

# **Intensification of Inter-gender Domination by Intra-gender Exploitation in**

## **Margaret Atwood's Novel *The Handmaid's Tale***

### **Chapter – One**

#### **Introduction**

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* can be regarded as a thought provoking novel about the domination of women by men. It presents a state where liberty for women is extremely restricted because of the new Christian government's policies. This new state, the Republic of Gilead, can be called a totalitarian regime based on fundamental puritan beliefs. This totalitarian tendency is described here in the novel by a woman called Offred. She is a Handmaid, a kind of breeding means for the republic. The Handmaids' only duty is to provide their Commander with children. Handmaids are those women who have had children out of marriage or either they or their partners have been twice married. Such women are arrested after being considered morally unfit, and taken to a "Re-Learning" center where they are forced to submit themselves and learn their new duty in life.

Due to serious low reproduction rates because of the widespread availability of birth control, biological, chemical warfare, and AIDS epidemic; it has become normal to have Handmaids assigned to bear children for elite couples who are sterile (316). Because of the reproduction crisis, birth control was banned and compulsory pregnancy tests were imposed upon females in the society. According to David Ketterer, "Atwood has imagined a late-20th-century future where a woman's ability to procreate is of paramount importance since disease and pollution have led to a catastrophic decline in the birthrate. Given this situation, the patriarchal Republic of Gilead, established as the result of a coup in New England." (209). The society

defines the women as wombs whose duty is to work as per interest of patriarchy. The society does not want to give any sort of freedom to women.

The women in Gilead are not the human beings for the patriarchy but they are the tools by which the patriarchy can take benefit for the betterment of the barren land. Jane Armbruster claims “. . . the very existence of Gilead depends upon the suppression and manipulation of human feelings" (148) especially that of women.

Women feel excessive domination in totalitarian and monolithic patriarchy.

Individual freedoms have been repealed for the supposed benefit. In other words, the only people truly benefitted from the new order are the male elites in society. Females especially the sexually-enslaved Handmaids experience unbelievable oppression at the hands of their male. Furthermore, even some women have been fooled to the oppressive tendencies of the new regime by the presence of indoctrinating Aunts.

Most women in this society experience very little freedom. They have to belong to their male Commanders for every matter. They must give up their will to the males. Their very names imply that they are merely tools used to denote to whom they belong. They are not identified by their names. Offred remembers that she does not have her own name. According to Patricia F. Goldblatt, Offred, “. . . no longer owns a name; she is “Of Fred,” the concubine named for the man who will impregnate her” (278). The Handmaids in Gileadean society are identified by adopting their Commanders’ name. Offred, the protagonist of the novel, remembers her real name but she never reveals it.

In the Gileadean society, the females are under the surveillance of the Aunts. Their freedom is almost restricted in a sense that they cannot implement their own decision in the society and / or family. The Handmaids' activities are highly monitored in their public move. More importantly, the Handmaids are restricted to get involved

in the jobs by which they can become independent. Immediately after the new government “. . . women were fired from their jobs, lost the rights of abortion and birth control, were subjected to arranged marriages” (Peter G. Stillman and S. Anne Johnson 73). In Gilead, the Handmaids lost almost all their rights. In the society, the males are given the full responsibility for maintaining and running the theocratic society but the females are not even given the chance to get involved in the jobs. It indicates that there is gender partiality. More importantly, one group of women is deployed as the means to exploit other women to run that theocratic society. Here actually women are used to control the women themselves in order to help for the regulation of the patriarchal society. Because of this strategy, inter - gender domination intensifies.

Atwood has deliberately posed some females on the powerful positions and some other females on the sub-ordinate position to depict the existing exploitation in Gilead. The Aunts are the best example of such powerful women in the novel. The patriarchy knows the best way to control the women in the society is by using females themselves; otherwise it is almost impossible to rule over the women. Professor Pieixoto in the novel’s epilogue clearly notes, “. . . the best and most cost-effective way to control women for reproductive and other purposes was through women themselves. For this there were many historical precedents; in fact, no empire imposed by force or otherwise has ever been without this feature: control of the indigenous by members of their own group” (320). From this it can be said that the Gileadean history is the history of exploiting some people by the use of some other people. Here in the novel the Aunts are used to exploit another sort of females.

By creating hierarchy among the women, the patriarchy divides them. Among the women, the Aunts in the society are at the topmost level. Since they have a bit

more power, they exercise it over other women. However, the Aunts are also the victims of a male hierarchy. The Aunts are responsible for not only supporting the Gileadean rule but also involve at reeducating to the Handmaids at the Rachel and Leah Reeducation Center. According to Armbruster, “. . . women are selected, imprisoned, and trained as childbearing handmaids to reverse plum” (147). They teach Handmaids’ duty as childbearing machine. Ofwarren, one of the Handmaids in the novel, gets ready to beget a child for new society. Moreover, the Aunts are also accountable for directing the females who are not Handmaids. All these facts indicate that the Handmaids are exploited by the Aunts to proceed the male theocratic reign in the society.

Almost every activity of the Handmaids is controlled by the Aunts. When women are divided into different groups, the upper level women dominate the women who are at the bottom. Armbruster states, “A class system encourages women to control one another” (147). Offred is surprised when she sees an aunt’s complete control of every activity of her friend Moira. The Aunts determine when the Handmaids take their breaks. For how long the breaks are. They also decide the weight of the Handmaids in Gilead. They punish the Handmaids when they are overweight. Furthermore, the Handmaids are also controlled on the food items. Vitamins and mineral are necessary for them but no ‘coffee or tea’. The Commanders rather than involving themselves to dominate the women they use some elite women to dominate and regulate the new system in Gilead. In fact, the Aunts are thus exploited by the males to exploit the Handmaids.

Aunt Elizabeth and Aunt Sara scrutinize almost every activity of the Handmaids in Gilead. They are forbidden to speak aloud. Inside the household, the Aunts monitor every move of the Handmaids whereas armed guards called Angels

carefully guard outside world of Gilead. “It establishes a strict moral code supported by public ceremonies, the omnipresent fear of the Eyes, and the mute warning proclaimed by the hooded and robed dead who hang along the wall. Squealing on your fellows is rewarded, and trust is dangerous” (Stillman and Johnson 73). The women are asked not to trust or doubt others people. If anyone goes beyond the societal rule, they are severely punished. Showing the executed people who have crossed the norms of Gilead, the women are threatened.

