

Tribhuvan University

Intra Gender and Inter Gender Discrimination in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

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## Declaration

This thesis entitled "Intra Gender and Inter Gender Discrimination in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*" submitted to the Department of English, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus is conducted by myself. I here by declare that it is complexly under my authorship.

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**Letter of Recommendation**

Ms. Sarojini Manandhar has prepared this thesis entitled "Intra Gender and Inter Gender Discrimination in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*" under my supervision. I, therefore, recommend it to be submitted for viva voce.

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## Abstract

This research work aims to depict the inter gender discrimination in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. In this novel, Atwood presents an increasingly common concept of patriarchy in which a woman is constrained by tradition to be dependent on men, crippled to realize her own strength. She presents her women struggling side by side because the patriarchal assumption makes them suffer a lot. Almost all the women in the novel go through extreme suffering and exploitation from psychological/social to physical violence. Behind the suffering of these women patriarchal gender discrimination plays major roles. At the end of the novel, Atwood has given them a gesture of defiance against patriarchy. Her women have been portrayed as intelligent, questioning women who are not contented with the injustice against them. So, Atwood's women raise the question of their way of life consolidated by patriarchy, and look it not only as the site of their oppression at home and in society but also make it a field of battle to vanquish their oppressors. In this sense, *The Handmaid's Tale* belongs to a feminist writing which depicts the suffering due to the gender discrimination as well as gives the sense of awareness against this discrimination.

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## Chapter I: Introduction to Gender and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

### Gender and Feminism

Gender refers to individual's social and legal status as girls and boys or women and men. Similarly, gender identity means how one feels about and express his/her gender category. However, culture determines gender roles and what is masculine and feminine. Gender includes a complex mix of beliefs, behaviors, and characteristics. How does a person act, talk, and behave like a woman or man determines his/her feminine or masculine characteristics. Keeping these issues into the consideration, contemporary feminist thinker have focused on the gender construction, sexuality and body power to deal with the new dimension of female identity, gender roles and sexuality. Likewise, radical feminist views the patriarchy as a major institution that exploits, suppresses, marginalizes women by providing submissive gender roles for female. They argue that the basic differences between men and women regarding behaviour and attribute are biologically determined and women deserve superior qualities. Patriarchal gender roles are destructive and to liberate women from the destructive patriarchal values, radical feminist tries to challenge the conventional gender roles by or through revision of the feminine stereotypes.

Lios Tyson has of the opinion regarding the gender roles of both male and female that the "patriarchal gender roles are destructive either they are feminine or masculine gender roles" (86). These patriarchal gender roles badly affect both men and women equally. For instance, these roles dictate men to be independent, rational and strong; women are hoped to be emotional, dependent and weak. If male or female violates their prescribed roles either he/she is "punished or pressured to follow it" (86). Moreover, "male are not permitted to fail at any aspect of life that implies the failure in one's manhood"(86).

In the same way male should be economically independent because male is considered as provider. the patriarchal gender roles in the same way, expect to be more emotional, loving,

sentimental, and submissive. If women play these roles honestly then they are considered as good girls. If they violate they are regarded as monsters. It is clear that the traditional gender roles have been leading women to the suppression by limiting their roles within a domestic space. Thus, various feminist thinkers have focused on the dismantling of the blur of the traditional gender roles of patriarchal society that is why it is relevant to take the reference from construction and subversion of gender roles.

The concept of gender roles and identity is linked with the emancipation of women from the suppression of patriarchy. Most of the radical feminists argue that women should create new gender identity dismantling the previous one in order to wrestle against patriarchy. Hartsock regards this creation of new gender identity with new gender roles as a politics that should be played by women. Likewise, Judith Butler argues that feminists should think beyond the strictures of identity politics. According to Butler, feminists should be wary of the idea that politics needs to be based on a fixed idea of women's nature and interests. For her, women should create new gender identity. She argues that:

The premature insistence on a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women, inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept the category. These domains of exclusion reveal the coercive and regulatory consequences of that construction, even when the construction has been elaborated for emancipatory purposes. Indeed, the fragmentation within feminism and the paradoxical opposition to feminism from "women" whom feminism claims to represent suggest the necessary limits of identity politics. (4)

Butler discerns at least two problems in the attempt to ground politics in an essential, naturalized female identity. She argues that the assertion of the category 'woman' as the

ground for political action excludes, marginalizes and inevitably misrepresents those who do not recognize themselves within the terms of that identity. For Butler the appeal to identity both overlooks the differences in power and resources between, for example, third world and Western women, and tends to make these differences a source of conflict rather than a source of strength.

She claims, moreover, that "a feminist identity politics that appeals to a fixed 'feminist subject,' 'presumes, fixes and constrains the very 'subjects' that it hopes to represent and liberate" (148). Thus, Butler sees new possibilities for feminist political practice, possibilities that are precluded by positions that take identity to be fixed or foundational. In this sense, it is clear that traditional gender roles have led to the suppression of women under patriarchy.

Thus, gender refers to the socio-cultural definition of men and women, the way society distinguishes men and women and assigns them social roles. It is used as an analytical tool to understand social realities with regard to women and men. Gender trauma is the part of psychological trauma in a sense that psychological trauma refers to extreme stress that overwhelms such as violence, hate, crimes, sexual abuse and other events. Likewise, in gender trauma there is also sexual violence, different types of crimes which are done by men over the women. Basically in patriarchal society there must be affected the women.

Due to the gender discrimination the violence against women happens within her home. They have to go with domestic violence even by nearest one like her husband. Domestic violence against woman under patriarchy is basic issue to deal with the idea that woman's body has become the site of violence in patriarchal society as well as a

means of control. The violence upon the female body includes the control, exploitation and subordinating female body. It is particularly existed in Third World and Islamic countries where female body becomes the site of violence and exploitation by patriarchy. In this connection, Ketu H. Katrak writes, "A politics of the female body includes the constructions and controls of female sexuality, its acceptable and censored expressions, its location socio-culturally' (9).

Likewise, Gender discrimination, different hierarchical codes and conducts and different gender roles designed by patriarchal assumptions for males and females are some of the factors of patriarchal society that subordinates, exploits and tortures women. Even her family, relatives and nearest one's psychology too is shaped by similar patriarchal ideology. That is why, woman finds the family as the source of inspiration and trust but the brutal domination and violence may start from here too. In this connection Deepti Misri writes:

Feminist historians of the Partition have observed that in addition to the staggering range of sexual brutalities women suffered from rioting mobs, another prevalent form of Violence against women had long remained acknowledge they although highly visible in the powerful cultural memory of the partition the preemptive sacrifice of women by their families in order to save family and community honor. (2)

The domestic violence against women is the result of assumptions of patriarchal society. Women are obligated to find the daily compassion for family but she should suffer the most in return. Behind the domestic violence as well as the gender discrimination, the body's politics of patriarchal assumptions could not be neglected. By violence, sexual harassment, rape or tortures like these patriarchy directly exploits women. On the other

hand, regarding sexuality it questions upon the chastity or purity of women unlike to the men.

Gender discriminating patriarchal society basically exploits, oppresses, and victimizes women by applying patriarchal power directly upon the female body. The physical torture is applied on woman's body in order suppress her in such society. The direct oppression on female body is obvious in such societies since both the community and domestic violence against women are the result of gender discriminatory perception of patriarchal society. Regarding domestic violence as the common phenomenon of patriarchal society Khan says, "Domestic violence is a common social ill that destroys thousands of women's lives worldwide" (20).

Oppression of the women is due to their being within a confined domestic space. For example, in 1960, Simone de Beauvoir wrote her seminal history of the oppression of women's sexuality by men, *The Second Sex*, and, in the process, defined a radically different, but equally essentialist, set of ideal women's gender roles, "The emancipated woman... refuses to confine herself to her role as female, because she will not accept mutilation; woman is a complete individual, equal to the male, only if she too is a human being with her [liberated] sexuality" (de Beauvoir 682).

Though de Beauvoir does not reject heterosexuality outright, true femininity, true womanhood, necessarily involves a liberated sexuality, a sexuality hitherto "mutilated" in the "age long sex-limitation by men" (de Beauvoir 694), a sexuality hitherto constrained to the institution of heterosexual marriage. Only when this sexuality is liberated-unshackled from the oppressive conservative institutions regulating it-does a woman realize true womanhood. In this, de Beauvoir seeks to liberate women from the largely

conservative essentialist gender roles of pre-1960. But while her roles radically oppose any previous, they remain essentialist, asserting liberated sexuality as natural and a pseudo or incomplete status on any woman remaining, by choice or necessity, in a non-liberated sexual relationship. Any women who choose to remain in monogamous, heterosexual marriages are slaves and enablers of the patriarchal institutions that have repressed women for thousands of years.

### **A Brief Summary and Discussion of *The Handmaid's Tale***

Offred is the major character in *The Handmaid's Tale*. She lives in a dystopian world where a theocracy has taken the place of the United States government, and women have lost all of their rights. Offred has been forced to become a Handmaid, but dreams of escape. In the end, it is unclear if she is rescued or arrested.

There are lots of feminist issues that could be discussed in the novel. First of all, Offred becomes a 'walking womb' for the theocracy, which uses Handmaids like her to breed new white children. Most women have become sterile from pollution and sexually transmitted diseases due these practices. It is one of the forms of exploitation of female body under patriarchy. Thus, Offred has failed to get pregnant twice and will soon become one of the Unwomen who are forced to clean up toxic waste until they die of exposure. Similarly, Offred, whose name literally means 'Of-Fred,' the man whose baby she is supposed to conceive. He is lured into different illicit affairs though is supposed to only have sexual intercourse with Offred in a controlled ceremony. It is a cheating for innocent woman like Offred. Serena Joy is wife of Of-Fred who even arranges for Offred to have sex with Nick, her chauffeur, to increase the likelihood of a pregnancy.

