

Chapter II

Reflection of Working- class Women in Union Street

Union Street, Pat Barker's first novel is set in the early 1970's in an unnamed city in England's industrial Northeast. The poorer and worse, grimy town has two basic industries : the steelworks and the cake Factory. The steelworks from which the men are frequently furloughed or prematurely retired and the cake factory where many of the women worked or have worked.

According to Ivan Gold :

Miss Barker skilfully employs the factory setting to touch on matter like automation, race prejudice, feeble-mindedness and the sheer human hardship experienced by some of those trapped on the assembly line.

Union street was well – received when it appeared in England (the highest praise and subtlest put-down being The New Statement's comment that it was a "long overdue working – class masterpiece"). The novel is divided into seven sections, each named for a particular female, it begins with a chapter on a girl Kelly Brown, who is brutally raped by a man who has been shadowing her truant wanderings since morning and ends with the near – octogenarian Alice Bell, who drags herself from home on wintry day to avoid humiliation of the social welfare system and die in peace. Between these two are five quite wonderful chapters called "Joanne Wilson", "Lisa Goddard", "Muriel Scaife", "Iris King" and "Blonde Dinah".

Actually, this is a very old fictional technique. There are so many instances of this technique – e.g. John Dos Passos “U.S.A” as does the fiction of Harriette Arnow. According to Ivan Gold Pat Barker is equally capable of brilliantly bending the technical rules. Set in England’s grimy Northeast, its seven loosely linked chapters offer a vision of working – class women’s lives that are mordant, heartbreaking and unique. She mentioned the worse things here the pleasureless sex, unwanted pregnancies, the dead end jobs and poverty, dirt, neighbours – also the small triumphs and joys of even these difficult lives of her heroines delicately and compassionately which is that they believe in female inferiority while being themselves far stronger than their menfolk.

The novel is preoccupied with ‘birth, copulation and death’. Sociologist in the west have started taking an interest in social problems like sex equality and female exploitation even since they shifted their perspective in order to consolidate their appreciation of social dynamics. There is no women who has not suffered at one time or another the harassment, humiliation, exploitation and violence that shadow her sex. A women’s life lies between pleasure at one end and danger at the another end. In daily life women are routinely defined by sex and even if not all men are potential kidnappers, rapists, murderers of women, all women are potential victims.¹

In the first chapter of the novel Union Street eleven year old girl named Kelly Brown is brutally raped by a man. Rape is the offence of having sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent , intention

to commit the offence has to be proved. The prosecution must prove penetration, even the slightest, failing which there may still be a conviction for the attempt or at least for indecent assault. Rape is punishable in England with imprisonment for life.²

Linda and Kelly are sisters. They hate, their mother's, Mrs. Brown's a fancy man, Arthur and call him 'the woolly faced bugger with the squint dark bearded man.' Kelly says that she gets hungry at school but the bacon, milk and bread was not for her but for her mother and her fancy man. Iris King tells Mrs. Bell that she saw her the other week sat round the Buffs with that Wilf Rogerson. They were there till past midnight and that bairn left to God Providence. She further tells that when her bairns were little they were never let room the streets.

If Kelly went late in the school, she might get the stick. She could easily write a note tomorrow in her mother's handwriting. She had done it before. Pat Barker gives us psychological details of Kelly, a young girl of eleven. Kelly made up her mind, after making sure the crisp pound notes in her pocket and ran into the railway tunnel. She wandered down a long avenue of trees, scuffling through the dead leaves. She was lonely. The early excitement of nicking off from school was gone. The afternoon had dragged. There was a smell of decay of life ending. Barker has created a proper atmosphere, which increases fear in mind and suspense and unhappiness. Whenever she was in the state she started thinking about her father, imagining what it would be like when he came back home. She was always looking for him,

expecting to meet him, though sometimes , in moments of panic and despair, she doubted if she would recognize him if she did. If she closed her eyes she could see her warm and slightly oily brown skin and the snake on his arm that wriggled when he clenched the muscle underneath. A poor little girl ! Everybody sympathizes with her.

Suddenly a man arrived there but he looked at her so intently. Her mother, Linda, the teachers at school – merely glanced at her and then with indifference or haste passed on. She had to go with him. She had been seen to be hypnotized. In fact, she was mentally disturbed and longing for love.

Kelly became emotional when she watched enviously as the younger girl leaned out over water to scatter scrums while her father held on to her skirt. She felt a presence of her father there but it was a part of dream. Pat Barker is expert in descriptions and narrations. She has written much about the lake:

The geese came hissing and swaying from the
Water, long necks outstretched, waiting the path
With their cracked orange feet. Kelly stepped
Back but they followed thick necks thrust
Out yellow beaks jabbing at her hands
And her thighs, she pushed them away,
Sickened by the feel of wet plumage over bone.³

Then the man went away. She came at the entrance to the Hall of mirrors with her friend Sharon. But she was watching the young

man's reflection in the glass. Then they stood in the queue for the Ghost Train. She was watching the people leave the train. He was not among them. It was 10'O clock. After Sharon's leaving the place, she was beginning to feel sick she stopped to watch a round - about and there he was, watching her, a patch of darkness against the brightness of the fair. The suspense increased.

She started to run and did not stop it until she reached the gate. He was fat and shiny with a black moustache. He was staring at her with a kind of disgusted fascination. He asked her many questions and told him about Union Street - "You go down Light Pipe Hall Road, past the steelworks and then under the railway tunnel."⁴ He assured of knowing a short-cut. Then silence become deeper and tense. They were walking through an area of mixed factories and housing. He was standing at the entrance to an alley. If brings out them into Wellington street. She started to walk forward into the darkness. Not only the factory windows but those of the houses on either side were boarded up. The whole place was derelict.

