by fire is the fate of all women. Sexton expresses her personal experience with a social comment. As the wheel of fortune turns, woman becomes rebel, servant and victim. Men resent women's power and exploit every occasion to destroy it. They victimise every woman who does not conform to patriarchal ideology. The woman poet's ambivalent experience in the male world which simultaneously encourages her to write and restrains her from doing so is evident in this poem.
Kamala Das is also conscious of the bane of the creatively inclined woman whose search for equality always ends in frustration. Women with creative potential are compelled to lead an isolated and lonely existence. Even when married, talented women are alienated. The narrator complains in My Story:

My mother-in-law sulked, for she felt that I was spending too much time away from my child and my domestic responsibilities. Whenever she said disgruntled things my husband grew angry, and his anger was directed against me and the baby (97-98).

The narrator's husband could not tolerate her self-assertiveness. Once he prevented her from taking part in a play rehearsal at the terrace of their flat, with the words: "You must remember you are a wife and a mother" (My Story 98). She silently yields to this rebuke. The narrator continues: "I kept myself busy with dreary housework while my spirit protested and cried, get out of this trap, escape" (98). Das protests against the senseless restrictions which force a sensitive and intelligent woman to lead a vapid kind of existence.

Male tyranny is the outcome of man's incapacity to love and respect woman. The poem "Nani" vicariously suggests the callousness and cruelty of the male world (BK D 19-20):
Nani, the pregnant maid hanged herself, in the privy one day. For three long hours until the police came, she was hanging there a clumsy puppet, and when the wind blew turning her gently on the rope, it seemed to us who were children then that Nani was doing, to delight us, a comic dance.

The unmarried maid was obviously seduced and betrayed by her master(s) or lover. Her suicide acquires a grotesque flavour due to the children's mistaken sense of enjoyment at the extraordinary sight of Nani hanging from the ceiling of the privy. The macabre images suggest total lack of sympathy for the dead maid. The poem "Honour" also deals with male tyranny, but on a different level (SKD 138-39):

... At night their
serfs
Let them take to bed little nieces, and
pregnancy,

A puzzle to the young toys, later thrown into
wells and ponds
From which they rose like lotuses and water-
lilies, each with

A bruise on her throat and a soft bulge below
her navel.

This poem, as Ramachandran Nair suggests, is a "powerful expression of unmuzzled wrath and righteous indignation at
the cruelties" unleashed on "the depressed class people" (57). In fact the poem can be said to portray patriarchy operating through multiple hierarchies in Indian society. The feudal lord's "honour" comprises not only of the exploitation of the male folk but also of the seduction and ultimate murder or enforced suicide of their women. This poem is an ironic exposition of the suffering and dishonour a community is subjected to: "the poor / Were ravished, strangled, drowned, buried at midnight behind /snake-shrines." Kamala Das describes the brutal games of the feudal lords. She concludes the poem with a cryptic reference to the death of a Moplah bride: "even dead and rotting / The wench was alluring." The ironic conclusion of the poem evokes a derisive laughter which at once mocks the pseudo-honour of the feudal lords and shocks the conscience of the readers. In a recent article Leela Menon quotes Das to illustrate the point that Kerala women are not yet emancipated. The poet ridicules Indian women's consuming desire for getting married:

Why do they want to give dowry and marry? . . .

Present marriages are just rape with family consent . . . I felt cheated when I was forced to marry. It was traumatic (9).

Dowry is an extension of patriarchy that works through the general notion of male sovereignty.
In the poem "Buying the Whore" Sexton delineates through a series of images the miserable condition of a woman sex-worker as well as the wantonness of man in exploiting her (C P S 581). Compelled by the exigencies of her profession the woman is abused for man's sexual enjoyment. Man derives sardonic pleasure in ravishing his victim whose inevitable passivity forces her to be "purchased" or "rented by the hour." The poem echoes a jaunty, angry, Plath-like voice:

You are a glass that I have paid to shatter
and I swallow the pieces down with my spit.
You are the grate I warm my trembling hands on,
searching the flesh until it's nice and juicy.

Woman's salvation lies in her shelving softness and delicacy. Man endangers his interests in devastating and deserting a woman; he is forced to swallow the pieces of glass he has broken. The innate strength of woman, according to Sexton, can stop man's aggression if only she breaks the mystique of femininity.