It is not directly exposed in the novel. However, Nick supposedly arranges for Offred's escape to Canada. When she's taken from her master's house, it is unclear if she is being arrested or rescued, whether Nick was really a member of a resistance movement, or a government employee posing as such. Atwood never clears up this ambiguity. Anyway the novel brings various issues related with discriminating gender roles and women's imprisonment as well as their efforts to escape from it in the novel.

The novel was written in relation to several American gender-essentialist political movements between the 1960s and 80s. Around 1960, first-wave feminism birthed second-wave. Whereas first-wave feminism addressed primarily women's suffrage, labor laws, and women's place in the workplace and post-war society, second-wave, among other issues, focused mainly on women's sexuality, family, and reproductive rights. While the various feminisms within the second wave ostensibly resisted the essentialist gender roles of the post-war period, many espoused liberated roles problematic for their own essentialism.

For Atwood, who has been a politically active advocate of human rights since the early 1960s, Cultural Feminism lacked an overt political focus or agenda. This sub-group was concerned instead with recovering cultural and artistic expressions and traditions that were uniquely female. Cultural Feminists sought to move away from representing male-dominated institutions and values in favor of elevating women's experiences and values. Professor Warren Hedges believes their central dilemma was "how to create a 'gynocentric' culture without drawing on a notion of 'universal' sisterhood that may exclude some women" (1). This gynocentric culture is predicated on the assumption that women are inherently kinder and gentler than men. Atwood criticizes

this assumption in *The Handmaid's Tale*, where we see a woman's culture maintained through women's cruelty towards one another.

Atwood's women raise the question of their way of life consolidated by patriarchy, and look at it not only as the site of their oppression at home and in society but also make it a field of battle to vanquish their oppressors. Sudden dramatic change on the mentality of the protagonist turns the mode of the story. Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* critiques the undercurrents and fallout of welcoming western concept of liberal thought and modernity. Most of the female characters in *The Handmaid's Tale* are deviated from their cultural root and individual identity. They feel that the temptation to follow the westernized thought has distorted the taste and attitude of females.

The main character Offred transcribes the account of one woman's posting in the imaginative republic called Gilead. A society based around Biblical philosophies as a way to validate inhumane state practices. In a society of declining birth rates, fertile women are chosen to become Handmaids, walking incubators, whose role in life is to reproduce for barren wives of commanders. Older women, gay men, and barren Handmaids are sent to the colonies to clean toxic waste. Fear is power. Fear is ever-present in Gilead; it is implemented through violence and force. Atwood shows Gilead as an extremist state with strong religious connotations. We see the outcome of the reversal of women's rights and a totalitarian government which is based on reproduction. Not only is the government oppressive, but we see the female roles support and enable the oppression of other female characters. *Handmaid's Tale*. This is the story of unfortunate Handmaids under the new social order who have only one purpose: to breed. In Gilead, where women are prohibited from holding jobs, reading and forming friendships.

Cultural environment of America categorically rejects the sovereignty and the unique supremacy of western ideals like universal human rights and democracy, modern secularism, political liberalism, gender equality and individual freedom to females. *The Handmaid's Tale* is written in the grey zone. The work situated in American society where native Canadian is lost in emptiness and hollow of modern scientific development. She is deviated and hanged between several problems. *The Handmaid's Tale* reflects the political and social unrest in America. *The Handmaid's Tale* is preventative of people's history, a bottom-up rather than top-down view of a country in flux. Atwood's work moves back and forth in time and focusing on small events and everyday people, Atwood breathes life into history by describing the effects of larger-than-life events on the average citizen.

The thesis explores females who have several dreams regarding education, development and their expansion in the future life and they have strong gut to fulfill these dreams even adapting the new cultural behaviors, costumes and rules of the urban city. However, it is a tragedy that the golden dreams their hardships to fulfill them do not bring any positive outcomes in the life of the poor females in Western world. The research has been articulated the condition of middle class women tend to be used only as a tool in the commodity culture and the source of amusement of the higher class males of the modern society. But failing of both and have separated life without any hope and expectation at the end of the life of main character.

In *The Handmaid's Tale* western thoughts like democracy, enlightenment rationality, universal human rights, and gender equality are depicted as enfeebled and powerless to transform the position of females in the society. These crucial components

of cosmopolitan modernity have rather put the seed of socio-cultural troubles in society. American youth people believe in the pragmatic and modernizing influence of western thought. But they are compelled to face the harmful consequences. They are tired of social instability. If the utilization of western thoughts creates conflict, despair and disillusionment on the part of females how can the nonwestern programs of transforming traditional society become successful?

### **Reviews of Literature**

Atwood is the prominent author of the contemporary Canada. Atwood is largely considered as the novelist with vigorous longing for politico-cultural realism. She has criticized several social and ideological bigotries. She always stands for the progressive transformation of society. Angela Carter makes the following remarks about the novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* on its Historical reality and representation of Modern American society and realistic situation of the Females of nineteenth century in city as:

*The Handmaid's Tale* personalizes the political and social changes in his country over the past few decades in this novel unlike most historical narratives from USA, which are pegged to political events? *The Handmaid's Tale* is a representative of people's history, a bottom-up rather than top-down view of a country in flux. By moving back and forth in time and focusing on small events and everyday people, Atwood creates life into history by describing the effects of larger-than-life events on the average citizen. (12)

Thematically, Carter opines about the political and social issues are merged and modified in the novel. In a sense, *The Handmaid's Tale* Atwood tends to reflect upon the history of

modern Canada. Modern Canada has come a long way since the last few decades. Yet it still has to face countless number of challenges and troubles. Atwood is recognized as one of the best authors who can contemplation upon history that gives profound insight to those who want to alter the course of history of modern Canada and the condition of the modern female youth.

Howard Goldblatt is another critic of Atwood who analyzes Atwood's novel on the basis of the sensual imageries for the depiction of modern society and its open expression. He is critically aware of Margret Atwood's ability to have her own aura of writing novel and he criticizes about her limitations as a novelist. He enumerates how Atwood has injected her own anecdotal experience to portrayal of society. Goldblatt argues thus:

Munro, Rather than exploring the darker undercurrents of society or the depths of the characters, she seems to make it her goal to stay on the surface. Much of the energy of the novel is spent on long and sensuous descriptions of the effect and impact of ultra modernity. There are too many episodes when the reader has to witness this or that character urinating, and to endure long descriptions of the urine. Whether Atwood has been successful in portraying the characters in their organic form or not, it is not clear. But one thing is undoubtedly clear that daily activities are described in a vivid and vigorous way. The real charm of Margret Atwood's literary aura is that she is skillful in describing the common incidents of life. (27)

Symbolically, Goldblatt appreciates upon Atwood's selection of real character from the society and her vivid depiction to carry out the theme of the novel as a representation of the contemporary society of Canada and America.

Joanne Arnott is a celebrated critic and author who looks Margret Atwood's literary representation from western eyes. She criticizes the dystopian effect of the book in reference to another American Modern novelist Anthony Burgess as:

*The Handmaid's Tale* is hardly a work of fiction. This is essentially a dystopian text. It seems like a novel but is a complete story. In contrast to Anthony Burgess's often expensive novel it describes events spanning four decades from 1969 to 2009. While amounting to a memoir, Burges is selective in what he presents. (37)

By writing this novel in the form of dystopia, Atwood tries to attack the transitional politics of Canadian society. The constantly shifting scenario of Canada has affected the common pattern of Canadian youth. The modernization of Canada is both subversive and uplifting as well. Both the rosy and seamy side of modernizing Canada is brought to the focal point. Primarily, Atwood's fiction is most often set in her native country Southwestern Ontario. Her Story explores human complexities in an uncomplicated style. *The Handmaid's Tale* is representational story about the middle class women of Nineteenth Century their positive vision regarding the capitalistic modern society and their struggles getting a successful life but unfortunately the result as an antithesis of their prediction in the consumer culture. Basically, Offred is doomed to sacrifice the real taste of life owing to hr subordinate condition. She is helpless, alienated and suffered by the

blow of western culture, the other two critics Murphy and Georgeann make criticism on the Text by Atwood *The Handmaid's Tale* as:

*The Handmaid's Tale* (1978- published in Canada as *Who Do You Think You Are?*) begins and ends back in Ontario, following the progress of the protagonist Offred, whose life parallels Atwoode's in many ways.

Atwoode's plots since 1978 often set near her childhood home, regularly concern strategies of coping and acceptance: in her own words, "I write about where I am in Life." (7)

In this way, Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* has been criticized from different perspectives from different critics. Some have analyzed on the basis of its theme and its depiction of the realistic cultural scenario of the contemporary society, and some have analyzed its technical and metaphorical part. Although all these critics have examined the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* from possible various perspectives, none of them concentrated upon inter gender and intra gender discrimination. Thus, this research observes the novel through the perspective of gender roles and its link with contemporary gender status of female characters.

This research is divided into three chapters. The first chapter which is the introductory section of the research is entitled as Atwood and her Concern with Liberal feminism in *The Handmaid's Tale*, second chapter analyzes the text with the help of the theory cultural feminism and the last chapter concludes the entire research.

## Chapter II: Gender Identity and Feminism

### Gender

Gender is a distinction of biological and/or physiological characteristics typically associated with either males or females of a species in general. In the study of humans, socio-political issues arise in classifying whether a sex difference results from the biology of gender. This research focuses on quantitative differences which are based on a gradient and involve different averages. For example, men are taller than women on average, but an individual woman may be taller than an individual man. The existence of a gender difference does not necessarily identify whether the trait is due to nature or environment. Some traits are obviously innate (for example, reproductive organs), others obviously environmental (for example, given names), while for others the relationship is either multi-cause or unknown. Daniel Dennet says "modern humans have inherited natural traits that were adaptive in a prehistoric environment; including traits that had different advantages for males versus females" (25).