The males have assigned some duties to the Aunts. Amongst these, the first duty of the Aunts is to efface the women’s ‘self’. Therefore, the Handmaids cannot remember their previous life and cannot resist to the new system. The second goal is to instruct women how to deceive other women therefore unity amongst the females can be destroyed. Offred remembers that she cannot take with her friends even in mealtime. She notes Moira’s remarks, “Where can we talk” (81)? Creating communication gap, the Aunts want disharmony among the marginalized women. From this it is clear that the inter-gender exploitation is further intensified by the intra-gender exploitation in Gilead. This novel clearly reveals the women’s sexuality, which is extremely appropriated and manipulated by men using some women in the patriarchy of Gilead.

In Gilead, the Handmaids should be conscious because all their activities are strictly monitored. Offred and her friend Moira could not communicate each other. Offred says, “I couldn't talk to her for several days; we looked only, small glances . . . we avoided each other during the mealtime line-ups in the cafeteria and in the halls between classes” (81). They could not keep friendship since it is doubtful. They cannot share anything because the Gileadean society takes it as a threat. Therefore, they avoid each other even during the mealtime in the canteen. The Aunts supervise

every move of all the women in Gilead especially that of Handmaids. If they are thought to undermine the Gileadean rule, their behaviors will be reported. If anything is suspected, they become the victim of Aunts' severe punishment.

Offred describes how the aunts teach the new culture. First they teach forgetfulness. Then they teach that women's struggles for equality and autonomy caused all the rape and violence committed against women before Gilead. They also teach that restrictions on mobility and communication are protecting the handmaids from the rape and violence brought upon them by feminism. (Armbruster 147)

The Aunts teach the Handmaids the new culture of the new society. They subtly teach that struggle for equality causes violence. For that the Aunts use the pornographic films of pre-Gileadean society. Teaching such idea the Aunts are preparing the Handmaids for breeding for the barren Gilead. The Aunts teach the Handmaids that all the activities done to them by their male commanders are acceptable. The Handmaids silently realize everything happened to them is because of themselves. The Aunts use Janine's gang rape as a weapon to teach other Handmaids.

Gilead is exceptionally misogynistic. The barren Gilead control women's reproductive capacities. Due to the lack of the fertile women, some females who are supposed rich enough to reproduce are imprisoned for that purpose. "Fertile women are rare (men by patriarchal definition are not infertile), and Commanders, the rulers of the society, want children. If a Commander's wife is unable to bear children, a fertile woman must be brought in to be impregnated by him" (Stillman and Johnson 71). The Handmaids are fertile women for the barren Gilead.

In the novel, the author depicts a future patriarchal world where almost all women are victimized. Atwood states that there is power only in the hands of the

males and the females are always exploited. Almost all women are victimized and the most victimized women are Handmaids. They are “. . . trained in deference, self-abnegation, and service, prepared only for pregnancy, their status and purpose made evident by their uniforms and their names” (Stillman and Johnson 71). The Handmaids show the fact of women’s being oppressed through their subordinated position in a male-dominated society. Simone de Beauvoir claims, “. . . women’s independent successes are in contradiction within her femininity, since the true is required to make herself object, to be other. . . to be a ‘true women’ she must accept herself as Other” (1000). It is so because the patriarchy treats women as a second sex. They are considered as the essential ‘other’ but male is considered as subject who is assumed to represent humanity in general. It is social construction that based on male domination, which treats the women as commodities.

By creating binary opposition, male takes advantages. They consider themselves as active and ‘self’ whereas women as other passive creatures. Beauvoir claims that the sense of ‘other’ is not natural but is defined by ‘self’. They reduced female no more than a sexual object. She discloses the important truth about women’s oppression in history. For her, woman’s subordinated location originates from her confinement to the virtue of otherness. Woman is the other because she is not-man. Being a woman, she will never be like man, the ‘self’, who can define the meaning of his own being. Beauvoir claims that “. . . she would be quite embarrassed to decide *what she is*; but this not because the hidden truth is too vague to be discerned: it is because in this domain there is no truth” (998). The concept of gender is created just to dominate the females. Women’s domination mainly results from their subordination to men.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the elite class females are seen to have become dependent on the males by obeying what the males say to them to dominate the marginalized females. In the society, it is the male mechanism, which wants to lengthen male chauvinism by employing the females to dominate the females themselves. In the text, the aristocratic women, the Aunts, are used by the males to prolong patriarchal hegemony.

In the society, woman is justified by her role as a mother. She should agree in this point. The society train her be a good mother and a good woman. She does not have control over her own body. According to Beauvoir, a woman is “. . . required in every case to forget self” (995). The society force them to forget their ‘self’ i.e. identity. She is always needed to behave like a woman denying her own ‘self’. The woman’s oppression is the result of her role of a mother in the society.

The patriarchy dominates women in all areas. According to M. H. Abrams, patriarchal society is “. . . conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economical, social” (89). It controls and oppresses women by creating hierarchy in the family. The patriarchal society knows the weakness of human being especially that of women. If they divide women into different categories like the Wives, the Handmaids, the Aunts, the Marthas, the Econowives, the Unwomen, the widows, and the prostitutes, it makes them easy to control and continue their interest in the society. The society creates obstacles in the unity of females thereby making it easy to impose intra- gender torture.

Patriarchal society identifies the women as mother as well as a submissive wife. Females' role in the society is only to procreate so as to continue the generation. “The essential basis of women's inferiority lies in the immanent nature of childbearing” (Kara Granzow 46). In this regard, females are taken as childbearing

machines. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, through the Aunts, the males want to teach the Handmaids their role of child bearing.

In the novel, Offred is imposed to mother a child. Therefore, it can be said that the patriarchy always manipulates the sentiments of the females. Male dominance of the female sex leads to gender inequality. It is the heterosexual practice which is the centre of women's exploitation. In this regard, "Rich suggests that heterosexuality is the political institution that is core to women's oppression" (Karin A. Martin 246). The heterosexuality is a politics of patriarchy under which males impose their power upon the females. Under such institution, women's identity is reduced to a merely sexual object.

Being a beautiful thing for sexual use, men reduce women's identity in the society as a mere reproductive machine. MacKinnon states, ". . . gender as a division of power is discoverable and verifiable through women's intimate experience of sexual objectification, which is definitive of and synonymous with women's lives as gender female"(535). Creating the gender role, the society always dominates the women. It reduces the women as an object like breeding tools. Social objectification of women is vibrantly portrayed in the novel.

