

## Critique of Cosmopolitan Modernity in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

This research entitled "Critique of Cosmopolitan Modernity in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*" argues how social conflict and cultural chaos arise on the life of women in the midst of cosmopolitan modernity. It analyzes the undercurrents and fallout of welcoming western concept of liberal thought and modernity. In *The Handmaid's Tale* most of the female characters 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 Handmaid's Tale* tells the story of Offred in the Republic of Gilead a theocratic totalitarian society. Human rights are severely limited and women's rights are even more curtailed; for example, women are forbidden to read. Offred belongs to the class of handmaid's fertile women who is forced to bear children for elite, barren couples and rich human. Offred forgets her real name, cultural identity and her own background being lost in the midst of western technocratic world. If ultramodern norms and values are imposed in female uncritically, females fall into chaotic situation. There can be unrest and communal conflict due to the direct tussle between imitated western values and the native trends and culture. *The Handmaid's Tale* demonstrates how dystopian view and disillusionment affect the lives of female characters. The obsessive search for the western cultural model in America resulted into crisis, conflict and perpetual unrest.

The youth cultural environment of America categorically denies the sovereignty and the unique supremacy of western ideals like universal human rights and democracy, modern secularism, political liberalism, gender equality and individual freedom. The setting of the novel is in American society where native Canadian Offerd is lost in emptiness and hollow of modern scientific development. She is deviated and hung between several problems. *The Handmaid's Tale* reflects the

political and social unrest in America. *The Handmaid's Tale* is reflection of human'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 human, Atwood breathes life into history by describing the effects of larger-than-life events on the average citizen.

The thesis claims that the characters 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 tragedy that the golden dreams for female's hardship do not bring any positive outcomes to fulfill their biological desire. The research has articulated the condition of middle class women who, 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. However, failing of both and have separated life without any hope and expectation at the end of the life of the 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 society. These crucial components of cosmopolitan modernity have rather put the seed of socio-cultural problems in society. American youth believe in the pragmatic and modernizing influence of western thought. However, 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 American youth how can the nonwestern programs of transforming traditional society become successful.

Atwood depicts modern scenario and the effects of urbanization, city, and development. It projects the concept of modernity and gender. When the society

turned into modernization and industrialization, not only males, but also many women from different parts of the villages migrated to the urban city and started to struggle there to live a better life. In this regard, the notion of *flaneur* was developed to represent especially the educated, higher class males from urban area and whose job is just to stroll in the city, streets and markets to gaze the middle class female who used to go to the market and public space for their job. Therefore, the streets, parks, cinema hall and other public spaces were considered to be the setting of those male *flaneurs*. But, the term *flaneuse* was coined by twentieth century feminist historicist Janet Wolff in her book, *The Invisible Flaneuse* (1985) where the book defines *flaneuses* as those middle class women who came from different country sides and doing work for the societal development economically.

Though the middle class women contributed their time and energy to develop the city economically, they were forgotten to define and portray by the traditional writers and artists, Thus, Janet Wolff talks about those marginalized female in the modern society and she coined the term *flaneuse* and *female flaneurs* to justify their role in the modern society. She speaks from the perspective of *flaneuse* who were made *flaneuse* by the female *flaneurs* and *flaneurs* in the modern city. The main character Offred in the book has been presented as a typical modern *flaneuse* who has been used only as the commodity tool and defined as an unstable lower class not developed and uncivilized female by the so - called higher class males of American society.

However, feminists historicists Janet Wolff, Anke Gleber and Bonnie Kim Scott visited the notion of defining modernity. The research had justified with the help of aforementioned critics with other Charls Baudelaire, Michael Foucault and Walter Benjamin to proof the cosmopolitan modernity in *The Handmade Tale*. Feminist

critics found that many traditional painters like Charles Baudelaire, artists and poets used to make the portrayal of an educated male walking in the streets aimlessly or just for staring the females and he was considered to be a *flaneur* in respective manner. Most importantly, Janet Wolff reviewed the traditional notion to define the women and she drew up the conclusion that especially during the time of nineteenth century, According to Wolff, there were two types of women such as Woman *flaneur* and *flaneuse*. Rich, sophisticated females like poets, artist and female from bourgeois society were also there and were strolling into the city during that time as the male *flaneurs* of the time did. Wolff defined that so-called higher class Female as female *flaneur*.