Evolutionary theory of sex considers gender differences as a result of distinct specialization of the sexes, performing relationship with preceding generations and with the environment. Theory explains ethological and psychological sexual dimorphism, more efficient 'education' or 'training' of females during the course of ontogenetic adaptation as well as greater conformism of females well known to psychologists. Gender roles theory and Alice Eagly claims that "boys and girls learn the appropriate behavior and attitudes from the family and overall culture they grow up with, and so non-physical gender differences are a product of socialization" (110). These are not all mutually exclusive theories. It is possible that gender differences are partially innate but are then

reinforced and exaggerated by the environment. Some feminists see gender differences as caused by patriarchy or discrimination, although difference feminism argues for an acceptance of gender differences. Conservative masculinists tend to see gender differences as inherent in human nature, while liberal masculinists see gender differences as caused by matriarchy or discrimination. Indian society being the patriarchal society, the gender discrimination is determined by traditional patriarchal ideology. This research focuses on the women's imprisonment within the home based on traditional gender roles in *The Handmaid's Tale*. This research basically focuses on the traditional and modern gender roles of women in Indian society and their confinement and freedom from traditional gender roles.

Issue of gender identity is primary concern in the novel since the novel is based on traditional and transiting Indian society. Gender identity shapes the different gender roles in Indian society. Gender identity is a person's own sense of identification as male or female. The term is intended to distinguish this psychological association, from physiological and sociological aspects of gender. Gender identity is how one personally identifies is or her gender regardless of his or her sex characteristics. It does not have to be either man or woman, but can be a combination of feminine, masculine and androgynous feelings. However, it is now thought that the innate gender identity, although powerfully influenced by the sex of the genitalia and the gender of rearing, is not determined by these factors. There is evidence that sex differentiation of the brain may be inconsistent with other sex characteristics, resulting in individuals dressing and/or behaving in a way which is perceived by others as being outside cultural gender norms; these gender expressions may be described as gender variant. Gender Identity does not

refer to the placing of a person into one of the categories male or female; but without including the concept of interaction with society at large the term has no meaning. We are social beings. Masculinists cite one-sided legislation, selective enforcement, and neglected civil rights as examples of discrimination against men and boys.

### **Gender Roles of Women**

It is a preconceived idea that attributes certain characteristics (in general) to all the members of class or set. The term is often used with a negative connotation when referring to an oversimplified, exaggerated, or demeaning assumption that a particular individual possesses the characteristics associated with the class due to his or her membership in it. Stereotypes can be used to deny individuals respect or legitimacy based on their membership in that group.

Stereotypes often form the basis of prejudice and are usually employed to explain real or imaginary differences due to race, gender, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic class, disability, occupation, etc. A stereotype can be a conventional and oversimplified conception, opinion, or image based on the belief that there are attitudes, appearances, or behaviors shared by all members of a group. Stereotypes are forms of social consensus rather than individual judgments. Stereotypes are sometimes formed by a previous illusory correlation, a false association between two variables that are loosely correlated if correlated at all. Stereotypes may be occasionally positive.

It specifically describes men and boys that are personal and human, unlike male which can also be used to describe animals, or masculine which can also be used to describe noun classes. When masculine is used to describe men, it can have degrees of comparison more masculine, most masculine. The opposite can be expressed by terms

such as unmanly, epicene or effeminate. A typical near-synonym of masculinity is virility and the usual complement is femininity.

Traditional gender role cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive while they caste women as emotional (m irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive. These gender roles have simply been used to show men's supremacy over women. From these so-called gender roles, women have been excluded from equal access to leadership and decision-making positions (in the family, as well as in politics, academia, and the corporate world). Paying men higher wages (salary) than women for doing the same jobs and convincing women that they are not fit for careers in such areas as "mathematics and engineering male dominated society puts women in low position" (85) as Tyson mentions. Low position long occupied by women in patriarchal society has been culturally produced. For example, it is patriarchal assumption that more women rather than men suffer from hysteria as it is socially defined as a woman's problem. But hysterical behavior in men won't be diagnosed as such. Women are really oppressed by the traditional gender roles which undermines her self-confidence and assertiveness. Even in literature, female characters are stereotyped either as "good girls" (gentle, submissive, virginal, angelic) or 'bad girls' (violent, aggressive, defiled, monstrous etc).

Patriarchal ideology suggests that there are only two identities a woman can have. If she accepts her traditional gender roles, she is a 'good girl,, if she doesn't she is a 'bad girl.' These two roles also refer to as 'Madonna', and 'whore' (prostitute) or 'angel' and 'bitch'. Ironically, men sleep with 'bad girls', but they don't marry them. 'Bad girls' are discarded because they don't deserve better. They are not good enough to bear a man's name or his legitimate children. The 'good girls' on the other hand, is rewarded for her

submissive behavior in the society. The repressive attitude towards women's sexuality is still visible in our language today. For example, we use negative word 'slut' to describe a woman who sleeps with a number of men while we use the positive word 'stud' to describe a man who sleeps with a number of women. Same is the case in the world of fashion too. Hence, traditional gender roles have made women 'subordinate,' 'inferior,' 'marginalized' and 'other' in various social platforms.

### **Gender Discrimination**

It refers to the prejudicial treatment of an individual based on biological sex. It is a gender stereotype model, also referred to as sexism or sexual discrimination. Such practices have shown favoritism to a particular child and many cases it has resulted to the negligence or disregard to the female sex. Preferences of male child, opportunities and choices for the male child are some of the examples of gender discrimination

Gender equality means the same status, rights and responsibilities for women and men. It means equal participation of men and women in all fields without discrimination on the basis of sex. Gender equality approach looks at equal representation of men and women in the work place and other areas of concern.

Similarly, liberation means individual freedom from exploitation or slavery. This concept of liberation came out of the feeling of domination and oppression existing in the society due its hierarchical system, - class, caste, races and sex etc. The socialist thinker in their theories of class struggle explains that the dominant group dominates the oppressed group and exploits them. They regard that these oppressed group must be liberated for an egalitarian\ socialist society. In the feminist theory liberation means freedom from male domination. Women's Liberation Movement, during the late 1960s

were targeted towards elimination of all forms of domination, some of them were the nature of family and private property.

Emancipation means freedom from political, legal and moral restraint. Women's emancipation means freedom from the restrictions from the community or society and obtaining all the rights and opportunities with respect to men. Most of the critical thinkers advocate for emancipation by arousing critical consciousness. Women's consciousness raising group in Women's Liberation Movement deemed for women's emancipation by freeing them from all bondage\obligations even from the family.

The most predictable form of violence experienced by women as women, is when the women of one community are sexually assaulted by the men of the other in an overt assertion of their identity and a simultaneous humiliation of other by 'dishonoring' their women. In this respect "the rape and molestation of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim women before and after partition probably followed the familiar pattern of sexual violence and of attack, retaliation and reprisal" (Menon and Bhasin 41).

The violence against women during partition cannot be separated from the violent hostility that erupted between Hindus and Muslims at that time. The repertoire of violence on all sides included profaning everything that was held to be of sacred and symbolic value to the other-from pig and cow slain in front of mosques and temples to the circumcision of non-Muslim men, and the forced consumption of beef by Hindus-and this extended to sexually violating their women. The preoccupation with woman's sexuality formed part of the contract of war between the three communities, Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims.

Women's bodies were targeted as the battlefield during the partition of India and

its rampant violence. As a matter of fact, in a world raven by ethnic and communal conflicts in which women are not only the victims but also the weapons of war. "From Bangladesh to the Balkans, from Cambodia to Colombia, Peru to Liberia, Rwanda to Somalia and Uganda, the ravaged bodies of women has become 'envelope to carry the message of conquest from one group of men to another" (Menon and Bhasin 75).

As Bapsin Sidhawa observes elsewhere, women are the "living objects on whose soft bodies' victors and losers alike vent their wrath enact fantastic vendettas, celebrate victories" (380). During the partition violence both losers and victors regarded female's soft body as an object of wrath. In the male-dominated society like India, if a raped woman speaks of her shame could accept the fact that she can no longer occupy any available and acceptable social space. A woman raped can no longer belong to any of the known categories of virgin, wife or widow and are thus effectively erased from the social register. During the partition violence hundreds and thousands of women had undergone same experience. Thus was the day of partition of India especially for the woman.

Similarly, one might agree that feminists ought to work to end all forms of oppression - oppression is unjust and feminists, like everyone else, have a moral obligation to fight injustice - without maintaining that it is the mission of feminism to end all oppression. One might even believe that in order to accomplish feminism's goals it is necessary to combat racism and economic exploitation, but also think that there is a narrower set of specifically feminist objectives. In other words, opposing oppression in its many forms may be instrumental to, even a necessary means to, feminism, but not intrinsic to it. For example, bell hooks argues:

Feminism, as liberation struggle, must exist apart from and as a part of the

larger struggle to eradicate domination in all its forms. We must understand that patriarchal domination shares an ideological foundation with racism and other forms of group oppression, and that there is no hope that it can be eradicated while these systems remain intact. This knowledge should consistently inform the direction of feminist theory and practice. (22)

On hooks' account, the defining characteristic that distinguishes feminism from other liberation struggles is its concern with sexism:

Unlike many feminist comrades, I believe women and men must share a common understanding - a basic knowledge of what feminism is - if it is ever to be a powerful mass-based political movement. In *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*, I suggest that defining feminism broadly as "a movement to end sexism and sexist oppression" would enable us to have a common political goal . . . Sharing a common goal does not imply that women and men will not have radically divergent perspectives on how that goal might be reached. (hooks, 23)

Hooks' approach depends on the claim that sexism is a particular form of oppression that can be distinguished from other forms, e.g., racism and homophobia, even though it is currently (and virtually always) interlocked with other forms of oppression. Feminism's objective is to end sexism, though because of its relation to other forms of oppression, this will require efforts to end other forms of oppression as well. For example, feminists who themselves remain racists will not be able to fully appreciate the broad impact of sexism on the lives of women of color. Furthermore because sexist institutions are also,

e.g., racist, classist and homophobic, dismantling sexist institutions will require that we dismantle the other forms of domination intertwined with them. Following hooks' lead, we might characterize feminism schematically (allowing the schema to be filled in differently by different accounts) as the view that women are subject to sexist oppression and that this is wrong. This move shifts the burden of our inquiry from a characterization of what feminism is to a characterization of what sexism, or sexist oppression is.