Sexton's "Speaking Bitterness" reflects the way men with faltering hearts run after the female body (C P S 584-85). What attracts men is the mystery of femininity and not female autonomy. Physical deformity or age cannot dissuade men from seeking physical gratification from the female body.
Now I am just an elderly lady who is full of spleen,
who humps around greater Boston in a God-awful hat,
who never lived and yet outlived her time,
hating men and dogs and Democrats.

Woman drags on her life and curses men who never show democratic spirit or the sense of equality in life, not to speak of fidelity. Lack of spiritual attachment leads to the brutality and bestiality that dominate male behaviour:

... Christ rots in my mouth.

I curse the seed of my father that put me here
for when I die there'll be no one to say: Oh No!
Oh dear.

A woman curses her birth and life and bemoans her tragic predicament as she finds not a single male who is reliable and trustworthy to sustain her in life as a human being and an equal partner. The male-narrator of "The One-Legged Man" barters away his leg-woman and later attempts to win her back (CPS 306-09). He does not want to apologize for his thoughtless action or to provide her with a dignified life. He rather wants to exploit her further as a sex object.

Man does not offer woman companionship in marriage. So she turns to her children for companionship and emotional fulfilment. In her yearning for recognition and
prominence in the family hierarchy the woman longs for a son, the symbol of her power. As a mother she earns the respect of society which she fails to acquire as a wife. Thus, being a mother becomes synonymous with being a woman. So, a woman considers her role of mother more important than that of a wife. Betty Friedan observes that modern woman lives through her body; she considers child-bearing "the pinnacle of human achievement" (*Mystique* 125). Modern woman considers child-bearing a substitute, though a poor substitute, for male achievement. This "glorification of the female sexual function" is one of the ways by which the feminine mystique is propagated (*Frieden*, *Mystique* 126).

Confined to the home, a woman remains passive with no phase of her existence under her own control. Wholly dependent on man in the world of his making, woman craves to have a child for self-affirmation and self-expression.

Kamala Das's "Jaisurya" portrays the feelings of a woman associated with the birth of a son (B K D 62-63). This poem glorifies creation and childbirth as fulfilment of love. It is the finest example of her vision of organic unity in a poem. The speaker is involved in the loving act of creation. She feels like and becomes the earth and finds meaning and fulfilment in love. The man who helps her conceive is only a shadow figure:

Only that matters which forms as toadstools do
under lightning and rain,
the soft stir in womb,
the foetus growing,

proud Jaisurya,
my son, separated from a darkness
that was mine
and in me.

This poem, as Devindra Kohli observes, weaves "a pattern of feeling which holds itself with the joy of creation" (97). The birth of the child is the break of day under "virgin whiteness." The poem exemplifies feminine sentiments. The childbirth is a psychological function with a cathartic effect. The growth of the foetus and its expulsion are, as Ramachandran Nair remarks, linked to "the creative process of nature" (34). This creative process of nature and the biological process of childbirth can again be linked to the pleasure and pain latent in the creation of a poem. There is a strange similarity between the birth of a child and the birth of a poem. This analogy is explored by Sylvia Plath in "Morning Song" and Anne Sexton in her "daughter poems." Kamala Das weaves into her experience the universal feminine hunger for a child. The companion poem "The White Flowers" expresses a mother's anxiety and anguish at the war which destroys love and life (D 24). The speaker's
concern for her baby-son assumes a universal dimension. The mother is determined to protect her son: "Today I shall kiss the crown of my baby-son's head / And wish him a long life before putting him to bed." The speaker wishes her son long life in face of the threat of violence and death. The poem "Afterwards" stresses the sense of belonging a son offers to a mother (B K D 5-8): "A man who let me take his name / To make me feel I belonged."

Sexton's poem "Unknown Girl in the Maternity Ward" portrays an unwed-mother who is giving up her illegitimate baby (C P S 24-25). Sexton portrays, as Neil Myers says, "the love of a speechless mother for a child she cannot keep and wants desperately" (Wagner-Martin 23). The speaker reminds us of the legendary princess Kunti from Mahabharat who could not keep her first-born despite her ardent desire for the child. The narrator carasses her six-day old child: "Your lips are animal: you are fed / with love." The poet focusses her attention on the mother's brooding amazement at the baby's animal poise: "I prize / your need, the animals of your lips, your skin / growing warm and plumb."

Sexton uses the dramatic situation of the "Unknown Girl" to affirm the difference between the maternal bond and the maternal role. The doctors, the representatives of the patriarchal world, pester the girl to know the details of the father of the baby:
... They guess about the man who left me,
some pendulum soul, going the way men go
and leave you full of child.