*The Handmaid's Tale* is a story of pathetic and even helpless creatures to whom the males nakedly imposed their power. The novel represents how a group of women is controlled and oppressed by powerful men. The Commanders are the leaders of the Gileadean republic who have power to control and regulate the society. The feminists believe that gender has been constructed by males to control females in patriarchal societies. Millett ". . . argues that consent for a male domination of women therefore, is necessarily ideologically obtained" (Patricia Ticineto Clough and Kate

Millett 476). The patriarchal takes the consent of women to exploit them. MacKinnon further claims:

Women notice that sexual harassment looks a great deal like ordinary heterosexual initiation under conditions of gender inequality. Few women are in a position to refuse unwanted sexual initiatives. That consent rather than non-mutuality is the line between rape and intercourse further exposes the inequality in normal social expectations. So does the substantial amount of male force allowed in the focus on the woman's resistance, which tends to be disabled by socialization to passivity. (532)

The practice of heterosexuality makes easy to take the consent of women's exploitation. The mechanism is quite enough to control and regulate the women. Actually, *The Handmaid's Tale* depicts the two major forms of women's oppression under patriarchy i. e. motherhood and sexuality.

Motherhood is a main issue in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. The novel portrays a monolithic and despotic society where the concept of motherhood is distorted. The women's major role is to breed children. The society has always convinced women that a woman is a mother. In this way by instructing the females about their roles as wives and mothers, the Gileadean society makes the females the childbearing machines. In other words in Gilead, women's one and only job is mothering. In the society, women's status is no more than the bearers of children. If they fail to fulfill male's desire, they are charged as 'barren' because of which they happen to lose their own identity.

Women should respect themselves, their experiences as a mother so as to be free from the extreme domination of patriarchy. They should work women's own

liberation. They should have “. . . ultimate goal to change the world by promoting gender equality” (Lois Tyson 91). Otherwise the patriarchy exploit them in all ways- their sexuality and motherhood. Because of the institution of motherhood, women’s bodies are manipulated for male use. They are exploited and oppressed in the name of their sexuality and motherhood.

Hence, women are not complete human being but they are reduced to their role. In Gilead, women are categorized into different functions such as, reproductive prostitutes, domestic prostitutes, and sex prostitutes. MacKinnon “. . . argues that women's oppression is constructed through all sexuality” (Martin 246). They simply become tools of patriarchal appropriation of female sexuality. In one way or another, females are being exploited in different names.

According MacKinnon sexuality becomes the major tool of men’s domination and control of women. It is the key instrument of gender inequality as well. The institutionalized heterosexuality is a ‘form of power’ of male in the society. “Women and men are divided by gender, made into the sexes as we know them, by the social requirements of heterosexuality” (MacKinnon 533). She believes that homosexuality is the centre point of male power. Because of the institutionalized heterosexuality, the patriarchy has created gender inequality i.e. male as superior and female as inferior.

*The Handmaid’s Tale* reveals the nature of patriarchal society, which is full of male sexual violence of female sex. As MacKinnon believes that “Sexuality is that social process which creates, organizes, expresses, and directs desire,' creating the social beings we know as women and men, as their relations create society” (516). In Gileadean society women are imposed and objectified. The society imposed its power and interest upon the women.

The central focus of this thesis is the oppression of women by women themselves within the social institution of gender as depicted in the novel. Reading Atwood's text from the point of view of feminism, the readers would get some knowledge about how gender roles are truly social and cultural constructs under which women are victimized and oppressed. It means gender is a social construct that helps the patriarchy control and oppress the females.

In this dissertation, I will try to study how patriarchy celebrates the maternity of the women and treats them as objects in the novel. It divides women into different categories and gives some females more power than the rest of the others, which makes them easy to oppress the women's maternity and sexuality. To accomplish their goal, the privileged women, the Aunts, are assigned to brainwash the Handmaids like Offred and Ofglen to their role as surrogate mothers. The male dominated society knows that the most effective way to control women is none other than women themselves. To meet their mission, at first, Aunts destroy the history of women, their identity and teach them the role of women in Gileadean society.

In patriarchal society, women are oppressed and subordinated in the name of sexuality and motherhood. In such society, women have no autonomy. Their bodies become sexual objects. They do not have even the material right. They in fact become mothers without their own choice. In Gilead, they are forced to become pregnant. In addition, they are brainwashed that after becoming the mothers their life would be more meaningful than that of the past. Women in such a cruel world of male domination are nothing but objectified. In a despotic society like Gilead they are reduced as the sexual objects of men. Women are helplessly willing to subjugate and debase themselves for the sake of love. Actually to oppress the female sexuality and identity, females themselves are diplomatically used. By making some females like

Aunts a bit more powerful, patriarchy controls other marginalized women - like Wives, Handmaids, or Marthas. Women, in this system live constantly under the suffocated observation of the Aunts.

## **Chapter – Two**

### **Objectification of Women's Body:**

#### **The Politics of Heterosexuality**

*The Handmaid's Tale* explores how Gileadean patriarchal mechanism has objectified women's body. They are treated as sexual objects. In the society women's 'self' is dangerous. They are not humanized rather they are objectified. Women are controlled almost every area; they are not permitted to go wherever they like, to do whatever they want. More importantly they do not get possession of their own body. In Gilead women are not permitted to read and write. By controlling women's mind and body, the authorities more easily control them specially their bodies. The Gileadean society wants to control women's bodies, their reproductive rights and their sex lives. The patriarchal society gives important focus on heterosexuality because it

is the heterosexuality that confirms the Gileadean patriarchal norms but the homosexuality destroys the expectation of it.

The women's bodies, especially that of Handmaids, are exploited in the name of sexual relationships. The Handmaid's sexuality is violated. The Handmaids cannot show their any part of their body. They must cover their whole body with red clothes not to reveal their sexual attractions to males. Rich “. . . argues that sexuality and gender relations are controlled together and are two tightly bound systems of oppression” (Martin 246). The females have been sexually bounded with male by which they easily become victimized. In Gilead the Handmaids must not show their sexual desire with their male partners.

In the patriarchal society the males think that the females are born for the purpose of males. The males “. . . possess women and that women's bodies are, socially, men's things” (MacKinnon 647). Males think that the body of women as their own property and use as well as misuse them whenever they like and however, they like. In the novel, the Handmaids are used as if they are the Commanders' property. In fact, male rapes the women as if their bodies are made for it.