There are a variety of interpretations, feminist and otherwise, of what exactly oppression consists in, but the leading idea is that oppression consists in "an enclosing structure of forces and barriers which tends to the immobilization and reduction of a group or category of people" (Frye 10-11). Not just any 'enclosing structure' is oppressive, however, for plausibly any process of socialization will create a structure that both limits and enables all individuals who live within it. In the case of oppression, however, the 'enclosing structures' in question are part of a broader system that asymmetrically and unjustly disadvantages one group and benefits another.

Therefore, although sexism restricts the opportunities available to and so unquestionably harms both men and women (and considering some pairwise comparisons may even have a greater negative impact on a man than a woman), overall, women as a group unjustly suffer the greater harm. It is a crucial feature of contemporary accounts, however, that one cannot assume that members of the privileged group have intentionally designed or maintained the system for their benefit. The oppressive structure may be the result of an historical process whose originators are long gone, or it may be the unintended result of complex cooperative strategies gone wrong.

Leaving aside further details in the account of oppression, the question remains:

What makes a particular form of oppression sexist? If we just say that a form of oppression counts as sexist oppression if it harms women, or even primarily harms women, this is not enough to distinguish it from other forms of oppression. Virtually all forms of oppression harm women, and arguably some besides sexism harm women primarily (though not exclusively), e.g., body size oppression, age oppression. Besides, as we've noted before, sexism is not only harmful to women, but is harmful to all of us.

What makes a particular form of oppression sexist seems to be not just that it harms women, but that someone is subject to this form of oppression specifically because she is (or at least appears to be) a woman. Racial oppression harms women, but racial oppression (by itself) doesn't harm them because they are women, it harms them because they are (or appear to be) members of a particular race. The suggestion that sexist oppression consists in oppression to which one is subject by virtue of being or appearing to be a woman provides us at least the beginnings of an analytical tool for distinguishing subordinating structures that happen to affect some or even all women from those that are more specifically sexist. But problems and unclarities remain.

First, it is necessary to explicate further what it means to be oppressed because you are a woman. It is the idea that there is a particular form of oppression that is specific to women? Is to be oppressed "as a woman" to be oppressed in a particular way? Or can we be pluralists about what sexist oppression consists in without fragmenting the notion beyond usefulness? Two strategies for explicating sexist oppression have proven to be problematic. The first is to maintain that there is a form of oppression common to all women. For example, one might interpret Catharine MacKinnon's work as claiming that to be oppressed as a woman is to be viewed and treated as sexually subordinate, where

this claim is grounded in the alleged universal fact of the eroticization of male dominance and female submission. Although MacKinnon allows that sexual subordination can happen in a myriad of ways, her account is monistic in its attempt to unite the different forms of sexist oppression around a single core account that makes sexual objectification the focus. Although MacKinnon's work provides a powerful resource for analyzing women's subordination, many have argued that it is too narrow, e.g., in some contexts especially in developing countries sexist oppression seems to concern more the local division of labor and economic exploitation. Although certainly sexual subordination is a factor in sexist oppression, it requires us to fabricate implausible explanations of social life to suppose that all divisions of labor that exploit women (as women) stem from the "eroticization of dominance and submission" (58). Moreover, it is not obvious that in order to make sense of sexist oppression we need to seek a single form of oppression common to all women.

Second problematic strategy has been to consider as paradigms those who are oppressed only as women, with the thought that complex cases bringing in additional forms of oppression will obscure what is distinctive of sexist oppression. Spelman writes, "This strategy would have us focus in the U.S. on White, wealthy, young, beautiful, able-bodied, heterosexual women to determine what oppression, if any, they suffer, with the hope of finding sexism in its 'purest' form, unmixed with racism or homophobia, etc." (52-54). This approach is not only flawed in its exclusion of all but the most elite women in its paradigm, but it assumes that privilege in other areas does not affect the phenomenon under consideration. As Elizabeth Spelman explains:

. . . no woman is subject to any form of oppression simply because she is a

woman; which forms of oppression she is subject to depend on what 'kind' of woman she is. In a world in which a woman might be subject to racism, classism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, if she is not so subject it is because of her race, class, religion, sexual orientation. So it can never be the case that the treatment of a woman has only to do with her gender and nothing to do with her class or race. (52-53)

Recent accounts of oppression are designed to allow that oppression takes many forms, and refuse to identify one form as more basic or fundamental than the rest. For example, Iris Young describes five "faces" of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and systematic violence (Young Ch, 2). Plausibly others should be added to the list. Sexist or racist oppression, for example, will manifest itself in different ways in different contexts, e.g., in some contexts through systematic violence, in other contexts through economic exploitation.

Acknowledging this does not go quite far enough, however, for monistic theorists such as MacKinnon could grant this much. Pluralist accounts of sexist oppression must also allow that there isn't an over-arching explanation of sexist oppression that applies to all its forms: in some cases it may be that women's oppression as women is due to the eroticization of male dominance, but in other cases it may be better explained by women's reproductive value in establishing kinship structures, or by the shifting demands of globalization within an ethnically stratified workplace. Nancy Fraser writes:

In other words, pluralists resist the temptation to 'grand social theory', 'overarching metanarratives', monocausal explanations, to allow that the explanation of sexism in a particular historical context will rely on

economic, political, legal, and cultural factors that are specific to that context which would prevent the account from being generalized to all instances of sexism (90).

It is still compatible with pluralist methods to seek out patterns in women's social positions and structural explanations within and across social contexts, but in doing so we must be highly sensitive to historical and cultural variation.

### **Cultural Feminism**

Cultural feminism is a variety of feminism which emphasizes essential differences between men and women, based on biological differences in reproductive capacity. Cultural feminism attributes to those differences distinctive and superior virtues in women. What women share, in this perspective, provides a basis for 'sisterhood,' or unity, solidarity and shared identity. The phrase 'essential differences' refers to the belief that gender differences are part of the *essence* of females or males, that the differences are not chosen but are part of the nature of woman or man. Cultural feminists differ as to whether these differences are based on biology or enculturation. About the cultural feminism Linda Alcoff mentions, "*Cultural feminism* is a term used to criticize the view that there is a 'female nature' or 'female essence' or related attempts to revalidate attributes ascribed to femaleness" (406). For Alcoff, "It is also used to describe theories that commend innate differences between women and men" (406).

Unlike radical feminism or socialist feminism, cultural feminism was not an ideology widely claimed by proponents, but was more commonly a pejorative label ascribed by its opponents. Alice Echols, a feminist historian and cultural theorist, credits Brooke Williams with applying the term "cultural feminism" in 1975 to describe the de-

politicization of radical feminism, “which led to the term being picked during the 1990s by academic feminists to describe various individuals” (Taylor, 21).

Although the term ‘cultural feminist’ is generally applied to individuals in the 1970s, similar lines of thought have been traced to earlier periods. George Ritzer mentions, “Jane Addams and Charlotte Perkins Gilman and argued that in governing the state, cooperation, caring, and nonviolence in the settlement of conflicts society seem to be what was needed from women’s virtues” (7). Likewise, Josephine Donovan argues that the nineteenth century journalist, critic and women’s rights activist, Margaret Fuller, initiated cultural feminism in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Josephine mentions, “She stressed the emotional, intuitive side of knowledge and expressed an organic worldview that is quite different from the mechanistic view of Enlightenment rationalists” (8).

However, it was Linda Alcoff’s argument in “Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: the Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory” that led to the widespread adoption of the term to describe contemporary feminists, not their historical antecedents. Alcoff claims, “cultural feminism places women in an overly determined position overdetermined by what she sees as patriarchal systems” (407). She contends, “Man has said that woman can be defined, delineated, captured, understood, explained, and diagnosed to a level of determination never accorded to man himself, who is conceived as a rational animal with free will” (410).

Alcoff makes the point that “the cultural feminist reappraisal construes woman’s passivity as her peacefulness, her sentimentality as her proclivity to nurture, her subjectiveness as her advanced self-awareness” (410). Cultural feminists argue that what they define as traditional male behaviors, including aggressiveness, competitiveness, and

domination, are harmful to society and to particular fields within society, including business and politics. Instead, the cultural feminist argues, emphasizing caring, cooperation, and egalitarianism would make a better world. Those who argue that women are biologically or inherently more kind, caring, nurturing, and cooperative, also argue then for more inclusion of women in decision-making processes in society and in particular fields within society.

Likewise, cultural feminists advocate for equal valuing of "female" occupations including parenting, respecting child care in the home, paying wages/salaries so that staying home is economically viable; respecting "female" values of care and nurturing, working to balance a culture that overvalues "male" values of aggression and undervalues "female" values of kindness and gentleness, creating rape crisis centers and women's shelters, often in cooperation with other kinds of feminists, emphasis on the shared values of women from white, African American, and other cultures, more than on the differences of women in different groups. In nutshell, cultural feminism assumes that a female sexuality that is based on an equality of power, based on mutuality rather than control, based on non-polarized roles, and refuses to recreate sexual hierarchies.

### **Feminism in the Context of *The Handmaid's Tale***

The issue of worry and disillusionment created on modern woman by modernity is extensively dealt with in this thesis. In the fictitious world of *The Handmaid's Tale*, author is raising the issues of disparity and discriminations for emphasizing for developing a harmonious society liberalizing the issues of western thoughts like political liberalism, and economics, universal democracy and universal human rights as well as gender equality In the peculiar world of Canada, the western thoughts turn out to be the

source of despair. Hence, the main criticism of Liberal Feminism is the major concern of this research. The *women's* movement, despite its obvious focus on the malaise of white middle-class suburban women. In short, Liberal Feminism ignored working-class and minority women, who, angered by further disenfranchisement, channeled their dissatisfaction into the formation of subgroups as a means to further their specific causes and agendas.