Though the man disowns the girl and the infant, she cannot
abandon the infant. Scared of the loss, she lets the child
grow, hardening her heart against the cruel, merciless
comments heard all around.

Sexton's "Little Girl, My String Bean, My Lovely
Woman" is a birthday poem for Linda, her elder daughter
(CPS 145-48). In this poem the poet celebrates her
daughter's passage into womanhood. She cautions her daughter
against the false promises and the lures of her youth. Man
will come to rouse her daughter's fascination and will
reject her after the brief spell of enjoyment. It is the
destiny of women that they are "born twice." The poet
counsels her daughter: "let your body in, / let it tie you
in, / in comfort." None else, not even her mother, can take
care of her at her "second birth." The poet asks her
daughter to realize the fleeting nature of youth as well as
the significance of her individuality. When she grows into
a blonde, wily men will attempt to woo and win her over,
reducing her to a self-less sex object. The poet expresses
anxiety at her daughter's sexual awakening. She seems to be
apprehensive of the possible disasters of such an
awakening. The poet advises her daughter to keep vigil
against the male witch-hunters. She warns the girl that she can yield to male exploitation only at the cost of herself. Sexton relives her own experience through the poem. In her role as the mother, the poet assumes the informing image of the creator. In this poem and in the companion poem, "A Little Uncomplicated Hymn" the relationship of mother and daughter is like that of a poet and a poem (C P S 148-52). The mother-daughter relationship has an aesthetic dimension in addition to the familial and domestic one. It is worth noting that Sexton's attitude to the "second birth" is not consistent. The poem "Suicide Note" reflects "second birth" as a curse, the tragedy of being a woman (C P S 156-59):

Better ...
not to be born;
and far better
not to be born twice.

The poet is disgusted with her life, but she is more disgusted with her womanly life. The sad experiences of being a woman, the pains and perils of a womanly life, prompt woman to look upon life as a curse.

Sexual exploitation and betrayal are not the only forms of male cruelty in a patriarchal society. Lack of love in man-woman relationships is an improvised form of male oppression. Remember Byron's remarks: "Man's love is
of man's life, a thing apart; it is woman's whole existence." Loveless relationships are unbearable for women. Relationships wanting in love corrupt their minds and degrade their positions in society. Kamala Das conceives of the male as a beast wallowing in lust with a monstrous ego under which the woman loses her identity. The strong desire for freedom, including the freedom to rebel, forms the central strain in many of her poems. She enumerates the male felonies in her poems and builds up a structure of protest and rebellion in her poetry. Das assimilates the strength of love and the fervour of sexual attraction into her poetry. But she rejects the general contention that sex and love can sustain a marriage and make a woman's life complete and meaningful. Alladi Uma rightly observes that sex in India is a woman's duty and a man's pleasure (40). Several poems of Das convey the tedium and monotony of sex both within and outside marriage. The husband and lovers are alike in the matter of love. Their love is disguised lust, a poor substitute for real love. The life of Das's persona may be considered a tale of her experiments with love and the repeated failures of her experiments force her ego to be resentful and defiant. She looks upon each encounter as a substitute for the real experience of true love. Several of her poems, including
"Honour" and "The Old Playhouse," illustrate this aspect of her attitude to love.

Kamala Das believes that not only actions but also words and gestures can make or break relationships. The poem "Of Calcutta" narrates how the routine sex of the speaker's partner is degraded by his endless tales of the sexual pleasures he derived outside the orbit of marriage (C P D 56-60):

... he folded
Me each night in his arms and told me of greater
Pleasures that had come his way, richer
harvests of
Lust, gleaned from other fields, not mine: the
embers died
Within me then.

Wittingly or not, the husband contributes almost everything that will mar a sexual union. In "A Man is a Season," the speaker blames her husband for sending her to other men (C P D 80):

... you let me toss my youth like coins
Into various hands, ...
... you let your wife
Seek ecstasy in others' arms.
The husband stoops to savage depths to teach her the
distinction between a man and a husband: man is a "season,"
but husband is "eternity." The aftermath of his action is irreparable and irreversible. "A Faded Epaulet on His Shoulder" portrays marital disharmony which results from the destruction of woman's personality (C P D 103-04). The speaker tells us of the unfeeling, unloving, bureaucratic husband in sarcastic terms. He has greater interest in the problems of the co-operative movement than in the parijat on her hair or in the aroma of her sandalwood-smeared breasts. The husband is lustful and lascivious: "even a fair-skinned maid servant could / take him away from me for hours." The partners are doomed to be estranged with rapid disappearance of love between them. Though the male partner hardly evokes any true passion in her, he is lively with his lust which he performs routinely.