In Gilead, women's sexual desire is seen as sin. If they show the sexual desire, it is supposed as a threat and insult to the theocratic society. The absence of pleasure in sexual act divides the Handmaid's body and her identity. This is what patriarchy of Gilead searching for. In such a condition, nobody searches her identity of her 'self'. Gilead makes the women's body a machine, which has nothing to do with it. The patriarchy plays its role on the Handmaids. Offred believes that her 'self' that her identity is “. . . apart from the body” (169). The Offred's sexuality is omitted. She does not have any emotion and feeling while her Commander was doing his duty i.e.

‘national’ duty of Gilead. The ‘vagina, is the only part with which the Commander works with because it is the main location that leads to the womb. Her other body parts remain covered. While doing this mechanical duty, the Commander does not uncloth her because her other body parts except vagina are considered as useless. The Commander’s only job is sending the semen into the surrogate womb.

All the Handmaids in Gilead have feeling of physical fragmentation. Their body is divided into parts and the society value only reproductive fertile womb; their other organs become insignificant. Not only at the time of national duty but also during the medical examination, the doctor asks Offred to open all clothes unnecessarily. She remembers, “I’m naked I lie down on the examining table, on the sheet of chilly crackling disposable paper” (70). The naked female body pleases to the male so no sooner had the male doctor got chance than he made her necked and satisfied his body. In the patriarchal society even the doctor loses the sense of humanity.

Furthermore, the doctor, “. . . deals with a torso only” (70). In Gilead, the doctors are also like vultures who treat the women especially the Handmaids as dead animals. Their bodies are treated as a means to satisfy the patriarchy. They are not treated as something valuable. They have no right over their own body. Offred believes her body to be an ‘instrument’ over which she has no right; it is of the society. In Gileadean regime, the Handmaids’ bodies are nothing but reduced only limited work of reproductive organ. It is identified in terms of parts rather than whole. During the examination period the doctor wants to seduce her. The doctor plays with her sensitive body parts. “His hand is between my legs” (70). Instead of doing his duty, the male doctor also tries to blackmails her.

Even if most of the males in Gilead are sterile, one cannot say that they are so because “It is illegal to say that a Commander is sterile” (Angela Laflen 105).

Officially the male are not barren; it is only the women who can be so. At the hospital when the doctor attempts to seduce her, the doctor makes it clear: “Most of those old guys can't make it anymore, he says. Or they're sterile” (70). So he wants to give a child for her or for Gilead. This is a good example that how the patriarchy defines the women and the men.

The body of the Handmaids is passive because it is not allowed to be touched with the world. Offred does not have any power over her own body. It is the society which uses the according to its interest so that it loses even the sensational quality within her body. When Offred touches herself, she does not have any feeling. She says, “There’s something dead about it, something deserted” (114). The Handmaids are treated as if they are useless objects. They become so passive that the things may happen on them but they can never act. Offred says, “I am like a room where things once happened ” (114). Since Offred has been controlled by the male mechanism, she loses her feeling and emotion. The Gileadean society has looted her everything that she had so that she does not have any feeling. It makes the Handmaids only breeding tool for the society.

Equality between men and women in such a society is not possible because of the socially institutionalized heterosexuality. The patriarchal society always promotes it. The Gilead also tries to “. . . preserve heterosexuality and patriarchal heterosexual institutions such as marriage and child bearing and rearing” (Martin 252). If anybody tries to attempt to cross the boundary, they are socially outcast. The patriarchy strongly discourages the homosexual relation because if anybody follows it obviously let him or her to be free from patriarchal mechanism. In Gilead, Moira is lesbian that

is why she does not completely surrender with the society. She is even able to escape from the household. She is revolutionary in the society whereas other women cannot do so because they are under heterosexual male institution. In Gilead, the Handmaids are objectified especially in mothering tasks. Because of their subordinated position in Gilead, they are always exploited. The tradition of heterosexuality has very important role of exploiting the women's self. Because of this reason, women in the patriarchal society are oppressed. Due to role of maternity, women's sexuality is objectified.

The male dominated society knows the women's weaknesses so that it imposes its master plan to imprison the women in its grip. Creating the gender hierarchy and imposing the heterosexuality, the patriarchy controls the women and their role of mother. "Thus the intertwining of gender and sexuality was an attempt to create a mechanism for controlling and keeping in check the gender hierarchy, which was dependent on a particular set of sexual relations"(Martin 252). The society makes the women depended on men.

In the name of gender and sexuality, the females are being exploited in the patriarchal society. According to Martin, ". . . we find that gender and sexuality can be used to control each other in different ways at different historical moments. They are not trans-historically connected" (255). It is the gender role that intensifies the sexual domination on women in the name of motherhood. She claims that gender is used to control sexuality and vice versa. These two ideas are used from the history of time to even future to hold their interest in the society.

In the Gileadean society, Women are sexual toys. Their position in the society is no better than a thing of commodity. They are impregnating machines. Rape, pornography as well as prostitution are daily activities of Gilead. Pornographic film becomes a means to prepare women for their role of mother as well as it becomes a

means to exploit the women every way. Here in the Gileadean society, some powerful women like Aunts and Wives are used to show such films and prepare the Handmaids to bear any kind of domination and oppression. Gilead uses “. . . women as agents of social control” (Leslie J. Miller 345). The operation of male is possible only by using females.

The Gileadean society follows almost all means to enslave the women and their body. The society clearly knows that the patriarchy can survive if the females are sexually enticed to the heterosexual relationships by one means or another means. The patriarchy does not even hesitate to show the pornographic films to the females in order to prepare and/or suggest their feminine roles in the society. According to Linda Williams, Bernard Williams and Robert Post “. . . heterosexual pornography shows, once this form of pornography became available to women consumers as well as to men, the longstanding males-only tradition of pornographic misogyny was disrupted” (8). In Gilead women are not human beings but as sexual object and \or the child breeding means. Moreover, heterosexuality is a means by which the patriarchy exploits the females by their consent.

Gilead seems using the Holy Bible to exploit the women. The sexual relationship between the Commander and his handmaid Offred in the presence of Serena Joy is “. . . just as the biblical handmaid Bilhah served her master Jacob whose wife Rachel could not conceive” (Slonczewski 120). During the act, the Wife Serena Joy “. . . holds my hands” (104). Offred lies just on the bed. Even during the ceremony the Handmaids can’t show her body parts except her legs. The Commander penetrates his penis her as if he attempts to impregnate his own wife. It means he does not hesitate to fuck her. “A Handmaid is fucked by a Commander as she lies between the legs and holds the hands of the Commander's Wife, in Offred's case a one- time

gospel singer whose real name is Pam but who called herself Serena Joy” (Ketterer 210). Offred is so critical in this mechanical process of sex. Despite the fact of her physical exploitation by the Commander, she never gets such a social status which Serena Joy does have.