Bonnie Kim Scott defines modernity as the “forgotten gender infected territory” (78). Gender, which is defined as a social construction rather than an essential biological trait, comes in many forms: in languages that assign genders to nouns and pronouns; in what sociologists describe as “sex roles,” which divide and limit what persons of one sex or the other can do in private and public spheres; in efforts to recuperate the culture or traditions of women, as neglected and marginal (87).

The middle class females who arrived in America migrating from village in search of many golden dreams and study were used as a commodity tool in restaurant, shopping centre, and parks. They were just for the male gaze so Janet Wolff termed and defined them as *flaneuse*. In the text, *The Handmaid's Tale* has presented the main character Offred including other female characters, Franny McGill and Cora as typical *flaneuse* in the Modern capitalistic American Society

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:

Thematically, Carter opines about the political and social issues that are merged and modified in the novel. In a sense, *The Handmaid's Tale* 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. (78)

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 Arnett 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 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 comes negative to them. Offred dooms to sacrifice the real taste of life owing to

her subordinate condition. She is helpless, alienated and suffered by the blow of western culture. Another critic Murphy Georgeann makes criticism 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 raised different issues in this novel, the critique of modernity project is totally absent in their reviews and consistent commentaries. Modernity has robbed man of manhood. Modernity is expected to enrich human comfort and minimize labor. Nevertheless, science has denuded the humanity of human beings as it misused by totalitarian rulers. It has denuded the manhood of man. The issue of scientific optimism and Offred's implicit view on the systematic denudation of manhood is increasingly new and untested issue. Offred's denuded manhood is miserable and heart-rending. That is why the researcher has picked up the issue of the critique of modernity.

Offred is degenerated into neurotic and paranoid because of the worst condition of the society, totalitarian political system, and manipulation of science and technology. Her degraded condition in dystopian world is described as:

Below in the little valley, the still gray serpentine of a river. Motionless and precise. Along the shore a burden of dead reeds. Are you okay? He said. The boy nodded. Then they set out along the blacktop in the gunmetal light, shuffling through the ash, is the other's world entire . . . They crossed the broken asphalt apron and found the tank for the pumps, (Atwood 4)

The critique of Enlightenment universals is central to the thinking of the philosophers of the post-modern period happen to scrutinize its main protagonist's miserable condition because of modernity. The conclusion he arrived at was that the scientific knowledge was actually marked by a contradiction because "scientific knowledge cannot know and make known that it is the true knowledge without resorting to the other, narrative kind of knowledge, which from its point of view is no knowledge at all. The dystopia theory considers science's "degradation." Furthermore, Booker M. Keith, also stands up against the Western tradition of rationalist thinking and its premise of reason, formed by the search for certainty and termed "logo centric" (Moylan 77). Though main protagonist Offred, primarily affiliates with the logo centric way of seeing the world, his reasoning inevitably simultaneously involves the deconstructive impulse - the tendency to subvert itself. The research aims to prove loopholes of modernity project. Applying the critique of modernity project as conceptualized by Janet Wolff, Griselda Pollock and Bonnie Kim Scott the research proves its hypothesis.

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 over females in modern city. Dream for harmonious society, political liberalism, and



economic status, democracy and human rights are dream for females. In the peculiar world of Canada, the western thoughts turn out to be the source of despair. Hence, woman is just a mean to satisfy the male.