To prove this hypothesis, the researcher uses the concepts of *Flaneuse* by Janet Woolf to talk about inter gender discrimination and cultural feminism as conceptualized by Zudith Butler. The main objective of the research is to explore the subversion of patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles. *Handmaid's Tale*, the protagonist of the text left her home where she is not exploited by males only rather becomes the victim of females too. There is gender discrimination, and exploitation through out the human history.

Keeping these seriousness into the consideration, this research observes the novel through the feminist perspective. Feminist theories have been development in order to address the issues and fight back against patriarchy. Feminism is a range of social, political and cultural movements that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social rights for women. This includes seeking to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment. bell hocks writes:

Feminist movements have campaigned and continue to campaign for women's rights, including the right to vote, to hold public office, to work, to earn fair wages or equal pay, to own property, to receive education to

enter contracts, to have equal rights within marriage, and to have maternity leave. Feminists have also worked to promote bodily autonomy and integrity. The theories or movement even has goal to protect women and girls from rape, sexual harassment and domestic violence. (3)

In this sense, feminist campaigns are generally considered to be a main force behind major historical social changes for women's rights, particularly in the West, where they are near-universally credited with achieving women's suffrage, gender neutrality reproductive rights for women including access to contraceptives and abortion, and the right to enter into contracts and own property. Although feminist advocacy is, and has been, mainly focused on women's rights, some feminists, including bell hooks, argue for the inclusion of men's liberation within its aims because men are also harmed by traditional gender roles. Feminist theory, which emerged from feminist movements, aims to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women's social roles and lived experience; it has developed theories in a variety of disciplines in order to respond to issues concerning gender.

Numerous feminist movements and ideologies have developed over the years and represent different viewpoints and aims. Some forms of feminism have been criticized for taking into account only white, middle class, and educated perspectives. This criticism led to the creation of ethnically specific or multicultural forms of feminism, including black feminism and intersectional feminism. Keeping the ideas of feminist criticism at central discussion, this research observes the gender discrimination in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. The novel presents the suffering of women due to the discriminating gender roles inherent in male dominated society where oppressive

patriarchy always suppresses women making them imprisoned within the domestic space. Within the suppression of patriarchy there is even the raising voice of women against patriarchal domination by seeking the different gender roles than patriarchal tradition. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood presents an increasingly common concept of patriarchy in which a woman is constrained by tradition to be dependent on men, crippled to realize her own strength. She presents her women struggling side by side because of patriarchy but at the end, Atwood has given them a gesture of defiance against patriarchy. Her women have been portrayed as intelligent, questioning women who are not contented with the injustice against them.

### **Chapter III: Inter gender conflict in *The Handmaid's Tale***

*The Handmaid's Tale* chronicles the life of a middle class woman in modern American society after migrating from the small countryside of Canada, Ontario. The most important issues are dealt in this thesis such the cultural domination, male domination, objectified identification and the commoditized recognition of the middle class female in western modern society. The life of main character Offred and her positioning in the American society as the *flaneuse* is highly discussed and dealt. The issues of *flaneur* and *Flaneuse* are discussed as Janet Wolff discussed them as they are the paradigms of the modernity.

In the text, the society represents the all modern city and modern society and the main character Offred represents the all middle class female who are being *flaneuse*, not well recognized and well settled female returning to their native land or village. The Main character, Offred, after growing up in the little town of Hanratty, Ontario, wins a scholarship to a prestigious Canadian university. She left the village dreaming about many successes and to rise from poor to rich and become a modern woman in the urban arena. As a result at her first semester there, she finds a comfortable place to live, a part-time job, and a male admirer. But she has just treated as uncivilized and dirty which narrator describes as the retrospection of the main character Offred as:

Her shoes have left marks on the clean wet part of the floor, Emotional peak. 'I don't know what to do about her.' She looks down and sees her dirty knees (following Offred's eyes) and rubs at them viciously with her bare hands, smearing and the dirt around. 'She humiliates me,' she says,

straightening up. There it is the explanation. Humiliates me, she repeats with satisfaction. She has no respect. (17)

Here is the stereotypical representation of the working class female in the city. There is male perception to look at the female protagonist. She is a woman of the center stage in the modern metropolis. Her discrimination assumes she is whether as prostitute, housewife, mother anything anything else through the beginning of the novel. Anyway her marginalized position is reflected through the description made about her.

Protagonist Offred after migrating into a capitalistic urban society, she feels very strange with the cultural tradition which is different from the countryside, Ontario. Narrator describes Offred's unfamiliarity with city lights and inhuman behaviorism of people. She finds criminal attitude on people and happens to see a boy child in the street lying due to lack of parents and food but people do not have any concern and sympathy for him who she feels very painful and describes the reality of the modern city and makes comment as:

That was how she knew all she knew. She never saw sunlight, in those days, except on her days off. But she saw plenty else. She saw a man cut another's man's stomach with a knife. The stomach's owner just sat looking down surprised with no protest. Flo implied that was nothing, in Toronto . . . Offred saw a child die of a fit, too, its face was black as ink. Well I am scared, said Offred provokingly. There are the police anyway. (58)

Narrator narrates the compulsion of Offred to do job to enhance her education, as she is poor and cannot sustain her life in the expensive city. She respects even minor work and

started to work in Library; other young boys were playing on the ground. She used to hear the songs and music from bar and restaurants. She got a job working in the Library of the college, instead of in the cafeteria. Atwood narrates:

Dr Hensawe was a friend of Head Librarian. She worked on Saturdays afternoon. She worked in the stacks, putting books away. On the Saturday afternoons in the hall of library was nearly empty, because of games. The narrow windows were open to the leafy campus, the football field, the dry fall country. The distant songs and shouts came drifting in. (75)

In the library, while working she met a man 24 years, Patrick from British Columbia. He starts to gaze her then he follows her and proposes her for love. Offred finds as the agent of patriarchy who seems masculine in his behaviors. He forces her when proposing her for love. Offred remembers the days with Patrick that how humiliated she was feeling because of her class and her origin. For instance she remembers that as:

He did seem masculine to her because he took those chances. Only a man could be so careless and demanding. We come from two different worlds" she said to him, on another occasion. She felt like a character in a play, saying that. "My people are poor people". You would think the place I lived in was a dump. Now she was the one who was being dishonest, pretending to throw herself on his mercy, for of course she did not expect him to say, oh well, if you come from poor people and live in a dump then I will have to withdraw my offer. (78)

Patrick is a rich educated, young man from British Colombia having urban experience and strolls around the city as *Flaneurs* does. Offred feels that he is by birth rich but he is

very proud and irritating which narrator narrates the events with Patrick. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, a section narrates the feelings of Offred towards the Patrick:

It was not birth mark that concealed out his good looks, Offred thought.

There was something edgy, jumpy, and disconcerting about him. His voice would break under stress with her, it seemed he was always under stress - he knocked dishes and cups off tables, spilled drinks and bowls peanuts, like a comedian. He was not comedian; nothing could be further from his intentions. He came from British Columbia. His family was rich. (69)

Gender roles can be defined from the perspective of two spheres as Public sphere and Private sphere. During the early nineteenth century, Male was considered for going to public world but the female were kept under the male in private sphere. It is the discriminatory gender roles created by patriarchal society. Protagonist Offred too becomes a victim of this discriminatory gender role.

Offred as she faces the discrimination between lower class and rich class people, she is facing low self esteem in the city. So, firstly, when she rejects the proposal, narrator shares Patrick reaction to Offred is very furious. He treats Offred as an object and he is going to buy and charges her with bad hearing words. The narrator describes the incident as:

"Please Patrick let me not marry you" she said again with even less conviction "you are crazy" she didn't blame him for thinking so. Her voice sounded unnatural, wheedling, and silly. As soon as he opened the door she faced the fact of him, his sleepy eyes, his pajamas, she saw that what she had come to do was enormous, impossible. She would have to explain

everything to him, and of course she could not do it. She could not find any tone of voice, any expression of the face that would serve her. (93)

The public domain is completely controlled by males and women are confined within domestic space. Women are treated as inferior and treated as *flâneuse* undermining their contribution in the public space. The protagonist goes through similar experiences in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Narrator shares the memory of Offred about another female character Franny McGill in the city. Offred and McGill they were treated as the *flâneuse* in the modern city. They never get respect by the other male and bourgeois female. Offred remembers the incident of a girl, Franny McGill who is sexually assaulted by her father when he is drunk. Offred remembers the incidents when she feels humiliated and faces bullying by the males in the library. The narration goes on:

Franny McGill had been smashed against the wall, by her father drunk, when she was a baby. . . Her nose was crooked making every breath she took a long, dismal sounding snuffle. Her teeth were badly bunched together so that she could not close her mouth and never could contain her qualities of spit. She may not have been as stupid as everybody thought, but simply stunned, bewildered, by continual assault. And in spite of everything there was something hopeful about her she would follow after anybody who did not immediately attack and assault her. (28)

Offred in the Retrospection section remembers her past days when she was victimized by the male of modern city. She remembers that she was just used for the amusement of the several males. Narrator articulates the animalistic behavior of Offred's husband in the

party in front of many couples. Patrick kisses her in an insulting way hurting her which she remembers, "For crying out loud", said Patrick heartily, and he did squeeze her and kiss her, with a loud smacking noise on the neck. He always smacked when he kissed. "And his elbows always managed to dig in somewhere and hurt her. 'Enjoying you?'" (112).

Furthermore, during the party with many people, when Patrick treats Offred in a barbaric way, Offred cannot resist this as she is victimized and trapped by the modern cultural values and by the male domination. Narrators describes that "Jocelyn and Clifford had pitched out of the way for the party. Thank God it was empty of people. She went out of the back door and stood burning and shivering in the cool wet night. Her feeling were as confused as anybody's can get. She was humiliated, she was ashamed of Patrick" (111).