During the mechanical process of impregnation the handmaids are supposed to stay as passive recipients. Their ‘body’ and ‘self’ are separated. It is so because the handmaid mentally does not involve in the process; her body is forced to be involve in the act. Because of it men always dominates women in patriarchal system. In the novel, Offred thinks the sexual course is an act of rape in disguise because she is not emotionally involved rather she is imposed. It divides woman as her ‘self’ and her ‘body’.

In Gilead, women especially the Handmaids are compelled to think their roles as mother. The patriarchy of Gilead does not value of women’s identity. Their own desires and feelings are not important for it. Women are manipulated for the males’ needs. In the society, women are exploited in every way and in every time “Our Gilead surrounds us like air” (Armbruster 149). The male dominated society thinks them as their property so its power surrounds everywhere like air.

The Handmaids sexual desire is strongly controlled. They cannot show their sexual hunger. It should be suppressed. Offred in the novel describes sex as the suppression of her sexual desire. “. . . hunger to touch something, other than cloth or wood....hunger to commit the act of touch” (21). When she has excessive desire of sexual intercourse, she could express it; she could not fulfill it. Rather she is forced whenever she does not want to have a sex. It is all for the sake of society.

When Offred meets Nick, her mysterious lover, she immediately shows her sexual hunger. Offred unusually reflects her sexual desire, which is suppressed due to

the dystopian rule: "...I remain alive, continue to repeat its bedrock prayer: '*I am, I am. I am, still.*' I want to go to bed, make love, right now. I think of the word *relish*" (293). From this expression, we can understand that she cannot enjoy the genuine sexual pleasure with the Commanders. Rather she is just performing her duty assigned by Gilead.

The Handmaid, Offred tries to satisfy her sexual desire through the socially legalized and institutionalized-heterosexual relations though it fails to satisfy her. She becomes a mistress of different men but none can make her satisfied. Her relationship with three men, Nick, Luke, and the Commander are worthy to note. They merely use her as their way. Even if she is involved with different person, nobody loves her or behaves her as if she is a human being. She even cannot confirm whether Luck, her husband in pre-Gileadean society, loves her. She says, "I was nervous. How was I to know he loved me" (60)? The patriarchy always keeps the women in confusing state so as to exploit them.

Even if Offred is exploited in Gilead, she never thinks otherwise towards the society. She becomes loyal to all her men. The society teaches her to be silent. She knows how to act in such a dystopian society. She was taught how not to think: "The mistress was thinking about how not to think. The times were abnormal . . . he was a monster" (155). The society oppresses the women asking them to keep quiet. It knows that if women begin to speak, it cannot exercise its power; it cannot exploit them according to its necessity, it cannot make them puppets or tools to breed. So using the elite Aunts it indoctrinates them. Women are only as playthings for men. If they can satisfy the males, their socialization procedure becomes easy; otherwise their status as females is further worsened. Offred gives up her freedom and then surrenders her life

to the society because she has known that she could not bring any change though she fights for.

Moreover, the Gileadean society controls women's sexuality mainly through sexual cruelty and violence. MacKinnon says, ". . . sexual harassment, prostitution, female sexual slavery, and pornography" (529) are the chief cruelty of the gender exploitation. Life of women in the society is no better than sexual slave. The males use them as they want. During the monthly examination period the Handmaids are harassed by the male doctor. They are examined to confirm that whether their bodies are functioning properly for maternity. At this period the male doctor harasses them touching their breasts and other sexual organs unnecessarily.

Gilead uses pornography to exploit the lower class women so as to prepare them to accept male domination and their role of mother. It uses films as well as magazines. ". . . the magazines . . . had a pretty woman on it, with no clothes on, hanging from the ceiling by a chain around her hands"(48). Offred looks the necked picture of a pretty woman. She is frightened with it because it is hanged and necked. Such pornography and brutality make the women passive.

The society is a good example of female oppression where rape, killing and violence are routine. By such means it tries to control the women's body and maternity. According to Goldblatt, "Acts of love are reduced to institutionalized rapes, and random acts of violence, banishment to slag heaps, public hangings, endorsed public killings, bribery, deceit, and pornography all persist under other names in order to maintain a pious hold on women endorsed by the Gilead Fathers" (279). Using pornography and violence the society teaches the marginalized women subtly as they are nothing but sexual objects. The Handmaid Offred watches some pornographic movies of pre-Gileadean society. Such movies are played by the Aunts

in the Reeducation centre. This can be regarded as such unseen cultural screenplay of sexual violence against women.

The movie shows brutal scene of male sexual abuses to women. Offred recalls one of the horror movies shown to the women especially in the reeducation centre. “Women kneeling, sucking penises or guns, women tied up or chained or with dog collars around their necks, women hanging from trees, or upside-down, naked, with their legs held apart, women being raped, beaten up, killed” (128). In the films, women are humiliated, brutalized and cruelly behaved. They are asked to suck the penises; they are made necked, hanged, raped, beaten severely and their bodies are cut into pieces. Showing these kinds of movies Gilead prepares the women to accept everything without any question.

The patriarchy even thinks of the rape as a necessity of the society. In this regard, MacKinnon claims, “. . . rape as ‘violence not sex’ or ‘violence against women’ has been to separate sexuality from gender in order to affirm sex (heterosexuality) while rejecting violence (rape). The problem remains what it has always been: telling the difference” (646). To tell the different between male and female and to justify male as superior and female as inferior and to appropriate the patriarchal domination and oppression, the Gileadean society uses such pornography as a tool. The act of rape represents the unlimited male authority over the female body. It shows extreme control over female sexuality in the patriarchal society.

We can see hypocrisy in the Gilead. On the one hand, extra marital affair is totally prohibited but on the other hand they use sexual slaves i.e. Handmaids in the name of regulating the society. “Atwood demonstrates the alignment of women with an intellectually discredited but strategically useful mythology in her depiction of the women of Jezebel's, Gilead's brothel for its elite” (Hooker 286). At the intellectual

level the women's position in the society is worse. They are not identified as socially dignified ones rather they are prostitutes who can satisfy the elite males. The Gilead criticizes the prostitution but the upper class males use the prostitutes. Offred describes: "The official creed denies them, denies their very existence, yet here they are" (247). The official records of women's identity are dismissed. To efface the official record is to deny women as human beings. The Gilead does so as to objectify and commodify the women's body in the society.