For the first time *Flaneur* was characterized by the French Painter Baudelaire in his painting and arts to present the new dynamic complications of modern life. Traditionally, the traits that mark the *flaneur* were wealth, education, and idleness. He strolls to pass the time that his wealth affords him, treating the human who pass and the objects he sees as texts for his own pleasure. So, the *flaneur* is supposed to be free to probe his surrounding for. Janet Wolff makes discussion about the version of *flaneur* and *Flaneuse* as the words are originally coined from France and this was coined to represent the modern society which she defines as:

The *Flaneur*, the French term is always used, in English as well as in German is the person who strolls aimlessly in the modern city, observing human and events, perhaps if the *flaneur* happens also to be a writer or an artist with a view to recording these observations in word or image. Although this particular figure has a prehistory in eighteenth century thought, it is generally agreed that its prominence in the literature of modernity dates from Bauldaire's mid nineteenth- century essays on the modern life. (19)

Primarily, the concept of *flaneur* was centered on males where females were not accorded and they were not identified. The *flaneur*, however, is necessarily male. The privilege of passing unnoticed in the city, particularly in the period in which the *flaneur* flourished that is, the mid- nineteenth century to the early twentieth century - was not accorded to women, whose presence on the streets would certainly be noticed. Not only that as many historians of the period have pointed out, women in public, and

particularly women wandering without aim, immediately attract the negative stamp of the 'non - respectable'(19).

Wolff coined the term *flaneuse* associating with city to define the women of nineteenth century and especially for white male's pleasure, which she defines as:

The variety of city was again coded as a site of white masculine pleasure and hence as a potential threat to bourgeois femininity even as live experience provided examples of a tremendous variety of spatial practices across different genders, classes, and ethnicities. Such contemporary dichotomies were immediate motivation for the examination of the historical condition of cultural invisibility that termed as the *flaneuse*. (2)

Wolff questioned on early twentieth century regarding already formed *flaneur* and says, "The female version of modernity's urban stroller, such a person due to certain ideologies such as private and public sphere, gender, and female *flanerie* is impossible (18). In early Twentieth century, many Feminists and Artists like, Janet Wolff, Anke Gleber, Walter Benjamin and Griselda Pollock came with the idea of revision to define the undefined women of the nineteenth century.

*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 issue of cultural domination, patriarchy, objectification and the commodification of females are the major concern of this research. The life of main character Offred and her position in the American society is highly discussed and dealt. The issues of modernity and female gender are discussed as Janet Wolff discussed them as they are the paradigms of the modernity.

Janet Wolff makes description about the role of middle class female in the city as a commodity tool for the economic enhancement of the consumer culture. She says, “New opportunities for women in public as the department store supplanted the arcade, the mobilized gaze entered the service of consumption, and space opened for a *flaneuse* whose gendered gaze became a key element of consumer address” (20).

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, won a scholarship to a prestigious Canadian university. She left the village dreaming about many successes to rise from poor to rich and become a modern woman in the urban arena. At her first semester, she found a comfortable place to live, a part-time job, and a male admirer. But she was 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, 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)

Likewise, the stereotypical representation of the working class female in the city was highly dealt by the males of the urban area, female were rather defined as bad, fallen, whore and ideologies of bad which Wolff describes as:

Here, women move center stage in the modern metropolis, whether as prostitute, housewife, mother, new women or androgyny of 1920s and

early 1930s. Seen anew in the context of their actual lives, and in their representation in paintings by women artists, these figures offer a striking contrast to their more familiar prototypes in part of men and in the dominant ideologies of gender - ideologies of the 'good' and 'bad' woman, angel/whore, virgin/ fallen women. (25)

Offred after migrating into a capitalistic urban society, she feels very strange with the cultural tradition that is different from the countryside, Ontario. Narrator describes Offred's unfamiliarity with city lights and inhuman behaviorism of human. She finds criminal attitude on human and happens to see a boy child in the street lying due to lack of parents and food but human 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 is the police anyway. (58)

Narrator says 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 starts to work in Library. 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. 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.

In the library while working she meets Patrick from British Columbia, he starts to gaze her and follows her. Offred finds him as an agent of patriarchy who seems masculine in his behaviors. He forces her when proposing her for love.