The poem "The Sunshine Cat" reveals the extreme form of domestic cruelty perpetuated on woman (T 22). Selfishness and cowardice of the husband deprive the woman of familial protection: "being selfish / And a coward, the husband who neither loved nor / Used her, but was a ruthless watcher." Das's speakers bear the burden of sex without self which their ethically and psychologically inferior husbands perform ritually. Her women feel a sense of revulsion which ultimately lead them to protest and to rebel. The poem "The Freaks" presents the speaker and her partner as freakish (B K D 42). The woman's impatience and
frustration with an emotionally passive man who commutes his love into sheer lust find ironic expression in the poem. With his inability to love he short changes love for lust and mocks at her feminine integrity. With a view to asserting herself she flaunts "a grand, flamboyant lust." This poem reflects the widening chasm between woman's passion and its fulfilment. The poem "Cat in the Gutter" also presents the image of a woman disgusted with loveless sex (C P D 99). The speaker cannot convince her husband that "his robust lust" without any "soul to overpower" her is only a physical pleasure. With his lust he reduces the woman to "a high bred kitten / Rolling for fun in the gutter." In the poem "The Swamp," Das portrays the speaker's dissatisfaction with her sexual partner (B K D 89–91). The soul-less sex which the man engages in is only a physical exercise which produces a sort of addiction in the partners.

Anne Sexton also transmutes into poetry the theme of the importance of sex in married life. Like Das, Sexton also thinks that love and sex by themselves cannot offer a fulfilling existence for women. She resents her longing for her husband on a foreign tour. In her interview to Barbara Kevles, Sexton says: "Oh, I feel so guilty. I couldn't get along without my husband. It's a terrible thing, really, a modern woman should be able to do it" (McClatchy 17). Love
inspires a woman to depend on a man of her choice, despite his instability and flirtation. Man exploits romantic love as a trap to sexually abuse a woman. Sexton believes that marriage fails to harmonize a male and a female, but degenerates the latter to "the inessential . . . the Other" (Beauvoir 16). In her poems, Sexton flays the conjugal bond which is not better than a pose and a pretention. Maxine Kumin points to Sexton's feminist consciousness in the latter's "wonderful impudence in naming herself a kind of liberated female deity" (CPSxxx). In Sexton's view man's dictatorial and violent ways are hazardous to family life. As Jane McCabe states, many of Sexton's "experiences and feelings are the product of a society that oppresses women" (McClatchy 218). But the rage and protest that run through her poetry are her own.

Anne Sexton's perception of the real nature of man is vividly expressed in her poem "The Wife-Beater" (CPS307-08). The speaker's husband is surly and sullen; he kisses his wife and child "with a tongue like a razor." He reminds us of the lover in Kamala Das's "Gino" whose kiss is like the bite of a krait (BKD56-57). The man reduces his female dependents to lumps of flesh:

Yesterday he built me a country
and laid out a shadow where I could sleep
but today a coffin for the madonna and child.
The man extends a fake protection, "a shadow," to the speaker, who is a "madonna," helpless and innocent. His violence reaches its culmination in the concluding part of the poem.

Tonight all the red dogs lie down in fear
and the wife and daughter knit into each other
until they are killed.

Even animals are scared of his violence. The anger which a woman nourishes against male forces in degrading circumstances need not be construed in the negative. Adrienne Rich observes: "I think anger is culturally part of every human being" (111). The absence of passion in women props up conservative trends in society which perpetuates man's superiority. The speaker's husband is both a wife-beater and a child-beater. He, as Caroline King Barnard Hall observes, metamorphoses from "lover to misogynist" (126). The poem "After Auschwitz" reflects Sexton's wrathful apathy to the intolerance of man who, like a Nazi, does not hesitate to kill and cook a baby "for breakfast / in his frying pan" (C P S 432-33).