The Handmaids are prostitutes who are like the material substances which meet males' necessity i.e. male sexual desire. Every woman learns her role in the Gileadean society. They are like commodity which is used in the exchange market. "Each has learned that a woman is a commodity, valued only for her appearance. Therefore it comes as no surprise that Atwood's protagonists measure their worth in terms of body" (Goldblatt 278). In Gilead all the women are identified with their role as sex workers and mothers. For instance, Moira is seen to have been as a sex worker at brothel. "When she is taken to Jezebel's as an 'evening rental' Offred discovers her old friend Moira among the prostitutes" (Hooker 286). Moira's appearance in the Jezebel's brothel is a next example of woman's position as commodity on the sexual exchange market.

It is not only Gilead which exploits the women but also pre- Gileadean society which was not free from it. Such rape and pornography were everywhere. It is never free from sexual violence to women. Women are always tortured, raped, beaten, cut into piece, killed in the bleak patriarchal society like Gilead. They use pornography to change the males' as well as females' mind; to tell that males are at superior level and female as inferior position. ". . . pornography alters the attitudes of its male audience toward rape and sexual violence against women"(Linda Williams, Bernard Williams

and Robert Post 11). Such pornography prepares the women to be acted upon and men act upon. The society does so to show its necked brevity on the innocence women.

The patriarchy of Gilead creates disharmony among women. One kind of women does not like the others. The society creates hatred upon women to rule over the females. Offred describes how Marthas hate her: “She thinks I may be catching, like a disease or any form of bad luck” (20). The Marthas behave with the Handmaids as if they are untouchable animals or any other such hatred objects. The Marthas feel the Handmaids as if they are ‘bad star’. Similarly the Commander’s Wife also hesitates to touch the Offred as her body contaminates her during the ceremony. The Gileadean society wants disharmony of women just to fulfill their mission.

The hypocritical society of Gilead bans the homosexual practices and extra-marital affair but it does not hesitate to rape an innocent woman. The Commander of Offred rapes her in front of his wife, Serena Joy. Serena Joy cries silently after the act of rape. According to Amery Bodelson:

In Gilead, abortions, homosexuality, and adultery have all been banned, but the patriarchal regime has institutionalized rape as a way to propagate the theocratic society. Instead of living with the modern fear of being assaulted by a stranger, handmaids are subjected each month to ritualized, clinical rapes by the very men in whose houses they reside. (65)

The patriarchy thinks that if the homosexuality is banned from practice, it helps the males to be superior to females. But homosexuality makes the females more superior to the males. The practice of homosexuality leads the females “. . . to be superior to

men” (Martin 251). However, the society never entertains the homosexual activities of the females.

Moiras as a lesbian does not get afraid of the Aunts or any Commander in the society, the society cannot make her as an object and control her for long. Moira is the only exceptional woman who possesses real power over her body since she is not at the abyss of heterosexuality. She can resist to the patriarchal state. She does not accept the role the society assigns her as a surrogate mother. Rather she dares to attend the Rachel and Reeducation Centre by wearing the dress of the Aunts. Since the patriarchy always wants males to be superior and females as inferior, it bans any sort of threat to heterosexuality. The heterosexuality confirms the male’s power in the society.

In order to oppress the women’s body, females themselves are tactfully used in Gilead. Females are objectified in a sense that their role is to beget the children for the barren Gilead. By making some females like Aunts a bit more powerful, the patriarchy easily controls females. For example every month, when Offred is at the right period of fertility, she must have sexual intercourse without any resistance with her Commander while Serena Joy assists him holding Offred’s hands. Marginalized women like, Handmaids and Marthas, are highly controlled by the State. Women, in this system live regularly under the surveillance of the Aunts as well as other Eyes. The patriarchy seems to sustain its reign by emphasizing the heterosexuality at the cost of homosexuality. They give prime focus on heterosexuality because it is the heterosexuality that affirms the Gileadean patriarchal norms but the homosexuality destroys the expectation of the patriarchy.

## **Chapter – Three**

### **Motherhood and Oppression**

The novel deals with how the patriarchal society celebrates the motherhood of women. Using the motherhood as a means, the women are exploited in the Gileadean society. The society exaggerates the idea of motherhood and exploits the women. Due to such exaggeration, the women in the patriarchy compel to be mother. At the one hand, the society celebrates the motherhood; at the same time uses it as a tool to suppress the women every way. To oppress the women and their maternity, the some elite class women are used. Such lucky women are the Aunts. Through the narration of Offred, it is understood that women are oppressed and subordinated not only by the men but also by the females themselves.

The Handmaids in Gilead cannot show their sexual desire. They are intended to be seen as vessels having no sentiments and emotion in the new regime. Females are made the sex toys by the Commanders in Gileadean society. Their activity is strictly monitor. They are forced to wear large red clothes and show no skin even when performing their sexual duty. Armbruster states, “Handmaids wear floor-length, long-sleeved, immobilizing dresses with headdresses and veils. The headdresses restrict verbal communication and make it impossible to see to the right or left, while

the veils make it impossible to see ahead” (148). They are moved from one male to another when they fail to produce a child.

To oppress the maternity of women in the society, religion is used as a means. Using the Bible the theocratic state exploits women and their role as a mother. To control the women, “Gilead adds its patriarchal religion, its desperate quest for fertile (white) wombs, its indoctrination (in "Re-education" or "Red Centers") of Handmaids . . . the narrowness and low skill requirements of their tasks, and the extremely truncated scope for self-expression, initiative, or independent action by women (Stillman and Johnson 73). The patriarchy of Gilead uses religion as a means to control of women’s maternity so that the theocratic regime can be lengthened with no obstacles.

The patriarchy of Gilead oppresses the women’s material role using religion. From beginning, there appears the lack of a religious mechanism, the church. “According to Atwood, the historical mistreatment of those marginalized in America because of race, religion, or gender is a direct ramification of an unjustified sense of national superiority” (Danita J. Dodson 69). The irony is that Gilead uses the religion without priest. In fact, the Commanders and the Aunts use the Bible to enslave other women in the society. The Aunts uses line of the Bible while educating the Handmaids. Here, Goldblatt claims that, “In *The Handmaid's Tale* the Bible is likewise the chief source of female repression. Words are corrupted, perverted, or presented out of context to establish a man's holy vision of women” (279). The Bible is biased for the women. It corrupts the women’s right of getting the individual freedom. Here what God says strengthens the maternal image of women like wives and the Handmaids.