Walter Benjamin extended the idea, “*flaneur* came to rise primarily because of an architectural change in the city of Paris. This change was rooted in building capitalism involved the creation of the arcades, which were passageways through elegant shops and park” (37). Baudelaire’s depiction of *flaneur* in the city that “Baudelaire would be torn rest of his life between the stances of *flaneur* and dandy, a disengaged and cynical voyeur on the one hand, and man of the human who enters into the life of his subjects with passion on the other. *Flaneur*, as both lines of continuity and ruptures between nineteenth century and *flaneur* as its medium, paradigms, while rethinking of questions of gender and representation in the space of the modernity. (11)

Offred remembers the days with Patrick that how humiliated she was because of her class and her origin. She narrates 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 human are poor human”. 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 human and live in a dump then I will have to withdraw my offer. (78)

Patrick, is a rich educated, young man from British Columbia having urban experience and strolls around the city as *flaneurs* does. Offred feels that he is by birth rich but very proud. 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 to Columbia. His family was rich.

Moreover, about the role of woman another critic Bonnie Kim Scott in her text “Gender of Modernity” defines 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. In this context Scott describes as, “Parks and theater as liminal spaces of modernity, urban sites caught between or outside the public and private spheres, where women could be seen without being categorized as fallen and sexualized, where they could inscribe alternate interpretations of femininity” (34). Scott’s question is about the liberation of female in the modern city.

How the construction of shopping as particularly feminized. How feminized activity affected its ability to become an object of the Male’s gaze (14). Further she comments and says, “many female strollers was involved in such activities during the time such as cinema going, shopping, The fact is that there was women’s lack of access to the distortions of cultural theory and solidarity which foregrounds male activities and women invisible?” (18)

The Dr. proposes Offred for marriage. Offred finds the idea is very 'furious'. Though she discards him, he follows her for his selfishness and for proving himself superior which narrator describes, "Patrick Blatchford was in love with Offred. This has become a fixed, even furious, /'idea with him. For her, a continual surprise. He wanted to marry her. He waited for her after classes, moved in and walked beside her what he thought of their conversation. Offred was flattered and but nervous" (68).

Offred as she faces the discrimination between lower class and rich class human, she is facing low self-esteem in the city. Therefore, 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)

Scott transposes the feminist critique of the literature of modernity and describes the past literatures by the traditional male authors and painters who described woman as inferior and treated as women undermining their contribution in the society. Male is a lived, occupiable position available or unavailable to urban subjects based on their gender, class, or sexuality. Particularly, Scott and Wolff are interested in investigation on the social construction about the *flaneur*. Forms of transforming and say that,

*flaneurs* advocating posters, sold goods, supermarkets, bookstores, window shopping, department store and cycling. Woolf further asserts:

It is essentially literatures about transformations in the public world and in its associated consciousness. . . . Its protagonists, invoked to epitomize the experience of modern life were invariably male figures: the dandy, the stranger, the flaneur. Within these academic essays, literary Offred, and poetry Wolff contended, women were largely absent; confined to home, to invisible arena of the private. (4)

The *flaneur*, however, is necessarily male. The privilege of passing unnoticed in the city, particularly in the period in which the *flaneur* flourished. That is the mid nineteenth century, was not accorded to women, whose presence on the streets would certainly be noticed. Not only that as many historians of the period have pointed out, women in public, and particularly women, apparently wandering without aim, immediately attract the negative stamp of the non - respectable. It is not accident that prostitutes appear as the central female tropes in the discourse of modernity.

Narrator shares the memory of Offred about another female character Franny McGill in the city. Offred and McGill they were treating as the *flaneuse* 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.

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 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. (112). Furthermore, during the party with many human, when Patrick treats Offred in a barbaric way, Offred cannot resist this because she is trapped by the modern cultural values. Narrators describes, "Jocelyn and Clifford had pitched out of the way for the party. She went out of the back door and stood burning and shivering in the cool wet night.. She was humiliated, she was ashamed of Patrick" (111).

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 human 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 human 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 to keep inside the house. He visits the bar, restaurants and pub but he does not want Offred to come out. Even he comments upon the dresses of Offred. Offred feels Patrick as her ‘watchdog’. He does not 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 makes a trip to the bathroom to remove her from Patrick, who seems to want to stick close to her. She thinks that he is being a watchdog; she forgets he may be shy. When she comes out, he moves on. She drinks three cups of punch in quick succession and is introduced to the woman who had written the play. Offred is constantly humiliated b by her husband.