Women's access to urban space introduces gender biased and alternatives posed by feminist historians for rethinking the public/ private divide. They describe a modernity in which women are no longer visible, although these are important matters to address. Offred when she visits the bar and restaurants invited by her friends of the particular city of America, she finds herself always humiliated and she herself being a fool by the members. When people are drunk in the party, Clifford who is the husband of Jocelyn keeps sexual relationship with Offred. However, at the end, Offred finds that they are making fun of her. Offred realizes that no one is serious with her and feels guilty the narrator narrates the incidents of Offred as:

The people admired were inevitably poorer than she was. it seemed a bad joke on her, after being poor all her life in a place where poverty was

never anything to be proud of that now she had to feel apologetic and embarrassed about the opposite condition with someone like Jocelyn, for instance, who could say middle-class prosperity so viciously and despairingly. ( 119)

Patrick treats Offred as his personal property and wants to keep her inside the house. He visits the bar, restaurants and pub but he doesn't want Offred to come out. Even he comments upon the dress of Offred. Offred feels Patrick as her 'watchdog'.

Patrick seems imposing upon Offred. He doesn't want her wearing short skirts. There was beer to drink, and wine punch Jocelyn, who was a splendid cook, was stirring a pot of jambalaya. Offred make a trip to the bathroom to remove her from Patrick, who seemed to want to stick close to her, she thought he was being a watchdog; she forgot that he might be shy. When she came out he had moved on. She drank three cups of punch in quick succession and was introduced to the woman who had written the play as a matter of fact she found it mystifying, and Patrick had thought it was revolting.

Moreover, Offred's life is describes as mischief because the other two men after having sexual relationships with Offred, Clifford and Tom they explains the relation as a mischief and mistake. Narrator shares the feelings of Offred. She feels really tormented and insecure and used by the all males which narrator describes as:

This time Tom and Offred did not refer so openly to their disappointment. They had begun to hold back a little, maybe to suspect that they were unlucky for each other, they were tenderly, carefully, amusingly, and almost as if the last failure had not happened. He phoned to tell her that his wife and children were going to England. He was going to join them there,

but later, ten days. So there will be ten days, cried Offred, blotting out the long absence to come he was to stay in England until the end of the summer. (149)

Offred remembers her life incidents when she gets divorce by Patrick. She is isolated and separated. During that day, she feels herself empty and tired of life due to the male's domination and the dystopian results of the modern society. Narrators narrates this painful condition representing the condition of all the middle class female migrating from the countryside's and describes, "She knew that how she had seen him; she knows it, because it happened again. She was in Toronto Airport, in the middle of the night. This was about nine years after she and Patrick had divorced . . . . She was alone. No one was meeting her. She was tired and bedraggled" (99).

Traditional notion of gender roles are created by the patriarchal society. It puts male at the centre undermining the role of women in the society. The public life of women is generally can be found in parks and theatre halls as luminal spaces as the places are considered to be the site of modernity. But the females are considered only for the sexual purposes and for the male gaze in such a place due to the discrimination of gender role existed in society.

Offred further remembers the past memory and the negative treatment of Patrick after giving dsivorce to Offred. Narrators talks about the painful condition when she loosed her daughter Anna. Patrick takes responsibility of Anna thinking that Offred cannot give her proper care and facilities. Offred as a hopeless person at the end of the relation with Patrick, she discovers the letter sent by Patrick in which he describes his next life with another girl, Elizabeth. But the life of Offred was distorted so she

remembers the decision of Patrick on the letter blaming to Offred saying she is unstable and immoral person. Patrick does not have any respect towards her so he is giving bad ideologies words that narrator describes in this way:

Tom wrote her a letter, o loving humorous letter, mentioning fate. A grieved, relieved, renunciation, before he set off for England.. This last snow of winter was quickly gone, causing some fooding in the valleys. Patrick wrote that he would drive up in June, when school was out, and take Anna back with him for the summer. He said he wanted to start the divorce because he had met a girl he wanted to marry. Her name was Elizabeth. He said she was a fine and stable person. (154)

Narrator narrates the incidents of Offred and her ultimate life. Offred comes to the American World to be educated, developed and rich. She respects even works hard as artist, R.J, and works in library. She has to face many hardships. He bears the problem of cultural adaptation.

Protagonist Offred contributed for the capitalistic society by giving company too many males. And has never got respect by other. At the end, she has to return in her original village in a ruined condition. She has no hope in the life; no one is coming to meet her. So, the ideals and ideologies of modern society become just as a fantasy and dystopian reality for her. And the most painful condition is that Offred has wished to keep her daughter with her. But this decision is also done by Patrick. So Narrator narrates this moment as:

Offred wanted to reply that she was making a home for Anna here, but she could not do that truthfully. She no longer wanted to stay. The charm, the

transparency, of this town was gone for her. The pay was poor. She would never be able to afford anything but this cheap apartment. She might never get a job or another love. She was thinking of going east, going to Toronto, trying getting a job there, with a radio or television station, perhaps even some acting jobs. She was thinking of going to east. (155)

Offred becomes a bearer of the gaze is an instantiation of patriarchal power. The patriarchal power observes her as the object of an erotic and covetous look. In capitalistic modern society, her roles become as only a means of commodity. Males look as a form of visual fetish on woman. Male authority recasts the women on the city streets as erotic object.

Moreover, narrator describes the ultimate and painful condition when she cannot take the responsibility the responsibility for instance, "she was paying for Anna's life and her own. She could feel the weight of Anna in the apartment then just as naturally as she had felt her weight in her body, and without having to go and look at her far skin and glistening eyebrows, the profile along which if you looked closely, you could see the tiny almost invisible hairs rise, catching the light" (145).

Narrator describes the emotional attachment of a mother with a child. Offred feels unsecured to send her daughter with step mother Elizabeth, new wife of Patrick. Narrator narrates that "Offred thought she heard the voice of the stable girl friend - which she was using Anna to give herself some stability, rather than face up to the consequences of the path she had chosen" (155). Likewise, narrator describes the ultimate life of Offred when she returns back to the village after the divorce with Patrick. Narrator describes now she has not any hope and dreams in future. She feels she is ruined and lost by the modern

society. Offred just remembers the past days and she has disillusionment created by the modern ideologies and culture. Narrator narrates the present condition of a returnee migrant worker as:

Offred gets lonely in new places; she wishes she had invitations. She goes out and walks in the streets and looks in the lighted windows at all the Saturday- night parties, the Sunday - night family suppers. It is no good telling herself she wouldn't be long inside there, chattering and getting drunk, or spooning up the gravy, before she would wish she was walking streets. She thinks she could take any hospitality. She could go to some parties. (156)

Narrator narrates the incidents of Offred and her ultimate life. Offred comes to the American World to be educated, developed and rich. She respects even works hard as artist, R.J, and works in library.

Atwood tried to present this bitter reality in the book creating a leading female character Offred. The thesis clarifies that a girl being middle class girl from village cannot fulfill her dream rather she has to face many sorts of insult and humiliations. So, this thesis tries to raise the question upon western philosophy of civilization which cannot be justifiable for the all citizens and all human. Atwood depicts the life of women which has to face many disparities in the society like gender wise, geographic wise and class wise. Therefore, Offred represents most of the all American western society and traditions.

The American society was taken as most developed, civilized and highly educated. However, there is lack of emotion, sentiments and harmony. This very situation

has been dealt by Atwood by presenting many issues and life events of main character in relation to other minor characters in the book. Margret Atwood explicates the issues to show the major contributions of those middle class working women to develop the society but unfortunately they are considered as manner less, uncivilized and immoral.

Likewise, *The Handmaid's Tale* was inspired by Second-Wave Feminism and the genre of speculative fiction. Indeed, blending these elements was the genesis for Atwood's portrayal in *The Handmaid's Tale* of the disunity of women, and the consequent destruction of female solidarity. Preying on the social confusion and unrest stemming from the Women's Liberation movement, the patriarchy of Gilead isolates women and then relegates them to the domestic periphery. Reacting to the increasingly strained gender relations of the liberal American culture that preceded it, the Republic of Gilead emerges as the new nation state.

In Gilead, all men are *not* created equal: some men are second-class citizens and all women are third-class citizens. To be successful, the patriarchy of Gilead must re-assert male dominance. Women are seen as potentially threatening and subversive, and, therefore, require strict control. They are banned from employment and then forbidden to own property or access assets, rendering them virtual prisoners within their homes. Women's imprisonment paves the way for Gilead's institution of a caste system, which, as previously discussed, is superficially designed to simplify the lives of citizens by dividing them into classes with clearly delineated standards for behavior, dress, and responsibilities. However, as in all dystopian societies, this caste system is actually a tool of oppression, particularly for women.

The result of the micro-stratification in Gilead is the evolution of a new form of misogyny, not as we usually think of it, as men's hatred of women, but as women's hatred of women. Thus, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood depicts one viable backlash from our current feminist momentum: gynocentric misogyny and "traditional" misogyny combined in one militaristic socio-religious order.

The patriarchy of Gilead establishes a matriarchal network responsible for regulating women through enforcing the division of domestic labor. Reconstructing Margaret Atwood's Protagonists, the work women do conspires to maintain the subjection of their own kind. The epilogue of the novel re-affirms the purpose of the matriarchy, "the best and most cost-effective way to control women for reproductive and other purposes was through women themselves" (308). This comment emphasizes the importance of the matriarchy both for establishing and maintaining the new social order. By relying on women to self-regulate, the founders of Gilead successfully destroy female solidarity. There are two social systems in which this dysfunctional matriarchy is enforced: the Handmaid training system and the household. These two systems illustrate the public and private enforcement of the matriarchy.

Handmaids are the crux of Gilead's survival, paradoxically the most valued, yet most despised caste. They are charged with reversing the plummeting birthrate, a vital mission following an age of readily available birth control, irresponsible management of nuclear waste and chemical weaponry, and indiscriminate use of agricultural chemicals. After being arrested for participating in non-traditional relationships (second or common-law marriages, or other extra-marital liaisons), the Handmaids are then turned over to the Aunts for training.