She pressed herself against the wall. He came round the corner and stopped watching her, then started to walk toward her. He was beyond hearing her and said, " Don't be afraid I'm not going to hurt you." The words thick and terrifying. He forced her down and spread himself over her. At first her tight skin resisted her and he swore at her until he found the way in. she stiffened against the pain. It was all over

and he was looking at her as if he hated her more than anything else on earth. They stood and stared at each other. Pat Barker says :

He seemed to sag and shrivel as she watched,
like a ballon that before Christmas is big
And shing and full of air and afterwords
When you take it down, is just a stickyl
Wrinkled bag.⁵

Rape is an instrument, to exploit women, used by men. Virginity is valued by men, yet it is men who violate it and commit rapes. The important factors in rape are – age, consent, duress, state of mind and resistance. Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code describes rape as sex with a women against her will, or without her consent or with her consent obtained by putting her in fear or death, or hurt or with her consent when the man knows that he is not her husband or with or without her consent when she is under sixteen years of age.⁶

Kelly could never tell anybody. She went home. The sight of her misery would bring Mrs. Brown own gushing to the surface again, and it had taken most of the night for her to get it under control. She had asked the doctor to give Kelly a sleeping pill. But it was necessary to let her shout and scream. Mrs. Brown wanted Kelly unconscious as fast as possible, as much for her own sake as the child's.

Mrs. Brown thought of herself as a hard, tough, realistic woman, able to cope with most things. She had to be bringing up two children on her own. Many times she would have liked to cry but from long habit

held the tears back she felt a spasm of hatred for her husband whom she had not of for years but who was now, momentarily, identified in her mind with the man. It had been so easy for him to walk out, and he didn't give a bugger, he never even sent them something for Christmas, not even a bloody card; she needed a woman to talk to, but in all that sodding street there wasn't one of them she could trust. This is the life of women.

Pat Barker has succeeded in showing a mother's mentally disturbed condition after her daughter's rape. She went to the Iris' home. She saw that Mrs. Brown was close to tears, for a long time she could only sob and choke and managed to speak – it was only the single word “Kelly” and then “My bairn”. Now Pat Barker made her a sympathetic figure. After all it was nothing but motherly love. Her voice cracked and bleating with distress went on echoing all over the room she told her that Kelly even tried to wash her own pants out. She was just going to put them in the dustbin. she had been too scared. The police had blamed ‘her’ for it because of her wondering around at that time of night. Mrs. Brown was helpless. Kelly was still in bed. We can understand the problem and reason, consequences of rape. The following consequences emphasizes the motive in rape ; especially type of rapist:

- i) Sexually and socially normal
- ii) Sexually deviated and socially normal
- iii) Socially deviated and sexually normal

iv) Sexually and socially normal

Then Kelly was on the stairs, wearing a skimpy nightdress. Mrs. Brown felt a spasm of dislike for her daughter Kelly seemed normal Mrs. Brown felt as if she was being cheated of a drama that she had right to expect Kelly couldn't scream and have police all over the house. Normally when Arthur left the relationship between mother and daughter became easier. Her mother asked her many questions about what had happened. What she felt was merely sympathy and outraged love, not a more complex mixture of fascination and distaste for that immature, and yet no longer innocent flesh. Kelly looked at her mother. She felt only a renewed and more savage pride in her ability to survive alone. Nobody knew how to react. The women were more open in their sympathy. The children were told to play with Kelly as usual and not to ask any questions but after a decent interval they left her alone: she was no longer a child. The whispering never stopped. Behind closed doors the voices spoke out more freely.

Kelly cut the hair off. It was shocking; she could have saved her head. People took it as an act of rebellion self-mutilating and aggressive. They had offered sympathy and been rejected. She was no longer the child they had known. They sensed an inner transformation, they didn't try to understand it she had moved beyond the range of its understanding.

On one cold night, Kelly went out. The street was her home now. She knew what she was going to do – there was same sensation of

pressure, the same feeling of blood squeezing through narrowed veins, she was at the school that time.

She went into the Headmaster's study and sat down in his chair. On the top of the cupboard behind the door was a cane. She swivelled the chair experimentally from side to side. All the time anger and courage draining away from her. It had been a mistake to come there, she thought, the house had been better. She had done before she had gone to the park, the exact place she approached the house. She stepped inside, the house was empty. She began to go from room to room very quietly, at first she touched things gently. There was a smell of lavender. Then she went upstairs she snuffled her way around like some small, predatory animal. The girl's bedroom bored her in the end. There were books about ballet and ponies; lipstick in a drawer. The bathroom next she fingered the towels and squirted aftershave on to her skin. It brought goose pimples up all over her arms. She pulled handfuls of clothes out of the dirty linen basket, shirts and underwear mainly. She could tell whether the pants belonged to a man or a woman with her eyes shut, by the smell alone. She snuffled into armpits and stained crotches. The parent's bedroom was best a big bed, smell of perfume , powder , wardrobe, so many creams, moisturizer, night cream, throat cream, hand cream, special tissue cream, big, soft, delicately scented cushions. She wanted something else, something more. She felt her skin tightened as if at any moment it might split open and deposit her, a new seed, on the earth. She began clawing at the

satin skin of the bed dragging her nails across the dressing-table hard enough to leave scratches, claw marks, in the polished wood , poured powder and nail polish all over the carpet, daub dressing-table and mirror with lipstick.