The Commander reads the Bible to the women in the household and interprets according to his interest. “We can be read to from it, by him, but we cannot read. Our heads turn towards him, we are expectant, here comes our bedtime story” (98). The women cannot read and interpret it anymore. So it does not give individual identity for the women. It is the society that shape the females’ identity. The Commander after reading a text the Bible locks it as if it is a treasure.

It is our culture that helps women to suppress another sort of women in the name of institutionalized motherhood. When one gets birth as a female, she is supposed to beget children in order to keep up the generation and to be specific a society. In the name of such motherhood, the women's freedom is restricted. In this regard, Laura E. Casari views:

“Rich offers her analysis of its importance along with her vividly depicted experience of motherhood, an experience potentially desirable, but destroyed by the institutions in patriarchal culture. This combination of historical material and personal experience makes starkly clear that we have lost, in taking women's freedom from them, much that our culture sorely needs.” (206)

In the patriarchal society, the exploitation of women results from the experience of the socially constructed and institutionalized motherhood.

Education is another means by which men can control the women’s role of maternity. In the novel, the Red Center is apparently manipulated by the Gileadean state to educate the Handmaids. The women who do not follow the societal rule are either sent to reeducation center or severely punished by the state sponsored women in Gilead. “Those who do not fit the society’s norms are re-educated, expelled, or

executed” (Stillman and Johnson 71). The Aunts are such agents of the society who can teach or punish the marginalized women like the Handmaids:

For the generations that come after, Aunt Lydia said, it will be so much better. The women will live in harmony together, all in one family; you will be like daughters to them, and when the population level is up to scratch again we'll no longer have to transfer you from one house to another because there will be enough to go round. There can be bonds of real affection”. (171)

This kind of teaching regularly makes the Handmaids think nothing but accept everything of the society. Showing the better future the Aunts are manipulating the marginalized women. It compels them to agree to their tasks as mothers. By the help of education, the Handmaids are trained under the Aunts’ indoctrination to play the roles of reproductive machines for men. Atwood seems to provide a pitiable scene of male domination using some women like Aunts and Serena Joy over other like Offred, Moira, Ofwarren, Ofglen, etc. in the novel. This is the author’s criticism of the patriarchal regime’s control over its reproductive powers.

The patriarchal society expects women as “. . . docile, soft, passive, nurturant, vulnerable, weak, narcissistic, childlike, incompetent, masochistic, and domestic, made for child care, home care, and husband care” (MacKinnon 530). If the women become active in the society, the male domination is not possible. They cannot fulfill their evil motive; they cannot exploit women. So, the patriarchy wants to enslave women inside domestic periphery making them slaves to care the child, home, or even their husband. In Gilead marginalized women like Handmaids, domestic servant like Marthas are treated no more than children. The society cannot respect them as human being. According to Goldblatt, “To perpetuate the status-quo, women are kept

vulnerable and treated as children: girls must ask permission, dress in silly frocks, are allowed no money, play no part in their own self-determination” (279). They do not have their own ‘self’; they cannot do anything without taking permission from the Aunts or their male commanders.

Women who silently accept male interest are celebrated in Gilead and consequently they are given recognized positions in the society. Aunts are the examples of such women in the Gilead. “Women who comply or succeed are elevated as models, tokenized by success on male terms or portrayed as consenting to their natural place and dismissed as having participated if they complain” (MacKinnon 530). If they fail to maintain the male chauvinism, they become the victims of male oppression. Offred says they should remember the societal orders otherwise; they become the victims of brutal punishment. She says, “We should remember to do what we are told and not get into trouble, because if we do we will be rightfully punished” (296). If they cross any social border, the Aunts severely punish them. It is a group of Aunts themselves who are responsible for maintaining the inter-gender exploitation by supporting the intra-gender exploitation.

The regime of Gilead is such that it controls almost all activities of the females ranging from their household activities to the market activities. For instance, Offred is allowed to travel only to the center of Gilead for shopping and other household tasks “. . . here, shopping, is where you might see someone you know, someone you've known in the time before” (35). Only on the shopping time the Handmaids can cross the periphery of the house. They can see some people they know. In other time they are trapped into the four walls of the Commanders' house. In addition, she faces various kinds of physical as well as psychological barriers on the way for shopping created by males as well as females. “Offred's life is monitored in numerous other

ways as well. Guards posted at towers monitor her movements out of doors” (Laflen 106). Not only in the household but also everywhere the handmaids are supervised by the Gileadean agents. In fact, there are the state sponsored agents in the society who watch every public move of the women. Here the Aunts are ‘social agents’ who support the society in every way.

The females in Gilead are classified into different categories. They are forced to wear the clothes of different colors. The Handmaids are easily identified in the open field because they wear red suits. Ketterer believes the Handmaids are “. . . women with viable ovaries became ‘two-legged wombs’ . . . dressed in red habits and white-winged hoods, each, after a period of training, was assigned to a particular Commander and his sterile Wife” (209). The red color defines the Handmaids in Gilead. Other women also wear different sorts of clothes which also distinguish them in terms of their positions, roles, and identities in the society. In fact, each woman wears fixed identified clothes, which indicates her position and function in Gilead. Here what is important is the categorization of people. The patriarchy always divides people especially women into different groups, assign them different roles, and rule them, otherwise it is very difficult to them to exploit the women in the society.

In the infertile Gilead, the Handmaids are surrendered their duties of bearing children. The Handmaids’ every activity is observed by the males and the Aunts of that society. The Eye also supervises every trivial activity of the females. If their work is related to child bearing or reproduction, there is little surveillance but in other cases, they are instantly enquired. “Every step, every mouthful of food, every move is observed, reported, circumvented, or approved for the sake of the child she might carry to term. Her only worth resides in her biological function. Her dreams and desires are unimportant” (Goldblatt 278). The Handmaids are strictly monitored by

these men, cannot do anything else except for reproduction. It is not only women but also the males used to control the so called 'two legged-womb' in the society. From this point, we can interpret that the role of Handmaids is merely the reproduction of the child in Gileadean society.