Sexton believes that man is an embodiment of evil and ugliness whose domination should be resisted. The poet condemns the barbarous male-oriented tradition and curses man. Sexton thinks that deliberate attempts should be made to end male-chauvinism. Man's rudeness and rancour are
portrayed through the sustained metaphor of a hornet in the poem "Hornet" (C P S 499-500). The man "would get in the house any way he could / and then he would bounce from window / to ceiling, buzzing and looking for you." Man inflicts pain on his dependent woman. He makes his stifling presence felt everywhere in the woman's life, "in the curtain" and "under the shelf." He speaks to her with "a nest of knives" and creates a nuisance of himself by climbing "out of the toilet" when she sits on it. This poem is Sexton's plea to women to awake, arise and organise themselves against male atrocities.

The poem "The Farmer's Wife" depicts the tedium of sex without self in the life of a farm couple (C P S 19-20):

... she has been his habit:
as again tonight he'll say
honey bunch let's go
and she will not say how there
must be more to living
than this brief bright bridge
of the raucous bed or even
the slow braille touch of him
like a heavy god grown light,
that old pantomime of love

Love and sex are brief and blind, as "pantomime" and "braille touch" suggest. The rural housewife is confined to
brief sex can save her from the sense of isolation. The sex act over, she returns to her isolated state:

mind's apart from him, living
her own self in her own words
and hating the sweat of the house
they keep when they finally lie
each in separate dreams

The farmer's wife has a parallel in the speaker of Kamala Das's poem "Cat in the Gutter" in which the woman desperately wants to tell the male partner that there is more to life than lust (C P D 99).

Man's miserable maladjustability is portrayed in "Man and Wife." In this poem Sexton presents the pitiable condition of a couple "who came to the suburbs / by mistake / forsaking Boston" (C P S 116-18). The "blind wall" against which "they bumped / their small heads" is the outdated conventions of marriage. In the absence of genuine passion and harmony, they live like strangers under the same roof:

We are not lovers.
We do not even know each other.
We look alike
but we have nothing to say.
Now they are together
like strangers in a two-seater outhouse,
eating and squatting together.
The narrow-minded couple lead a bestial life. While the husband quarrels with the wife to establish male sovereignty and false prestige, the wife wages a battle for recognition and human treatment. Marriage injures the individual psyche of the couple and mars their union.

Patriarchy is sexual colonialism in which gender relationships are in terms of domination and subordination. This ingenious form of internal colonization results in the inhuman and undignified treatment of women. Men develop a utilitarian attitude to women and expect total and unconditional servility from them. Love and marriage are means of emotional manipulation which men exploit to their advantage. Man not only underestimates woman's aspirations but also refuses to create a context for her growth. This can lead to the construction of a world of fantasy in which a woman may flit from man to man in relentless pursuit of a fruitful and abiding relationship. Both Kamala Das and Anne Sexton are keenly aware of the complexity of the problem, which both have articulated with involvement in their poems.

Kamala Das's "Substitute" is a an overview of her various relationships with men which she considers substitutes for her marriage (D 6-7):
... love became a swivel-door,
When one want out, another came in.
Then I lost count, for always in my arms
Was a substitute for a substitute.

The speaker plunges into a series of affairs as satisfactory substitutes for her disharmonious marriage. Devindra Kohli finds in her article "I Studied All Men" an elaboration of this view (95). Love is compared to "a swivel-door": as one lover leaves her, another enters. The refrain "It will be alright" is an ambiguous statement. The speaker means the opposite of what it literally conveys. Her unconventional state, as Vrinda Nabar points out, is an aberration (44). But it is an aberration only from the angle of patriarchy. There is complete lack of harmony between the man and the woman:

Our bodies after love-making
Turned away, rejecting.
Our words began to sound
Like clatter of swords in fight.

This poem is an exploration of the frustrated female psyche. There is hardly any emotional involvement in this love. The warmth and loveliness of the affair is short-lived.

The poem "Gino" can be read as Dad's experience with one such "substitute for substitute" (BK D 56-57). It
opens on a note of warning. Das compares the kiss of a lover to the bite of a krait that "fills / the bloodstream with its accursed essence." As Vrinda Nabar observes, there is an element of betrayal in the kiss of the Indian lover (65). The speaker is caught between a frustrated love life and the prospects of a glorious love which, it is suggested, is unlikely to be realized. Caught between the misery of one and the uncertainty of the other, the speaker becomes lonely and helpless. Another poem "Sunset, Blue Bird" presents the desertion of the lover after he has found out that the woman has conceived from him (B K D 86). The woman continues to be absorbed in the lover long after the event. This poem reminds us of the lover in Sexton's poem "Unknown Girl in the Maternity Ward."