She looked as wild and unkempt as an ape, as savage as a wolf. She picked ashtray and threw it at the mirror. She rocked herself, thrusting her finger deep into her mouth and biting on them to stop the groans. She began hacking at her hair, but scissors were too small. Suddenly, her ears had caught something, a quickening of the silence. She heard a car turning into the road. She slipped out through the French windows she wished she had written all over the house the worst words that she knew. She wished she had torn and scattered and smashed, because then nobody could have pretended that nothing had happened.

Then, remembering that day, she turned in the headmaster's chair. She picked up the photograph of his wife and children and smashed it on a corner of the desk. She got a paper – knife and ripped and tore at the soft, smooth, phoney skin while little white balls of polystyrene escaped from the cuts and trickled down on to the floor. She was sobbing. Her excitement mounting on every breath. Then she pulled her jeans and pants down and squatted. She picked up a smooth, gleaming, sating turd and smelling her own hot, animal stink. It reminded her of the man's cock, its shape, its weight. She began to daub shit all over the Headmaster's chair and desk, smearing it over

papers, wood and plastic. She scraped it off carefully on the sides of a Register. She almost ran at the blackboard and wrote, sobbing, PISS, SHIT, FUCK and then the worst word she knew : CUNT.

The night she was raped Kelly had gone home across the park. It was her first experience of the street at night. She walked past the drunks and other late night stragglers without fear. She went back to the tree but his face pursued her. She had said nothing to anybody that night, though next morning when she woke up the feeling of invulnerability was gone. For three weeks she was afraid, sweated in darkness while his face pursued her in and out of dreams and down the howling corridors of nightmares. Then, with a sensation of splitting open, of pissing on the floor, she started to scream. She tried to tell police about his face but they wanted to them what had happened in the alley behind the boarded – up factory, again and again. She was afraid of herself, afraid of what she might do.

Kelly felt no sympathy but rather distaste for her mother whose hard exterior had cracked to reveal an inner corruption. Her mother had been the one solid feature in the landscape of her mind she haunted the streets by night, she liked particularly the decaying, boarded – up streets by the river. She went back to Union Street on another night she, found a baby buried under a heap of broken bricks, but she put that carefully, brick by brick Christmas came and went. Kelly was given more presents than usual. The miners were on strike. She was sometimes sent to look for paper bags full of coal. The cold weather did

not keep her indoors. She will spent her evenings in the streets by the river. Her mother came in very late and often drunk. Linda solved her problems by spending more time at her boy friends house. Kelly cut herself from both of them; but underneath the fear increased.

In the end even her nights in the derelict streets lost their savour. She seemed to be drying up to be turning into a machine Her legs had the regularity and power of pistons and her hands were as heavy and lifeless as tools. One dark afternoon at the very end of winter, she left the house for the park. She could not break out of that room inside her head where she and the man sat and stared at each other's reflections in the mirror tiles. She would have liked to scream and beat the air, but lacked strength. She did not know where her footsteps were leading her, turned into the main avenue of trees and began to walk along it, hoping for nothing. She saw a dark figure on the bench; it was an old woman with renewed energy she looked at the child I seemed almost to be a gift of the light. They sat together for a ling time. The old woman's tears had dried. Kelly slipped home through the growing darkness. There was a sound coming out of the cake bakery was a crowd of women, talking together she stopped to watch them. Then she bent her head and followed their footsteps. She was going home.

Kelly is a tragic figure, but she expresses her anger in her own way a - very strange way – by breaking everything around her, by hurting herself, remaining silent before others. It is a character, which needs a psychological study. Her truant wanderings, fear in mind, her

behaviour with the others and the old woman, her loneliness, feelings for her mother and sister, her hatred for school and Arthur, her wanderings at nights without restrictions, her love for her father, her dreamy world and , her silence after her rape, then bursting out into tears, her screams, her wish to do the worst she could do - everything – really, everything was strange.

The rapist who commit rapes in pairs or groups are definitely men who are qualitatively, psychologically different from other men – abnormal and perverts. According to Ram Ahuja there are five types of rapists :

- i) Sadist: who have a past history of violence, a strong hostility to females and who obtain sexual satisfaction only when it is accompanied by physical violence.
- ii) Amoral delinquents: who are not hostile to female, use force to get what they want and commit rape to satisfy sexual desire without taking interest in the victim.
- iii) Drunken Variety: who after drinking delude themselves into thinking that a female is trying to seduce them.
- iv) Explosive: who are normally 'upright' citizens. A disturbed family background usually underlines the behaviour of these offenders.
- v) Double standard: who divides females into 'good' and 'bad' they rationalize the use of force, if necessary on 'bad' girls.⁷

Luckenbill and Sander have mentioned that some actions, for instance, rape are considered violent yet may involve only force.⁸ Hotstadter defined acts of force as 'those which inhibit the normal free action of movement of other persons or which inhibit them through the threat of violence'⁹. Buss distinguished 'angry aggression' in which the aggression is reinforced by pain or injury to the victim, from 'instrumental aggression' in which the aggression is a means to some other end.¹⁰

The second chapter of the novel Union Street is named after Joanne Wilson, who lived a few doors down from the Browns on the other side of Union Street. Joss had always fancied her and never got anywhere and went on being kind. She felt a stab of guilt and uneasiness. There was painful retching on an empty stomach. She straightened up for the second time. There was no sign at least. But her shoulders, arms, breasts! Blue veins showed up all over them, as intricately linked as the branches of tree; all leading down to the nipples which themselves were bigger and browner than they had been a month ago. Pat Barker gives here signs and symptoms of pregnancy.