At the Rachel and Leah Re-education Centers (also known as the Red Centers), the Aunts indoctrinate the Handmaids in the matriarchy of Gilead. The Aunts are entrusted with the crucial duty of training the Handmaids because they rank among the most powerful female agents of the patriarchal order. In full collusion with the male leaders of Gilead, the Aunts stop at nothing to subdue and domesticate the Handmaids during their initiation. In the first scene of the novel Offred remembers one of her first nights at the Red Center, "the lights were turned down but not out. Aunt Sara and Aunt Elizabeth patrolled; they had electric cattle prods slung on thongs from their belts" (4). In the semi-darkness of what was formerly a high school gymnasium, Offred and the other Handmaids-in-training mourn their lost culture, their lost lives, their lost freedom, and their lost selves. They are now a national resource to be protected and regulated. The Handmaids have lost their humanity; they are now nothing more than potentially productive ovaries.

However, by calling the Handmaids "sacred vessels" and "ambulatory chalices" the Aunts attempt to imbue their mission and status with honor (136). Indeed, the Aunts try to convince the Handmaids that Gilead has actually restored respect for women, who are now valued and appreciated because they are "holding the future in their hands" (55). The Aunts represent themselves as motherly mentors to the Handmaids, guides on the path to successful assimilation into Gilead. They present the mission of Gilead as, "Women united for a common end! Helping one another in their daily chores as they walk the path of life together, each performing her appointed task" (162).

Likewise, aunt Lydia's pep talk on solidarity is disturbingly ironic in the context of the society it claims to represent. The caste system is not liberating. It is an insidious

mechanism of the patriarchy, designed to convince women that their subservience provides personal fulfillment and serves the common good. Aunt Lydia justifies her mission to Offred's group, "I'm doing my best . . . I'm trying to give you the best chance you can have" (55). The "best chance" the Aunts can provide the Handmaids is intimidation through brainwashing, humiliation, and torture.

As part of a brainwashing campaign, the Handmaids are drugged into complacency and forced to watch pornographic movies. These films, among the Aunts favored tools, depict many sexually degrading and violent acts against women. In a particularly disturbing film, as Offred recounts, "we had to watch a woman being slowly cut to pieces, her fingers and breasts snipped off with garden shears, her stomach split open and her intestines pulled out" (118).

Aunt Lydia uses this film to illustrate the disdain men previously held for women. According to Aunt Lydia, women were merely bodies for men to use and abuse as they pleased. This is ironic on two levels. First, this attitude echoes the sentiments of many Second-Wave Feminists who saw men's objectification of women as the primary source of the social oppression of women. Second, the Aunts are charged with controlling the Handmaids for the patriarchy. The leaders of Gilead view the Handmaids merely as bodies to be used for the good of the nation. The patriarchy has twisted a prominent feminist premise into a tool that enables women to oppress each other. Within the confines of the Red Center, abuse is predominately psychological. Humiliation is a favorite technique of the Aunts. Janine, another Handmaid-in-training, repeatedly suffers public humiliation.

Aunt refuses to allow her a restroom break so she soils herself in front of the group. On another occasion, Janine is bullied into admitting she enticed the men who gang raped her, resulting in the abortion that marred her teenage years. Aunt Lydia condemns Janine, and all women who made spectacles of themselves by "oiling themselves like roasted meat on a spit, [revealing their] bare backs and shoulders, on the street, in public," and showing their legs without stockings" (53). For Aunt Lydia, the sexual freedom women struggled to attain during pre- Gilead times was the source of their victimization. Women foolishly flaunted their bodies, tempting men to sexual violence. In this sense, it's the traditional gender roles that have been affecting women throughout the history making them imprisoned with patriarchal social structure.

An immodest woman is punished by God, according to Aunt Lydia, to "teach her a *lesson*. Teach her a *lesson*. Teach her a *lesson*" (72). According to the Aunts, as spokeswomen for the patriarchy of Gilead, rape and other forms of sexual and domestic violence are consequences of women possessing sexual freedom and leading men on. If psychological avenues are unsuccessful, the Aunts use physical violence to control the women in their charge. Offred recounts a few instances of violence. Her friend Moira, a militant lesbian she knew before the days of Gilead, suffers the Aunts' wrath. Since hands and feet are unimportant to the Handmaids' reproductive mission, the Aunts target these areas for torture; one beating left Moira unable to walk for a week.

Nevertheless, Moira continues to resist the Aunts' authority, the only woman in the Red Center who does so. Moira finally escapes from the Red Center. The manner of her escape-taking off her state-issued Handmaid robes and putting on the uniform of an Aunt-symbolizes her rejection of Gilead's attempts to define her identity. Except for

Moirra, the Aunts achieve complete control over the Handmaids. The women make a few attempts to comfort one another and establish friendships in the Red Center, but acts of friendship are punishable offenses. Upon discharge from the Red Center, Offred is at the mercy of the patriarchy of Gilead. Within the domestic hierarchy, every woman is a spy and an enemy, even other Handmaids.

Once the Handmaids have been initiated into the patriarchy of Gilead, they are posted to households. The domestic hierarchy, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Wives, operates on mutual dislike. The Wives consider the Handmaids distasteful. During a Birth Day visit, the Commander's Wife makes the following comment to her friends, little whores, all of them, but still you waiting to be filled with the future of Gilead, Offred sees no glory in her sexual servitude:

The fact is that I'm his mistress. Men at the top have always had mistresses, why should things be any different? The arrangements aren't quite the same, granted. The mistress used to be kept in a minor house or apartment of her own, and now they've amalgamated things. But underneath it's the same. More or less. Outside woman, they used to be called in some countries. I am the outside woman. It's my job to provide what is otherwise lacking. (163)

The patriarchy has institutionalized adultery, under the guise of reproduction. Both Wife and Handmaid/Mistress are required to co-habit the house and must collaborate in the procreative mission of the household. Conception is the focus of family life in Gilead.

The Ceremony is a socially condoned *menage a trois*. Offred reflects, "It has nothing to do with passion or love or romance or any of those other notions we used to

titillate ourselves with. It has nothing to do with sexual desire, at least for me, and certainly not for Serena" (94). As Offred lies on Serena's canopied bed, her arms restrained, and her skirt hiked up to her waist she reflects, "This is not recreation, even for the Commander" (95).

Hence, sex has become a rote duty for all parties involved. To endure the Ceremony, Offred must detach from her body. Detaching from her body enables her to detach from her emotions. Offred learns to view the Ceremony as merely a part of her social duty. Serena, on the other hand, does not have the luxury of detachment. Her participation in the Ceremony requires her to watch her husband having sexual intercourse with another woman, an experience that is upsetting and insulting, to say the least. This disparity leaves Offred wondering, "Which of us is it worse for, her or me?" (95).

Serena always cries the night of the Ceremony, but silently. Offred believes Serena does so because, "she's trying to preserve her dignity, in front of us" (95). The Ceremony illustrates Serena's failed intentions to establish domestic harmony by collaborating with the patriarchy. She fought for women to be restored to their traditional roles of wives and mothers, but the reality of being a Wife in Gilead is much different than she envisioned. Controlling Offred is the only outlet through which Serena can express her frustration with a system she once supported.

Except for the nights of the Ceremony, Offred is isolated from the rest of the household. Under Serena's critical and ever watchful eyes, Offred must also do without the meager companionship provided at the Red Center. Offred has a deep wish to establish female solidarity; she desires a bond of friendship and a sense of community

with the other women who work and live in the household. However, Offred is continually reminded of her status as a pariah, even in her "home."

As Offred remarks, "Rita and Cora-the two Marthas, talk about me as though I can't hear. To them I am another household chore, one among many" (35). For the Marthas, Offred has the same status as any other necessary chore. Interestingly, the two Marthas have slightly different reactions to Offred's presence. Rita, the older Martha, objects to Offred's household duties, "she thinks I am common. She is over sixty, her mind's made up" (48). Though Offred's only viable alternative to becoming a Handmaid was exile or execution, Rita believes that Offred should not have "chosen" to be a Handmaid. Because of Rita's traditional mindset, she continually criticizes Offred, both directly and indirectly.

In contrast, Cora, the younger Martha, delights in the possibility of having a baby to care for. She views Offred's presence as one of hope and happiness for the household. Offred recognizes Cora's scant, yet willing, protection, "It pleased me that she was willing to lie for me, even in such a small thing, even for her own advantage. It was a link between us" (152). Cora treats Offred with respect and makes some attempts to reach out to her. Cora tolerates, clothes, and feeds Offred because of the child she might ultimately bear. Though Offred appreciates these token actions of respect and kindness, they merely reinforce her identity as a two-legged womb of Gilead.

Despite the Marthas' feelings towards her, Offred still yearns to sit at the kitchen table and visit and chat with them:

But even if I were to ask, even if I were to violate decorum to that extent, Rita would not allow it. She would be too afraid. The Marthas are not

supposed to fraternize with us. Fraternize means to behave like a brother.

Luke told me that. He said there was no corresponding word that meant to behave like a sister. Sororize, it would have to be, he said. From the Latin.

. . . I don't smile. Why tempt her to friendship? (11)

Treachery is so ingrained in every aspect of life in Gilead that Offred realizes that even considering the act of friendship is dangerous. The other women in the household must avoid her, as they have been trained to do, or suffer the consequences. Accordingly, Offred's domestic isolation is filled with silence. She longs to break the perpetual silence that surrounds her with anything, even banal pleasantries, "How I used to despise such talk. Now I long for it. At least it was talk. An exchange, of sorts" (11).