In the poem "Conflagration" the speaker reminds the poet that the world extends beyond the body of her lover (D 20). The sexual act is compared to "lying buried / Beneath a man." The Lawrentian sense of passion as a self-centred and destructive elemental fire is evident in the poem. The sexual act as burial is a recurring theme in Sexton's poetry also. Das's "Descendants" portrays lovers indulging in insubstantial love (B K D 43): "nailed, no, not / to crosses but to soft beds." The identification of the cross with the bed indicates, as Ramachandran Nair points out, the agony and torture of the kind of love the lovers practise (24). The
lust which the lovers actively engage in ends in damnation and punishment. The speaker is one of the descendants who awaits damnation for the unconventional love to which she yields easily. The poem "Captive" describes love as "an empty gift" and the speaker as a captive of "womb's blinded hunger" (CPD 81). The image of "muted whisper / at the core" suggests the act of consummation without contentment. This poem stresses the speaker's dissatisfaction with lust which is the only kind of love she experiences in her life. In "The Doubt," Kamala Das pictures love as a shameful act and sex as a murder where the murderer, the male, destroys the evidence of the crime (D 16):

... I can see him
After a murder, conscientiously
Tidy up the scene, wash
The bloodstains under
Faucet, bury the knife.

The lover's thrust is compared to a stab. The poem ends with an exposure of the poet's sexual identity: "what am I in sex who shuttles / Obsessively from his / Stabs." The speaker doubts whether the sexual experience she has as a female is something else. The theme of sexual act as murder also recurs in Sexton's poetry. In "Ferns" the relationship of the lovers is conveyed through the images such as "dismembered heads," "night-streets grinning in static..."
mirth" and "quiet places eat its own hotted flesh" and is confirmed by the pictorial lines "our / Bodeis stalked on beds will mimic the slow / Gestures of the mind" (B K D 32). The sexual hunger is self-consuming and horrible as expressed by the grotesque imagery of the poem.

In the poem "The Looking Glass" the speaker flatters the male ego in ironic expressions (D 25). The woman yields to the man's strange demands and gives in to his supremacy. The irony of the situation lies in the woman's difficulty to keep the man despite her sacrifices:

... getting
A man to love is easy, but living
Without him afterward may have to be faced . . . .

The basic needs of women are universal rather than personal. The speaker reveals what the male wants to believe: his strength compared to her softness before the looking glass. The explicit sexuality of the first half of the poem reminds us of Sexton's "That Day" in which the speaker admires and takes delight in her lover's phallus (C P S 180-81). The poem "Glass" speaks about the fragility of love and female body (B K D 103). The hasty arms of the lover reduces the woman to "an armful of splinters," a "broken glass." As Ramachandran Nair points out, the sad awareness that nothing endures in man–woman relationship is
the underlying feeling of the poem (42). The speaker renders a service to her many lovers, gives "a wrapping to their dreams," a "woman-voice" and a "woman-smell." The second half of "The Stone Age" portrays the poisonous and sinful nature of the speaker's relationship with her lover (B K D 97-98): "ask me / why his hand sways like a hooded snake / before it clasps my pubis." The erotic imagery has the advantage of erasing the question of infidelity of the speaker. "The Old Playhouse" portrays a lover who ensnares the speaker (B K D 100-01). His lust coils the woman like a snake; she depends on him for more love: "The strong man's / technique / is always the same. He serves his love in lethal doses." He kills her individuality through slow-poisoning by his lust. The lover in this poem reminds us of the man portrayed in Sexton's "Horse" (C P S 507). In her sexual encounters Das's speaker can never find fulfilment as a person or satisfaction as a woman. The woman's experiments with love end in a catastrophe. Das knows that in sexual relationships woman is always the inferior partner yielding to the egotistic cruelty of man.

Anne Sexton's poems on love and sex centre on the passive-female-versus-the-active-male motif. She uses elaborate imagery to indicate the violence linked with love and the accompanying torment, anger and death. Her poems reiterate the patriarchal demand for submission in the
guise of affection. Sexton exercises a kind of visionary insight by which she rewrites the history of the female. The domination of man is advantageous to him in all sexual relationships. This helps him to make ruthless exploitation of women for sexual enjoyment. Her poem "Unknown Girl in the Maternity Ward" portrays a callous lover who rejects a girl after ravishing her (CPS 24-25). The lover leaves the pregnant girl to her fate. Her life is made more miserable by the deeds of the representatives of patriarchy: "They want to know / the facts. They guess about the man who left me." The society wants to know the identity of the man, although it detests unwed-mothers and their infants. In Words for Dr. Y. (CPS 561-79), Sexton depicts the cheerful mood of girls and women which is disturbed and distracted by man's deceptive love. The initial inartificiality of the girl's happiness ends up in the unfulfilled womanly desires: "for sometimes her palm / will read He loves me not."