Wharfe Street was the worst street in the town. Now the houses were empty and boarded up, though not yet demolished. In the hierarchy of streets it came almost as far below Union Street as Union Street came below Bychanan Street, with its bay windows and strips of garden outside the front doors. Suicide, mental illness, crime, incest

had flourished there, as though inhaled with noxious fumes from the river. Those who had lived there, whether they had loved or hated the street, did not find it easy to forget.

If anybody gets fed up can always have a walk around the Buffs. She has seen Joss with Iris King and Ted many a night. She was not going to her mother, then where was she going? He didn't want to get rid of her but people will talk. She told him that she might be getting married. But she couldn't tell 'him' about that. She should have to tell her Mam where she was. By ten 'O'clock', it'll be in every house in the street. She said, "You will have to face when you get to work."

The new character, Mrs. Harrison, who had been a beautiful girl. It was still there. Her eyes were startlingly, almost incredibly, blue. She asked her about Joss and further told something about relationship between Joss and Iris King. According to Mrs. Harrison he is a fancy man of Iris King and she sticks up for him like a tiger. His mother had him to her father and that's why his legs were so short. The whole family was like it. She is not going to invite the buggers round to watch. He was jealous to death of her and she was only fourteen. When she was married, he was brought up by his father's sister. He used to go round to see his Mam.

Mrs. Harrison had been glad of her company Jo crossed the bakery yard. A few young men, waiting around to start loading up the vans, whistled and called out after her. There were none of them she fancied and anyway in a few months' time they wouldn't fancy her. She

went down the steps to the basement; there was the usual line of woman, pushing and jostling to get to the cloak. One woman said, "Bastard never pays out."

Pat Barker's description of cloakroom is very noteworthy. In the cloakroom they put on nylon overalls. There was always a smell of sweat in this room. The younger girls peered in the mirror at greasy morning skins and pink eyes, arranging scarves over the rollers they would wear all day. Doris, who was nearly sixty, sucked on a cigarette end and said 'Bugger wont go away we'd best get stuck in.'

The women were lined up facing each other at either side of the conveyor belt. There were four women working together: Lilian, Big Bertha- a West Indian woman, older than the rest, Elaine Watson and Jo. Lilian's job was to line the cakes up before they went into the slicing machine. Big Bertha and Elaine had to restack the layers of sliced and creamed sponge as they came out of the machine. Jo's job - an easy one by comparison with Elaine's and Bertha's- was to slide a cart under the reconstituted cake as it slid past her on its way to the packers.

The trouble was started when Bertha first came to work at the factory. She was the first coloured worker there, nobody liked it. There was 'nigger stink' in the cloakroom; why was Elaine being allowed to use the same toilets everybody knew what mucky buggers they were; if she had to be there at all, why sponges? There was chocolate cake upstairs, why not there? Elaine was almost as completely isolated as

Bertha, though there were two very young girls who followed her round in the tea and dinner breaks.

The author puts the problems of working-class women in a very effective manner. Elaine, taking off her overall at the end of the week, complained as usual about the smell. The black woman's fist shot out and struck Elaine full in the mouth. She fell back against the wall, half-stunned, the impact squeezing an old farting sound out of her chest. She opened her eyes and saw Bertha hanging over her, fist drawn back for next blow. Blood and mucus streamed from Elaine's nose. Bertha's eyes were bloodshot. It did not seem possible that normal life should continue after such an event. But they turned up facing each other across the conveyor belt like gladiators. Several of the older women suggested Jo to get herself shifted.

Nobody had any sympathy for Elaine and neither was there any feeling that Bertha's action had been justified. Many of women were horrified by it because violence between women was unthinkable. Anthropologist Oscar Lewis explained violence in terms of 'the culture of poverty.'¹¹ Megargee has defined violence as the 'overtly threatened or overtly accomplished application of force which results in the injury or destruction of persons or property or reputation.'¹² Occasionally it happen usually in Bute Street – a little scratching a little hair-pulling, accompanied by a great deal of abuse. They heated Bertha's behaviour. It confirms that she was an outsider amongst them.

The noise of machine was horrific as usual. There was no possibility of conversation. At intervals there were snatches of music, continuously. After a while not only speech but thought became impossible. In this roaring cavern of sound each woman was alone. Jo wanted to think about Ken, to work out exactly how she was going to tell him about the baby but she couldn't do it because each half-formed thought was aborted by the arrival of another cake. There was nothing wrong and the supervisor wanted to somebody to shout at. If that was it, Lillian was by far the safest choice. She was called as 'soppy Lil.'

She was about thirty, unmarried and distinctly girlish in appearance: she still wore her hair in too greasy bunches on either side of her head. She had gone on wearing it like that when she started work and spent her dinner hour hanging around the men on a near by building site. At twenty she was pregnant. Her mother, a chapel – going respectable woman had stormed and raged through out the pregnancy, always insisted that the child must be adopted. She changed her mind abruptly when she saw it and became equally insistent that it be brought home. It had been decided that the child should be brought up to regard its grandmother as its mother, and its mother as its sister. The grandmother doted on the child. Three of them could often be seen walking down in Union Street together. The grandmother doted on the child. The three of them could often be seen walking down Union street together.

It was obvious to everybody that there was no longer a place for the Lillian in the home – to everybody that is, except Lillian herself. She was pregnant again, nobody knew who by. This time her mother's attitude was different. She refused even to look at the baby. Lillian gave it up for adoption and returned home alone. But now her exclusion from the family group became more obvious. One illegitimate child was accepted easily enough; two was evidence of stupidity or worse. On Saturday nights, she was said to go round the Buffs there was a rumour that she had been sterilized, at any rate no more babies appeared. Jo had been familiar with this story for many years.