Moreover, Offred’s life is describes as mischief because the other two men after having sexual relationships with Offred, Clifford and Tom they explain the relation as a mischief and mistake. She feels really tormented 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 in 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." (99). She becomes deserted and alone in the modern city.

Females are not machine that can be programmed forever. They have emotions ,desires and feelings and desires for freedom. If the state efforts to control the personal freedom of human forever it generates permanent conflict between individual and state. The opening of the novel also casts light upon the conflict and ending also highlights upon the possible conflict.

First and foremost, Ofglen hangs herself as her society dominates but Offred never accepts those values. She makes a change in her private and public life by going to shop, park, Jazbel and fights against the cultural domination. She revolts against commander's futile objection. She leaves Red Center and goes with the members of May day. Offred sacrifices her own life for the sake of her survival. She enters the Weapons Lab in Gilead's place the totalitarian patriarchal society. Despite all of the wrongs that Gilead had done to her, she efforts to survive in the patriarchal society.

In a dystopian world, bodies are represented as powerless and feeble, being reduced to constant oppression and regulation from the state, which engages discipline to achieve its devious aim. As Mitchel Foucault in his text *Discipline and Punish* describes it, discipline is a tool that made "possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body" materialized in different ways (137). One of them focused on a scrupulously designed and organized everyday routine, which had to be followed by everyone in society. There is a state of still and fear. Including the president, all

congressmen are assassinated by the totalitarians. Paper Money is banned. Offred was kept under the surveillance of 'The Eye'.

This coercion grants the ruling elite a perfect opportunity to force human into submissiveness, turn them into robots that are trained to do with preciseness exactly the same thing as everyone else does. Every day and every hour of human's lives is prescribed and directed by the government, prohibiting human any involuntary deviation from the rigid schedule. In fact, it is through the use of such a strict disciplinary system that social order can be established where human become totally subservient and oblivious to the omnipotent power of the state. Foucault in his work elaborates on this idea and explains that “discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)” (138). In other words, once a human body becomes totally disciplined, two things happen. On the one hand, the body increases its productive potential and can benefit the state economically, and, on the other hand, it becomes completely obedient, posing no difficulties for the state's control. Thus, inadvertently, the citizens of most totalitarian regimes resemble prisoners because of the rigid discipline that the state requires of their bodies. Foucault discusses the implementation of discipline in penitentiary institutions in *Discipline and Punish* and quotes at length Léon Faucher, who drafted the rules for a Parisian prison:

The prisoners' day will begin at six in the morning in winter and at five in summer. They will work for nine hours a day throughout the year.

Two hours a day will be devoted to instruction . . . At the first drum-roll, the prisoners must rise and dress in silence, as the supervisor opens the cell doors. At the second drum-roll, they must be dressed and make their beds. At the third, they must line up and proceed to the

chapel for morning prayer . . . Work and the day will end at nine o'clock in winter and at eight in summer. . . (Foucault 6)

Similarly, Characters of *The Handmaid's Tale* follow exactly the same routine.

Human, to be exact Numbers, live day after day according to the Table of Hours—a detailed schedule of their lives organized and put together by the state. This Table, proclaimed by the main protagonist as the “heart and pulse of OneState,” dictates how human should spend every minute of the day—everyone is doing precisely the same thing in unison, creating a giant organism that acts and moves alike—to shape one body, which can be easily regulated through discipline and order (Atwood 12).

Atwood, depicting a typical day in the life Offred, narrates:

Every morning, with six-wheeled precision, at the very same hour and the very same minute, we get up, millions of us, as though we were one. At the same hour, millions of us as one, we start work. Later, millions as one, we stop. Then, like one body with a million hands, at the same second according to the Table, we lift the spoon to our lips. In addition, at the same second, we leave for a stroll and go to the auditorium, to the hall for the Taylor exercises, and then to bed. (13)

Such eerie unanimity does not allow any foreign action that is somehow different from the rest, making it very simple for the government to exercise its control and at the same time use human's productivity for its advantage. This never-interrupted and never-ending routine sucks out any creativity or desire to learn from these human, turning them into one giant mass of pliable material, easily trained and molded.