In "The Interrogation of the Man of Many Hearts," the male-narrator is a capricious and fickle-minded married man who makes the woman's life miserable (CPS 176-80):

She's the one I carried my bones to
and built a house that was just a cot
and built a life that was over an hour
and built a castle where no one lives
A woman for him is only "a body of bones / that I would honestly buy, if I could buy, / that I would marry, if I could marry." The conditional clauses ironically suggest man's fluctuation and vascillation in relation to woman. The man wants to tie the woman down with the marriage knot from which she can hardly escape even when he proves to be a fraud. Man is so blind and indiscriminate in his lust and lecherousness that he won't hesitate to molest a woman in his "mother's apron" or a girl in his "daughter's / pink corduroys." No power can check his pervert movements. He answers the questions about woman in uncertain and ambivalent terms:

God, even as he passes,
hands down monogamy like slang.
I wanted to write her into the law.
But, you know, there is no law for this.

He resents monogamy and doubts whether love with multiple relationships can be lawful.

I called her the woman in red.
I called her the girl in pink
but she was ten colors
and ten women.
I could hardly name her.

He considers woman a strange amalgam of the frightening, the painful and the maternal. In Sexton's relationships
affection, anger and anguish coalesce. Sexton wants women to muster up strength and courage to safeguard their interests against the deceitfulness of men.

In "Speaking Bitterness" the speaker is a dwarf with inner aspirations (C P S 584-85). She faces men with faltering hearts. Man seeks and derives sexual satisfaction from woman in spite of the latter's physical deformity and age. The speaker remembers the doctor-lover who deserted her:

When I was thirtytwo
the doctor kissed my withered limbs
and said he'd leave his wife and run
away with me. Oh, I remember the likes of him,
his hand over my boots, up my skirts like a
corkscrew.

The next month he moved his practice to
Washington.

Lack of spiritual attachment leads to the cruelty that dominates male behaviour.

Sexton's "Again and Again and Again" describes the conflict between two well-entrenched forces in her--the purely feminine, traditional voice of the past and the aggressive, unconventional, feminist voice of the present (C P S 195-96). The speaker often assumes a questioning posture, an impeaching stance regarding her role. The prevailing ideas of feminine fulfilment make it difficult
for her to sustain the voice of anger and discontent. Though woman's love is cherished and patronised by man, her genuine anger is frowned upon. The speaker emerges victorious from the dilemma created by the clash of generations, past and present. Ultimately she puts on the air of a revolutionary and establishes woman's equality and respect in society:

. . . I will kiss you when
I cut up one dozen new men
and you will die somewhat,
again and again.

A woman's identity revolves round herself. This is often ignored by the lopsided tradition of patriarchy. Love takes a potentially destructive and cannibalistic turn towards the end of the poem. Sexton believes that a woman should establish her self, power and personality by herself.

Sexton continues the love-violence theme in "Barefoot" in which images of love and murder are linked (C P S 199-200): "You do / drink me. The gulls kill fish." The barefoot is a paradigm of naked woman. The speaker describes the lover's haste:

Now you grab me by the ankles.
Now you work your way up the legs
and come to pierce me at my hunger mark.

The description of the sexual act as a stab in this poem is to be particularly noted. This is a recurring image in both
Anne Sexton and Kamala Das. In "You All Know the Story of the Other Woman" the speaker addresses the departure of the lover who treats her in a casual manner and renders her lifeless and insignificant (CPS 196): "when it is over he places her / like a phone, back on the hook." The speaker is "the Other woman" whom the lover damns as an inanimate object, "a phone" and places "on the hook" after the act.

In "For My Lover, Returning to His Wife," Sexton contrasts the roles of the wife and the Other woman (CPS 188-90). The poem illustrates the position of the wife and the speaker who is the Other woman in relation to the husband-lover. The speaker chooses a smaller space and a lesser position for herself. Both the speaker and the wife are female objects for the use of the husband-lover. But the wife occupies a relatively solid position. The speaker expresses her loss and insignificance in drained tone: "She is solid / As for me, I am a watercolor. / I wash off."