The sponges no longer arrived in front of Jo in a steady stream, but two or three at a time. This difference altered the whole nature of the job. She had to lean sideways and forwards over the belt. This altered movement, hundreds of times would amount by the end of the morning to agonizing pain. Jo could see pain and desperation on Elaine's face as she panted and sweated to keep up. Inevitably, Jo found herself trying to do Elaine's job as well as her own, straightening out lopsided cakes before they slipped the cardboard underneath. Some were odd-looking sponges found their way down to the parking department. This went on until the morning tea-break. Bertha looked blank, Lillian gawped, Jo and Elaine sweated and winced with pain. Jo, sweat pouring from her armpits, thighs trembling from the strain, simply prayed for it all to stop.

As they all climbed the three flights of stairs to the tea-room, Jo could feel aggression simmering in the air. She crawled up, hanging on the banister for support. She felt terrible Backache, belly ache, thigh ache, stickiness? With all the clarity of an hallucination she saw her pants stained with blood. Glorious, marvellous, wonderful blood. The supervisor asked Jo that if she looked as if she'd lost a bob and found a tanner. She replied, 'My back aches I've been working.' Then supervisor replied, 'Your back aches, my heart aches.' The manager warned the girls – women workers – that tea breaks is of fifteen minutes and not of thirty. He also warned Lilian to get her hair under that net. He further told them angrily not to pee in their own time but in the firm's time.

By dinner - time Jo was exhausted. She went back the tea – room where at least it would be quite. She sat down on one of the benches and let the silence wash over her. The only other women in the room Maureen Sullivan, who had a houseful of kids and no husband. But still she struggled on and thanked no one for their pity. Her kids went to school. She was respected but avoided. Everybody Jo met that day she seemed to be seeing at first time. It was because her own life was about to change so radically: every older women became an image of the future, a reason for hope or fear. Then there was Lisa Goddard, whom she often saw in the super – market, weighed down with kids and shopping, pushing her belly in front of her like another self.

Jo reminded something of Ken. Author has used a flash back technique here. She suspected that Ken wanted to get away from her, from that they had done together, after fucking. She wanted to cuddle, to feel close but, he wanted to be on the move at once. Their lovemaking never brought them closer. She told him about her pregnancy. Disbelief anger, fear chased each other across his face. He refused to take the charge of it. He stared around him helplessly. He was sweating with fear, fear of having to marry her. There was a certain detachment in her bitterness. She would wait and see what he did. She asked him about pills. Ken told her that his sister and her husband have been trying for a bairn for three year. Then they were outside the Bluebell. It was a steelworkers' pub. That was their last chance to talk to each other. She thought of girls she knew who had got married with a child on the way. She had thought it would never happen to her; her marriage would be different. When they stopped to say 'goodnight' he lifted her skirt and began to thrust into her, as he hated her, grinding and screwing and banging hard enough to hurt. She was afraid for the baby, he was trying to screw it out of her. She went cold, he fastened on to her with a terrible, monotonous power – how impersonal and machine like passion. He told her that he would be in touch before Sunday.

Joss produced three bottles of Newcastle Brown and two of Guinness, Guinness was for Jo. It was supposed to be good for the milk. Jo told him that he (Ken) is not the only one who's trapped. She

was the one who's got to walk round with her belly swelling, being sick and all that. Actually, she was trapped. They Ken's parents have got a furniture shop and a nice house. She didn't suppose they know where Union Street was. It was Sopsy Jo now.

In the present chapter Pat Barker skilfully handled the problem of unmarried pregnant women, problems and plight of the working - class women and their exploitation by their superiors, dirty and disgusting atmosphere in the cake – bakery , dead end jobs etc.

Job satisfaction is an important factor in determining the extent of well being in life of a working man or woman.¹² But the job holders in the cake factory have not any satisfaction but face only exploitation.

No doubt, Pat Barker is celebrated writer. Her descriptions and minute observations of the nature of the work and her skill to create an atmosphere- These things deserve a praise. Obviously, she would have seen the life of working class women closely because she knew each and everything and gave a detailed information about it.

Third chapter of the novel is Lisa Goddard in which the harried mother of two young sons miserably awaits the birth of her third child, unwanted and overdue while her 'redundant' and boozing husband. Steals the money he has put aside for the new baby and beats her when she accuses him of the theft. She can scarcely accept the "purple howling dwarf " she is finally delivered off " If she had been an animal she would have rejected it, would have sniffed at it and turned away, at once and finally."

The author described Lisa, shopping at supermarket with her eighteen months child in the pushchair. Her ankles were swollen. Her blood pressure was up. Kevin was crying, he came into arms, his face still stained with tears. She had hit him too hard. And not for the first time. She held him close and rocked. It wasn't that she didn't love him. It was only that she got so desperate. She loved him all right; this rocking gave her as much peace as it gave him. Only there was still the baby. There was still Darren to be seen to. She must try to be better. She thought why she was so bad – tempered with them. It was not their fault.

She didn't want that baby. They couldn't afford it: Brian had been out of work for the best part of a year. Brian was out drinking, she did not want to have his child. She doubted whether Brian would ever work again. But she has to work in the kitchen in that condition also. Pat Barker describes this very condition:

It seemed hardly possible that this heavy women lumbering round the kitchen of a poky house should be the same person as that girl who had worked all day at the cake bakery and still found the energy to dance at night.