Foucault elaborates on this “time-table” method of discipline and asserts that, because it “establishes rhythm, imposes particular occupations, regulates the cycle of repetition,” it allows the state to obtain the same blind compliance from its citizens as

commanders get from their soldiers in the army (149). The rigid breakdown of time into hours, minutes, and seconds and disciplinary control of gestures and movements in the military eliminates any free movements and adjusts “the body into temporal imperatives, ”which, if repeated continuously, stay in one’s body forever (151). By the same token Offred and other characters in *The Handmaid’s Tale* “precisely established meals, obligatory walks” that smears any traces of individuality and makes them robotic and identical, like “innumerable waves” in one big “mighty flood”(Atwood 7).

Louis Althusser’s work “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” where he introduces the idea of ideological function, which categorizes individuals into subjects. He states that a human being, who is subjected to ideology involuntarily, turns into a “subject,” as his outlook on the world will be shaped congruously with the state’s beliefs (157). However, he claims that “what is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live” (155). Thus, this “imaginary relation” will dictate how individuals perceive themselves in the world and what social function they will occupy.

A person’s ability to identify oneself is perceived through the lens of social practices that are imposed on human through ideology. Therefore, it is in the state’s best interest that human view themselves as “subjects” (not as individual identities); once they identify themselves as such, they act and think according to the ideology’s chief principles, and fail to break the circle they cannot imagine themselves outside of the ideological framework.

*The Handmaid’s Tale* also plays a central role as the main protagonist’s way of resistance to the totalitarian regime, where women are exclusively valued for their

reproductive function and are mentally and physically abused by the patriarchal ruling class. While writing helps the main character to discover her individuality and reconnect with the past, in Atwood's world, Offred, the main heroine, employs writing to reconstruct her body, which has been disciplined and exploited for the state's benefit. As Foucault puts it, the discipline that the state employs to achieve its supremacy has to dominate and control the body to achieve its total subjection: "the discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces" (138). Thus, she has to regain her body and reclaim her authority, recreate her identity and challenge the state's ideals by narrating her story. Among the dystopian novels discussed in this chapter, Atwood's novel literally belongs to the tradition of *écriture féminine* and directly reflects the philosophies of the feminist writers on the role of women and their oppression in society. Since women in the totalitarian society are defined only through their social functions of procreation, are treated as "machines," and have no power over the autonomy of their own bodies, the only way to survive and resist the repression is to attempt to regain their bodies (Moyalon 282). Writing, subsequently, becomes the avenue for the reconstruction and liberation of the woman's body, which has been taken away from her, rendering her voiceless and powerless. As Cixous underlines in her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," writing enables woman to "return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display" (395). Since the woman is reduced to being the servant of the militant male, his shadow, she has to rebel and let her body be heard through writing,—“an act which will not only 'realize' the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being.” But also give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal.

Narrating her own story thus becomes essential for Offred, because through writing she recreates her body, reconstructs her identity, and remains human. Offred, the main protagonist in Atwood, always refers to her body as something over which she does not have control anymore, something that is foreign or distant from her, something that is needed by the governing elite and thus treated as their property. In the totalitarian society, where as a result of the military coup, religious fundamentalists obtain governmental power, women who can still reproduce become a “national resource,” as nuclear pollution has rendered most women infertile (Atwood 85). Her role now is to give birth, and, if she is unable to accomplish it, she will be labeled an “unwoman” and sent to the Gilead camp to toil laboriously until she dies. Aunts indoctrinate Handmaids to think of themselves as “seeds,” but Offred refuses to be considered just a seed: she feels that as a human being she is entitled to have the ownership over her own body and herself (25). Thus, since she is denied the ownership of her body, she must reclaim it through her story. As Mautner thomas assures ,” Offred “refigures” her lost body “through the text, as she imagines the narrative as a metaphorical body” (356).The dismembered body is vividly present in this novel and becomes the metaphor for Offred’s lost body to the ruthless values , one she must reconstruct through her story. Images of and references to body parts can be detected throughout the whole novel ( 104). In this dystopia, females are only viewed as “two legged wombs” (176); the doctor who examines Offred “deals with a torso only” (78); the image of hands reoccurs multiple times when Offred thinks how “empty” they seem to her, as they “could be held, but not seen” (Atwood 62). When Offred has memories of her mother, she confesses that she feels like a “missing person” and expresses the incredible urge to hold a human body, “ Without it I too am disembodied. I can listen to my own heartbeat against the bedsprings, I can stroke