This poem and the companion piece, "The Break," are inspired by the desertion of Sexton's therapist-lover Zweizung (Middlebrook 266).

"The Break" revolves round the passive-female versus the active-male-motif and continues the love-violence theme (CPS 190-93). The title is ambiguous: it signifies emotional as well as physical break, a broken heart and a broken hip:
It was also my violent heart that broke,

It was also a message I never spoke,
calling, riser after riser, who cares
about you, who cares, splintering up
the hip that was merely made of crystal,

The speaker's physical break is related to her emotional break; her actual fall is made an expression of anger at her lover for having left her. As anger is "a message I never spoke," the result of silence is destruction. The sadness and violence break the speaker's heart. She explodes "in the hallway like a pistol." As woman is always susceptible to such psychological conditions, unexpressed anger is a source of destruction. Adrienne Rich remarks:

... for women to dissemble anger has been a means of survival, and therefore we turn our anger inward. Women's survival and self-respect have been so terribly dependent upon male approval. I almost think that we have a history of centuries of women in depression: really angry women, who could have been using their anger creatively, as men have used their anger creatively (111).

Sexton reveals her poetic awareness of this female dilemma and uses her anger creatively by realising its effects in
this poem. Anger works in two opposite ways: its suppression destroys the speaker of the poem while its release creates the poem. The break is explosive, physically and emotionally, leaving the speaker broken and helpless: "they placed me, tied me up on their plate, / and wheeled me out to their coffin, my next." The speaker is stripped of her clothing and of her residual identity. She gets no assistance from any source, man or woman. The break has a twin nature: "The fracture was twice. The fracture was double." Both the heart and the body of the speaker become corpses. The body will heal, but the heart will not. Sylvia Plath's Ariel has influenced Sexton to write this poem, especially in the expression of anger. In her interview to Barbara Kevles, Anne Sexton acknowledges her indebtedness to Sylvia Plath: "She [Plath] had dared to write hate poems, the one thing I had never dared to write. I'd always been afraid, even in my life, to express anger" (McClatchy 13). Though Sexton refers to "Cripples and Other Stories" and "The Addict" as examples of poems of hate and anger, the same influence remains evident in "The Break." William Spiegelman observes: "Anger and hatred are the most difficult emotions to express in poetry: they inhibit creativity and defy articulation" (Bryfonski 371). In the poem Sexton expresses the alienation of the body from the self by objectifying the former. The emotional burden of
the break of love is extremely painful for the woman. In a patriarchal society it is the woman who bears the consequences of all disasters that accompany sexual or romantic love. Sexton contributes to the feminist awakening, drawing public attention to the mystique patriarchy has been perpetuating. She exposes the hollowness of the mystique and the ruthless exploitation of woman by man.

Domestication of women is one of the strategies adopted by the patriarchal culture to perpetuate the interests of the dominant male sex. Man seldom reaches sophistication beyond the level of Browning's duke in "My Last Duchess" who regards taming the shrew as his serious vocation. Both Kamala Das and Anne Sexton are conscious of the perpetual domestication of women in contemporary society and have written about this in several of their poems.

For generations, women consider motherhood the be-all and end-all of womanhood. Though woman is defined by her sexuality, she is restrained from enjoying her sexuality. This irony of fate that haunts woman is one of the cruelties which a patriarchal society inflicts on woman. Even woman's maternal instincts are conditioned by patriarchal ideology. Woman looks upon the birth of a child as a necessary fulfilment which earns her recognition in
society. Kamala Das celebrates the birth of a son as an event of redemption in woman's life. A son, for her, is a deliverer who makes a woman's life meaningful. Anne Sexton celebrates the birth of a daughter as an instance of glorious fulfilment for woman. A woman can relive her experiences of a daughter as well as a mother through the double images of daughter and mother. But Sexton is apprehensive of the vicious patriarchal elements that will exploit woman when she is both a daughter and a mother. The preference of the sex of the child may be personal in the case of Das and Sexton. What is impersonal is the unmistakable fears and anxieties of a mother in a patriarchal society. Even the tender feelings of maternal duty and maternal bond are manipulated by patriarchal ideology. Kamala Das and Anne Sexton draw attention to the enormous proportion to which patriarchal ideology vitiates maternal instincts.