For the last four or five months she had been saving up for the baby. Most of the things she'd got for Kevin were worn out now, and the maternity grant wouldn't cover replacement. At first she saved whatever was left in her purse at the end of the week. But that was usually just a few coppers. Then she made herself save all the 50 p.

pieces. The sum quickly mounted up. By now the jar was almost full. She kept it right at the back of the pantry, behind everything else. But she closed the pantry door without checking on the jar. She thought of Brian a dirty filthy drunken bastard. He stolen her money and had not admitted the offence. He left the home and told that he was not coming back. The baby would be born in a few days. How would she manage alone?

Lisa was afraid. She didn't know how much there was left of the love she'd once felt for him. There were times when she hated him, times when she despised him. There were many, many times when she pitied him. But were there ever any times when she still loved him?

At last, the time came. Pat Barker gives detailed information of delivery. The atmosphere in the hospital is so lively that we find ourselves in the hospital, with tension and eager to hear a news of a new – born baby.

They had taken her details – name, address, her age, religion and the date of birth and details of her previous pregnancies. She had had no pains at all since she arrived at the hospital, though they had said that labour was about to start. The pains were stronger too. Then as the contraction ebbed as the door closed came cold and ashen darkness, she realized that it was dark outside. There was a soft light on in the ceiling above her bed. She sweated and laboured for delivery. The crying went on. A purple, howling dwarf appeared in the doctor's hands – a girl. She has got five stitches. She was cold and shivery after

she had vomited, she wanted somebody to come. She was alone with the whiteness of the walls.

Brian disliked hospitals so he did not want to come to see the baby. She did not feel that there she had given birth at all. There was no baby there. She had given birth at all. There was no baby there. Her room was a long way from the nursery and Intensive Care unit was on a different floor. She had a clear picture of her child. It had reddish-brown hair. When she first learned she was pregnant she had asked for an abortion.

Next morning at six nurse said 'Here is your daughter' Lisa stared at the child. There was nothing about this baby she recognized as hers. Instead, she read the label on the cot, the label on the baby's wrist. Her mind told her that it was hers. She was anxiously waiting for the moment when she would have to go back along the corridor to feed the child. The baby stared at her through the transparent side of its cot. Its eyes were still dark blue, birth – blue. To the very depths of her soul she felt guilty. She felt compelled to stare at it, to stare and go on staring. There seemed to be a great pleasure of painful feeling aching like matter in a boil, too confused to be expressed. She had not wanted this child. If she had had the courage to express her deepest feelings she would have said to the nurses, "Take it away. It isn't mine". She loved Kevin and Darren. How would she manage to care for this baby for whom she felt nothing? Its weakness terrified her. Pat Barker proceeds very delicately and compassionately.

The time she simply staring at the baby increased. When she parted the lips of vagina of baby she found there was more blood. Her heart contracted with fear. She thought that the baby had some terrible disease. But the nurse told her not to worry about. It is just like a period but she assured by asking the nurse again and again. She looked down at the baby and remembered that she had planned to call it Katherine if it was a girl. In fact, she had not been ready for a girl. But Pat Barker, portrayed the character of Lisa in such an effective way that we also feel motherly love again and again, transformation of Lisa is very noteworthy.

Lisa began to change. She felt a spurt of excitement, so strong that it had kept her awake at night. She reminded her childhood her nickname in childhood was – Doll. She walked across to the window holding the child in her arms. It is a natural instinct, after all. She fell in love with her newborn daughter, before they ever leave the hospital; you have read it to believe it. Really, very nice! Isn't it? No doubt, Pat Barker has a fund of knowledge in every field, e.g. hospitals, factories, bakeries, prostitution etc. In fact we fall in love of the characters drawn by her.

Muriel Scaife is the name of the fourth chapter of Union Street. Her sickly young husband is about to die, she changes direction with great effort into the inner life of 12-years old Richard Scaife, who will soon be dealing with the loss of the father, he never really had. At the end of this story there is a scene in which Pat Barker manages to

convey, with stunning economy and skill, the ineffable communion between bereaved wife and bereaved son.

Richard Scaife, the son of Muriel Scaife seemed almost able to read her thoughts to enter into the conflict of loyalties between her mother and her husband that was so painful to her. His Mickey Mouse appearance was both funny and pathetic. He thought that Union Street was a dangerous place for him. He ought to be in the street playing, as his sister was, but she had learned not to question him. He became irritable very quickly on the subject of home work and school.

His father had been ill as long as Richard could remember. There had never been a time when he was not coughing, or holding his stomach, or complaining of that, or the other pain. He had early adopted his grand mother's view of matter " that there was nothing wrong with his father that hard work would not cure. He hated the blue stubble on his father's chin. He hated the foul smell of his breath.

John, Muriel's husband couldn't read but for many years after their marriage she didn't know about it. She took it for granted that she should settle the bills and write whatever had to be written. It had never mattered to her that he couldn't read she read things to him and they figured it out between them. If anything, it had brought them closer together. Pat Barker brings out the relationship between husband and wife very delicately.

While portraying the character of Muriel, the author gives many dimensions to it. She was tired after her long day: the warmth and the

roar of flames made her drowsy. Yet, beneath the surface of her mind, something that could not be so easily lulled roused itself to keep watch. She had never been able to take happiness for granted, perhaps because she had lost her father while she was still a child. Love, security, order: these were achievements painfully wrested from a chaos that was always threatening to take him back. She remembered the children playing in the lamp-light. Life was like that. His life was like that- a moment in the light. When the lamp goes out, the circle is broken, the chanting voices are silenced forever.

Richard could feel how his father hated the books, he wasn't just indifferent to them, he wasn't neutral: he really hated them. Why did he behave like this? The writer, Pat Barker, makes us to think over it.