myself, under the dry white sheets, in the dark, but I too am dry and white . . .

running my hand over a plateful of dried rice; it's like snow. There's something dead about it, something deserted" (132).

When women all of a sudden become powerless over night as a result of the military coup that establishes the rule of the dictator , Offred recalls that she thought as if somebody had “cut off [her] feet” (Atwood). *The Handmaid's Tale*, the state prescribes which social function each person will serve for the welfare of the country as a whole. Thus, individual feelings or ambitions are disregarded, as dystopias, according to Martin Kessler, “posit a perfectly malleable . . . human nature incapable of experiencing any emotion or exercising any judgment outside of the prevailing . . . frame of reference” (568). Consequently, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, when girls reach the age of sixteen they are prohibited from choosing their future occupations because they are not in control of how their bodies will be used.

Griselda Pollock criticizes upon the failure of Traditional notion of modernity created by the traditional writers and artists in their literature at by putting male at the centre undermining the role of woman in the society. Such literature excluded the possibility of feminine equivalents to its heroes of modern life. The solitary and independent life of the male was not open to women. The sexual division of public from private in the nineteenth century prohibited women from strolling alone in the city. Offred further remembers the past memory and the negative treatment of Patrick after giving divorce 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, “ 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). The 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. 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. She feels she is ruined and lost in the modern society. Offred just remembers the past days and she has disillusionment created by the modern ideologies and culture. Modernity robs Offered instead enlightening her.

Finally, 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 critics especially after twentieth century. In the modern period, new feminist critics came with some new thought and ideologies to redefine past history about women written in art and literature. In addition, they raised the voice for the justice of the women and tried to review the 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 neglected. Therefore, 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. The thesis explored the role of female, condition and sufferings of female even in modern capitalistic society. The females were made invisible, used only for the male gaze as commodity value.

Margret Atwood published a collection of story to show the historical scenario of middle class women in nineteenth century modern city like America. Even after the great revolutions like French Revolution and World War II, though many things changed, the condition and status of women could not be changed. Atwood has 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 in the modern city. Rather she has to face many sorts of insult and humiliations. Therefore, this thesis tries to raise the question upon western philosophy of civilization that cannot be justifiable for the all citizens and all human. Atwood shows 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. Atwood has dealt this very situation 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.

The condition of the middle class female as in modernity is problematic due to their unclear identify and agency in the patriarchal society. The objectives to use this theoretical technique is to highlight the ultimate life that is painful, desperate and isolated getting return back to their original place. Those females are ruined due to patriarchy. Woolf questions modernity as oppressive project for females. Middle class women in the modern capitalistic society where they are always used as commodity having negative identity among the so- called educated and civilized male. *The Handmaid's Tale* shows the exact life of the ambitious female who was attracted to the modernity, wanted to develop them, wanted to get education but they were used as the tool for the males and for the economical enhancement of the society only.

The life of those females in modern society was not valuable, was not given value and not regarded positively. Therefore, the female in city migrated from country sides could not sustain them in the rich city, had to return to the village cutting off the all-temporary rations in the city, and lived an isolated and separated life. For instance, the main character who has to be back at the end of her life though many males had relationship with her. Even her husband gives divorce, takes the decision about daughter Anna, and takes himself back to Britain. Ultimately, Offred returned to her original place east Ontario and lives her fragmented life as the gift of modernity.

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