The only quasi-friendship Offred is allowed is the companionship of the Handmaid who accompanies her on their daily walks to market. Yet even here, free from the physical constraints of their respective households, verbal exchanges are limited to socially acceptable catch phrases: expressions of piety and dedication to Gilead. Exchanges that are not scripted are forbidden and risky. Offred and her companion are painfully aware that they meet as neither friends nor equals, but as potential informants. They travel in pairs under the guise of safety but, "the truth is that she is my spy, as I am hers" (19). The culture of Gilead is based on fear and suspicion; women are rewarded for spying on and betraying other women. Gilead, then, is indeed a culture of female treachery.

*The Handmaid's Tale* comprises Offred's record of life within the matriarchy of Gilead. As she performs her rote duties, under the strict system of female control, she struggles to come to terms with her multiple losses: culture, family, identity, agency, and,

most importantly, companionship. Though the Aunts insist that the household is a place of camaraderie, the domestic hierarchy thrives on mutual dislike and disapproval. There is no reprieve from the purposeful and lonely life of a Handmaid; nothing must deter her from her mission. Offred is allowed to attend a few social functions, such as Birth Day celebrations and women's Salvagings. These activities reinforce her role in Gilead. The Birth Day celebrations remind Offred of her duty to her household, her Commander, and her country. The Salvaging remind Offred of the consequences of any failure to follow the rules and regulations of Gilead. All of her other activities are designed to keep her body in prime reproductive health: daily exercises on the floor of her bedroom, daily walks to market, and her scheduled baths. As Margaret Daniels and Heather Bowen assert in their study of female leisure spaces in dystopian novels, this "strictly controlled access to leisure reinforces the Handmaid's enslavement" (426).

The Handmaids are doubly enslaved; first, by the patriarchy that developed and then implemented the caste system of Gilead, and second, by the matriarchal system instrumental to this new social order. Within this system of dual oppression the Handmaids are severely constrained. They have no choice regarding the treatment of their bodies; no permission to select the individuals with whom they pass time; [they have] no control over their lives.

Though Offred desperately wants to rebel and reassert her agency, the matriarchy ensures that she and the other Handmaids remain isolated and powerless within the domestic hierarchy that exhibits the most serious consequence of women placing their allegiance to men before their allegiance to women: the destruction of female solidarity resulting in the disunity of women.

Offred has to face many hardships. He bears the problem of cultural adaptation. She contributed for the capitalistic society by giving company too many males. And has never got respect by other. At the end, she has to return in her original village in a ruined condition. She has no hope in the life; no one is coming to meet her. So, the ideals and ideologies of modern society become just as a fantasy and dystopian reality for her. Offred came to America for studying and getting a better life but the discriminatory gender roles never let her exercise her potentiality in city. Rather, it exploits her, her sexuality and makes her a form of commodity.

However, the protagonist seems determinant to change her submissive gender roles and aims to be free and independent at the end of the novel. Offred within her exploitation learns to exist. Narration goes on:

Offred wanted to reply that she was making a home for Anna here, but she could not do that truthfully. She no longer wanted to stay. The charm, the transparency, of this town was gone for her. The pay was poor. She would never be able to afford anything but this cheap apartment. She might never get a job or another love. She was thinking of going east, going to Toronto, trying getting a job there, with a radio or television station, perhaps even some acting jobs. She was thinking of going to east. (155)

Thus, as a typical middle class woman, protagonist aims to go to public domain and tries to become independent in her life. It is her awareness of modern gender roles which only can make a woman emancipated from patriarchal exploitation.

The representation of the middle class women in literature has now being changed due to the contributions regarding different theories and queries pioneered by new

feminist historicists' especially after twentieth century. In the modern period, new feminist historicist came with some new thought and ideologies to redefine past history about women written in art and literature. And they raised the voice for the justice of the women and tried to review the past history and rewrite the old literature that gave the new role to the women of the then period and inspire the present world's women.

Gradually, the role of women is started to be presented beyond the stereotypical tradition of portraying women in literature. As literature is considered to be the reflection of the society, the past literature represented the contemporary society by creating female characters to show the manner and tradition of the society. In the past, the female's contributions, which were most important for the regulation and expansion of the society were not paid attention and did not give value. So, feminist came up with various versions of ideologies to rewrite the history of those unaddressed woman and tried to give justice by revisiting the traditional notion. *The Handmaid's Tale* is an epitome to reflect the nineteenth century society in Canada and America. It marks how a traditional gender roles imprisoned women with domesticity and encourages patriarchy to treat women as commodity. On the other hand the novel centers women can get emancipation from gender exploitation by breaking the traditional gender identity with new gender roles.

## **Chapter IV: Gender Roles as Means for Exploitation and Emancipation**

Based on the life and struggle of its central character Offred this research work has examined the roles of gender identity and gender roles for the exploitation and emancipation of females. The gender roles marks both female exploitation and emancipation because if women are limited within a traditional gender roles like emotional, submissive and domestic identity they are much exploited by patriarchal social structure. On the other hand, if these women are able to change their gender roles and identity as brave, rational, independent and control on a public domain they can wrestle against patriarchal domination.

The first-person, female, narrative perspective in *The Handmaid's Tale* is essential to the feminist message of the novel and Offred's account of her life in Gilead and before is fascinating in its own right. Offred's position is very submissive and marginal and may not include all women in Gilead. The novel depicts the massive exploitation of women while the 'Aunts' justify Gilead by referring to the problems with violence and birth rates in the past, Offred's Commander also has other ideas of why change was necessary. In his and Offred's private encounters he tries to justify things to her and claims that the problem was not only with the women, he says. The main problem was with the men. There was nothing for them anymore because the sex was too easy, anyone could just buy it. In this sense, women are just like a commodity. It is because women have submissive traditional gender roles and they have no resources for survive.

Nick, on the other hand, is a more difficult character to analyze. He works as a driver for the Commander, but he does not act like he is a servant. He does not seem to have the same fear Offred has. She subsequently suspects that he is an "Eye". However,

Nick becomes Offred's lover whom she becomes totally obsessed with. Offred's seems to compensate for the fact that she is otherwise consistently passive, but in Nick she finds a meaning with life.

Eventually it is he who rescues her from being arrested when Serena Joy finds out about the relationship between Offred and the Commander. Nick is most likely also involved in the resistance, but at the same time he is an "Eye". Furthermore, he is also involved in helping the Commander with his questionable living. Again, no character in Gilead is what he or she seems on the surface, not even the "Eyes", who are supposed to uphold law and order, are dedicated to the values of Gilead.

The discourse of Gilead only exists as means of maintaining power in the hands of men. The Commander, who is most likely to be dedicated to its values, is the worst offender of them all. He tries to justify Gilead to Offred, but at the same time he visits prostitutes and uses his powers to make Offred his mistress. Subsequently, he also cheats on his wife. There is no ruler in Atwood's fictional world, but everyone in it from Commander Fred to his domestic servants, from the doctor who inspects Offred. Offred herself is caught up in a network of surveillance and counter-surveillance. The novel constantly emphasizes the omnipresence of the scrutinizing gaze; the word "eye" is everywhere; the secret police are called "eyes," and the farewell greeting "under his eye" refers to the divine gaze but also testifies to the fact that female have been watched by male gaze. Gilead is thus nothing else but a place where women are suppressed for the reason that men want power and want to hinder women from getting it.

It is clear that when living in a society like Gilead one must adjust to the discourse of that society. It is very difficult not to adjust. The failure of doing this will most likely

result in alienation or even death, which is clear when looking at the women of Gilead who tried to rebel against the regime. Offred, on the other hand, does not rebel, but is affected by the Gilead patriarchal discourse. She partly adjusts to it, which makes her life more bearable. However, she is aware that she does this and does not want to do it, but she is not strong enough to resist. In addition, Offred contemplates the possibility to just surrender completely to the 'truth' of Gilead. By doing this she would fit in, but she cannot do that either, since she is also affected by the "truth" of the discourse from the society 'before', so she knows Gilead 'truth' might not be correct. Surrender to the 'truth' is exactly what Offred did in the society 'before' so she is now reluctant to repeat that mistake.

In the novel, truths and values too are created according to patriarchal ideology. All these values are targeted for the exploitation of women. The reason for this is, like in Offred's case, that they also have lived in the society 'before' and have problems with letting that go entirely. Consequently, the patriarchal values of Gilead can only survive if nobody is aware of an alternative way, and that is why there are such harsh punishments for offenders. The children born in Gilead are not supposed to be affected by any other truth.

The Gilead regime uses the negative aspects of the society 'before' to justify the situation for women, especially for Handmaids like Offred. They try to justify that women have lost their freedom and their right to decide over their own body by claiming that the conditions for women were worse before, with the sexual violence. Indeed, any notion that the society 'before' was an ideal place for women is refuted by Offred's flashbacks. This leads to the conclusion that both the discourse of Gilead and of the

society 'before' is one where the values result in oppression of women. In Gilead, it is a state system of keeping women controlled as, for example, Handmaids. In the society 'before' the sexual attacks on women show that attacking women was not something overly serious.

The image of women, aunt Lydia describes them as 'sluts', shows the oppression in the form of degrading women. These values of the patriarchal discourse of the society 'before' were the foundation upon which the values of Gilead were built. Their common trait is the position of women. In Gilead, men's supposedly natural violent side is recognized as something unavoidable, and thus women's freedom must be restricted. In the society 'before', women's equal rights were officially recognized, but the underlying values of the discourse prevented it from being the reality. As a result, women are involuntarily trapped.

To sum up, *The Handmaid's Tale* is, in fact, a rather tragic story where no woman is successful. It is because they are imprisoned within the traditional gender roles and do not try to resist it. For example, Offred's mother ends up in the colonies, Moira in a brothel, Serena Joy as a miserable housewife, and Ofglen ends up killing herself. Ironically, Offred, the character who tried the least to affect her situation, is the most successful as she manages to escape and tell her story. Offred finds herself hiding in a safe house somewhere because she tries to resist and is able to run away. It is her changed gender roles as a brave new lady. Thus, changed gender role helps her to be emancipated from oppression of patriarchal society.

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