John became worse, if he had had something to eat, he would actually cry out in pain. He would be better off in hospital. He needed all his concentration, all his strength to cope with the pain. And the day came blood gargling from his mouth, he was hospitalised. Muriel hesitated on the pavement, torn between the desire to go with her husband and the need to stay with her children. Pat Barker has shown for many times a conflict or dilemma in Muriel's mind. She was not free to live a life according to her own wish.

The death of John, the event was very skilfully handled by Pat Barker. In fact it is a very difficult thing:

She backed away in the doorway behind her, Sharon whimpered and hide her face in her hands. But Muriel had

eyes for nothing, but coffin. It tilted dangerously again and the man with the bald head called out, 'Mind!' suddenly Muriel cried out and started to run, her arms and legs jerking like a puppet. Iris followed and they ran out of the house, across the yards, and into the back. It was wash day. Sheets and towels and pillowcases were draped and hung out all along the alley Muriel ducked and dodged between them as she ran, though the wet sheets slapped against her face, and the arms and legs of wet clothes twined themselves around her neck. It was a nightmare. Then Iris caught her, and wrapped her broad arms around her.

For Muriel, funeral passed like an unhappy dream. Iris King and Mrs. Harrison had gone from door to door collecting money for a wreath. She went back to work the following day. The children went back to school. Nothing had changed. Everything had changed. The numbness that had carried her through the funeral lasted several more days. She tried to keep busy and, at work, succeeded. She seemed to be looking for something, but she didn't know what it was. And she listened all the time for John's voice. Even outside the house she went on searching. She had to look at the face of every man she passed in the street, though she knew that none of them could be John.

She tormented herself she shouldn't have sent him to hospital. He wanted to die at home. He had died during the time, she had gone

to the waiting room to lie down for an hour, because she knew the end was close. She blamed herself. Richard had caught cold while his father was ill. She was afraid to leave him alone in the home. He who had been so grown-up during his father's illness, such a help was now withdrawn and uncooperative. On the night of his father's funeral, when she was exhausted, he had insisted on staying up to watch some film. Muriel was in dilemma. Iris helped her with a temporary solution by offering to have the children in her own house before and after school.

Guilt was the hardest thing to bear. She heard John moving about the house. His last thoughts had been of her. Where was he now? In her mind, in his children. She thought about changing her job and Richard's tonsils and treatment of doctor. He had been frightened. Muriel could tell from the vibration of chest that he was crying, though he made no sound. She told him that, the night his father had the haemorrhage, he was talking about him that he was a fine lad, a good son, she assured that they will be all right, money and all that. Richard could get a Saturday job but she told him that he was not old enough and in the end she went back to her children, with a strong determination to love them and live them. Pat Barker has to pour her skill and then only created such a character, we found in our daily life. Muriel had to play both roles very dedicatedly dutifully – of a mother and a wife.

The relationship is surprising, shocking and impressive, too great to be described in words.

Her fifth chapter 'Iris King' – a character who is earth mother and comforter to many, including Laura, her own schizophrenic aunt or perhaps cousin – Iris is not entirely sure which – who has a history of setting senior citizens on fire because they are of “no use” and is forgiven even for bopping Iris on the head with a vase.

Iris is both bane and terror to others among them her own pregnant 16 – year – old daughter, Brenda. Iris threatens and cajoles Brenda into undergoing an abortion at the hands of the slovenly Big Irene, with horrific results. At the end, Iris (who never entirely forfeits our sympathy) is rooming to and stroking her socially acceptable grandson by her elder daughter. An unforgettable minor character is dotty old Mrs. Harrison, whose spouse George Harrison, takes up with the ancient hooker Blonde Dinah.

Brenda was five months pregnant and Ted told Iris King that he thought that she was hoping the operation might bring a miscarriage or she, perhaps, thought of automatic abortion. They'd lived in a series of boarding houses and some of them were brothels and some were not much better than brothels.

The first baby, a boy, was born dead. There'd been a mix-up over her dates all the way through – a premature baby.

Iris went out to work first at the bakery and then on the home help. She was not worried about the money, but she hated rows, the violence, the way of the children went quiet whenever their father walked in a room with much drinks. She cared about him. One day he

had brought two strangers to the home and sent them upstairs to Brenda. She was too frightened to cry. Iris carried her to the big bed for cuddle. She never willingly had sex with him again. She had lost Ted, she didn't think she'd married again. Her name was on the 'rent' book.

When Iris' children were small. She adored them. As they grew older things changed. Iris would have given her teenage daughters anything, but they were separate people now. There was a conflict in her mind.

Iris mothered half the street. Kelly Brown, safe children, Lisa Goddard's little lads – they all knew and loved their Iris. She valued her reputation in the street. She knew she was respected and her family was respected. Her reputation mattered more to her than anything else. It was the measure of distance from Wharfe Street. It was this that Brenda threatened to destroy.

She scolded Brenda - 'five minutes pleasure and a life time of misery.' 'No periods, morning sickness and she knew she'd been with that lad and she still turned round and said she didn't know she was pregnant.' Iris had been trying to warn Brenda about difficulties in future, after delivery – e.g. working, economical problem, bringing up bairn etc. But Brenda, due to motherly love and natural instinct gave birth to a child. But the worst was still to come. Iris took the child and wrapped him in newspaper and laid him in the basket. Then she slipped out of the house and down the street to the row of derelict houses at the end. She began digging a grave in the rubble she hardly thought at

all of what she was doing. That was her own flesh and Blood. Then she returned.

She banished the image in her rare moments of silence and solitude, returned to haunt her and turned to the living child of Sheila, who was socially accepted. Everything is for prestige and reputation. Pat Barker gives us much information about things happening in real life, through her dominant character with variety.

'Blonde Dinah,' a central character of sixth chapter was waiting for some man or other to walk into trap, sitting in the pubs all along the High Street. She never gave up. She was about sixty, living in the Union Street, behind the Bluebell George, a customer; a fancy man thought that there were two types of women the decent one and the rest. He felt they should look different; if every sag, every wrinkle of their used bodies proclaimed that they were one flesh? There was even a dark line down her belly, stretching from novel to groin. At some stage she must have borne a child. Though he had never heard of her having any family.

He spend his boyhood thinking about naked women, wondering what 'it' was like but when he finally got it, he didn't really see 'it'. There is nothing but a description, narration of sexual intercourse in this chapter, that's all.

'Alice Bell' is the last chapter of Union Street. Alice Bell near octogenarian who drags for herself from home one wintry day to avoid the humiliation of the social welfare system and die in a peace.

She is a strange character, whenever she moved newspaper stirred and rustled all around her, the bed was full of them. She had read somewhere that newspapers were as good as blankets, and the house was cold. Beside her bed, was a black hand bag with money inside was saved for her social security. When she was alone, she began to count them. How eccentric she was! The horror of the final rejection had stayed with her all her life. The death grant would not bury her. Inflation had made her small Insurance policy useless. There had to be a proper funeral, paid for out of her own money. Her self-respect, her dignity as a human being, required it. And so she had to save and starve.

Her second husband had been self-employed and too mean to pay a stamp. Every six months she received a visit from the social security people. The humiliation of these visits only strengthened her determination to preserve her independence at all costs. Union Street, for Mrs. Bell, was down. At first she hated it, the house was dark and drab and needed so many repairs. The descent to Union Street was bitter. Her nerves were very bad that first winter in the street. She avoided the other women as much as she could. There was an odd, uneasy, waking expressions on their faces she was ashamed of her poverty and of the changes that sickness and pain had wrought in her appearance. Her health got worse – obviously, due to the age. Through Iris, Alice was bonded into the street in a way she had never been before.

To younger women particularly Iris she was almost a mother and to the older women like Mrs. Harrison, she was a friend they could only rely upon not to gossip behind their backs. But there was a certain amount of jealousy. In January, the women of Union Street, had to cope with the problem of keeping themselves and their families warm. Mrs. Bell had a final look at the deaths. It was cold. There was no fire, no cold at all. Actually she was unable to move. She dragged herself towards the wall, her heels scrabbling on the ice, until she reached a place where the ground was clear and she could stand upright again. We can't rely on our neighbour for everything. They suggested a convalescent home but she refused. Her right side was weak, paralysed. Something was happening to her, very strange. She knew that it was ending. She returned in spirit to her first beginnings. To her first home. Above all, as life ebbed, she returned to her mother.

She lost three out of the first four kids in an epidemic. She reminded of her Dad, who was the only one made anything for her, but her mother, she judged her very harshly. She was a harsh woman with eighteen kids.

Alice had extraordinary dreams physically she deteriorated. The worst thing, that sometimes she lost control of her bowels. She wanted to die in her own home. They were taking it away from her. The dirt and disorder, the signs of malnutrition and neglect which to them were reasons for putting her away. She wanted to die with dignity.

She remembered at the end her mother called for her 'Alice, Alice'. She began pulling out cloths. Where was she going ? Finally, before she left, she got her black hand bag from under the pillows. She was too weak to walk. She, who had lived all her life by will power alone, had ended by setting it aside, to wait passively, to wait in darkness.

There was silence and were only the birds, soaring, swooping, gliding, moving in a never – ending spiral about the withered and unwithering tree, in the end. Every thing was ended. Pat Barker's power of writing more and more effective with heart – breathing emotions is very noteworthy. We burst into tears many a time, don't we? There are many questions, she makes us to think over it.

Pat Barker's pungent, raunchy North country dialogue and her exact use at obscure words and neologisms, like a man's cheeks juddering while he sleeps, or the scrumpling of a newspaper for a fire, or an old women's musculent eyes, alternate with passages of fine understated wit, e.g. this paragraph on the late John Scaife's mother in law:

The old lady's conviction that her son-in-law had enjoyed excellent health, though a little--shaken by his death, was by no means overcome.

All in all, Pat Barker gives the sense of a writer who has enormous power that she has scarcely had to tap to write a first – rate first novel.

Notes and references :

1. Ram Ahuja, Crime Against Women, Rawat Publications, 1987, p. 2
2. D. P. Girling(ed.), Everyman's Encyclopaedia, special ed. Vol. 9, 1978, p. 223
3. Pat Barker, Union Street, Virago Publications, 1982, p. 17
4. Pat Barker, Union Street, Virago Publications, 1982, p. 24
5. Pat Barker, Union Street, Virago Publications, 1982, p. 35
6. Ram Ahuja, Crime Against Women, Rawat Publications, 1987, p. 5
7. Ram Ahuja, Crime Against Women, Rawat Publications, 1987, p. 62
8. Luckenbill and Sanders, Criminal Violence in Sajarin and Montanino (eds.) Deviants: Voluntary Actors in a Hostile World, Morristown N.J, General Learning press, 1977
9. R. Hofstadter, Reflections of violence in U.S. in Hofstadter and Wallace (eds.), American Violence A Documentary History, (New York: Random House, 1970).
10. A.H. Buss, The Psychology of Aggression, New York : John Wiley, 1961.
11. Oscar Lewis, see Finkelhor, et. al, The Dark Side of Families, Calit Sage Publications, 1983.
12. Meenakshi Sharma, Women's Life Styles and Problems, Sheel Write Well (p) Ltd. 1998, p. 97.