The women feel suffocation due to the constant watch of omnipresent the Eyes and the Aunts. Inside the house the Aunts control and outside the house other males are assigned to do so. On the way Offred and her shopping friend, Ofglen proceed through a series of checkpoints controlled by such people. There is a Wall on the way to the shopping where executed dead bodies are hung. The people of the Gilead are forced to watch the public execution. "Men and women in Gilead are required to attend and participate in dramatic public hearings and executions, after which the bodies of the executed are displayed theatrically on the Wall, their faces hidden behind bags and a sign hung around their necks indicating the 'official' reason for their execution." (Laflen 107). The Wall is a place the so- called wrong doers are punished. There are often bodies hung on it and the women especially the Handmaids are supposed to watch the dead bodies. The patriarchy wants so just to weaken women's psychology from the resistance its hegemony.

The Wall also suggests the females that they should not cross the social boundaries. Otherwise their condition will be no more different than those of the executed persons. Offred says that she and Ofglen, ". . . stop, together as if on signal, and stand and look at the bodies." (42). It is not compulsory to look the hanged body on the wall. Even if the Handmaids are not forced to watch, the hanged bodies are for it. "Though Gilead forbids or limits many kinds of looking, the regime encourages people to look at the bodies on the Wall. Offred observes" (Laflen 107). The

Handmaids have no options; they do not have other way out rather they have to adjust themselves to the brutal patriarchal environment of Gilead.

In the family, the males have undefined, unnatural power who unexpectedly exploit the women. “The law defined domestic relations in terms of isolated households in which individual white male household heads exercised unchecked authority over their wives, children, servants, and slaves”( Laura F. Edwards 714). The base of patriarchy is the family where the male unlawfully exploits the women. The females’ position in the household is always supposed to be subordinated and dependent.

The females of the elite class are seen to be doubly marginalized whereas the females of the working class are seen to be triply marginalized in Gileadean society. The Handmaid, Offred, once remarks that “. . . the Commander is the head of the household. The house is what he holds” (91). The women do not have any natural right in the family. The wives are merely a voyeur. They are also helpless. Their condition is almost similar to that of the Handmaids in Gilead. The Commander’s control over his wife, Serena Joy is not significantly less than his control over Handmaids in Gilead. “Serena has begun to cry. I can hear her, behind my back. It isn't the first time. She always does this, the night of the Ceremony. She's trying not to make a noise” (101). At night when the Commander fucks the Handmaid, disturbed Serena cries silently. She does not expose her pain in front of other women in the household.

Serena Joy could not enjoy her life though she is from the elite family. She is not happy because she could not bear any child and fulfill the responsibility of motherhood. At home, she often sews in the sitting room. Usually, she devotes herself to some minor domestic affairs as “. . . she's sewing, in the sitting room, with her left

foot on the footstool, because of her arthritis” (22). Since she cannot beget children, she satisfies her thrust of mother making woolen children i.e. toys. Even if she is victimized by the patriarchy, she never treats well to other women at her house. In fact, she is sadistic women in the household. She has envy especially to the fertile handmaids. However, she is loyal to her husband.

The Handmaids are treated like toys. Furthermore, even if the Handmaids are treated like children in the household, Offred can watch television news after the impregnated ceremony. She is “. . . allowed to watch the news. It seems to be an unspoken rule in this household: we always get here on time, he's always late, Serena always lets us watch the news” (92). This is the one good thing for her she is allowed to watch the news on the television with her Commander. From this point, we can also say that the Commander's wife, Serena Joy has no power in the household. In front of the Commander, she is a helpless creature in Gilead.

In patriarchy, what most of the women have to face is the crisis of identification. When they are identified with other persons, they are identified only by their particular maternal roles. Those who fulfill the societal aspirations are called the good girls whereas those who cannot bear the children are known as the bad girls or whore. “The patriarchal ideology suggests that there are only two identities a woman can have. If she accepts her traditional gender role and obeys the patriarchal rules, she's a ‘good girl’; if she doesn't accept, she's a ‘bad girl’” (Tyson 88). They do not have their individual identity. If they follow the sexist, monolithic norms of child bearing and rearing, the society takes them positively and defines them as good girls in Tyson's words otherwise they are ‘whore’.

The patriarchy creates a kind of confusion among women's identity. Sometimes it celebrates the women's maternity; sometimes it makes them mother and

sometimes wives to serve their husbands, so called their life partner. “. . . women's position is multi-dimensional and that the various dimensions can exhibit relationships to fertility independently of one another” (Anju Malhotra, Reeve Vanneman and Sunita Kishor 282). There is no solid identity of females in Gilead in a sense that their identity is always shifting from daughter of somebody to the wife and the mother of somebody and the Handmaids of the commanders because of which they could never affirm their fixed and solid identity and hence they are exploited in the hands of males.

Similarly, the women in Gilead are taught to remain silent. The Commander teaches the duties of a wife i.e. to maintain the silence. If they remain silent, they never dare to unite and resist against the patriarchy. The Commander announces, “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. . . . And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved by childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety” (233). Taking the biblical reference, the Commander describes women’s position that is to be silent and perform duty of begetting children. “The aim of all suppression is to silence the voice, abolish the word, so that the only voices and words left are those of the ones in power” (Dodson 83). They are subtly taught to remain silence so that the patriarchy can assign them their different roles. For instance, the Marthas are assigned for household work of cooking, washing clothes and clean surrounding of home. Similarly, the Handmaids are for begetting and the Aunts are assigned for teaching the Handmaids their role of motherhood.

In traditional and monolithic patriarchy, women are used and exchanged by men. Their life is commodified. The patriarchy “. . . commodified private life” (Martha A. Starr 293) of women. They do not have private life. Their private life is

made a tool for child breeding work. Mother is one of the major social roles imposed on women in Gilead. No human feelings and sentiments of the females are recognized in the society.

The marginalized women are even not getting “Conjugal right, the right exercised by men, as husbands, over their wives” (Carole Pateman 447) in the new system. Offred remembers how she and her husband Luke enjoyed a lot in the pre-Gileadean society. She has her own daughter with Luke. She remembers her beautiful time with her family- Luke and her daughter; she says “Lying in bed, with Luke, his hand on my rounded belly. The three of us in bed, she kicking, turning over with me. Thunderstorm outside the window, that’s why she’s awake, they can hear.” (113). The beautiful family is torn immediately after the new Gileadean government began to rule. To control and dominate the women the patriarchy does everything whether that is better enough for the human civilization or worse that does not make any difference in it. Nevertheless, what is important for patriarchy is the control over ‘other’ in Beauvoir’s term.

Offred narrates her past life beautifully early in the book. She had a job, could make money for life. She enjoyed jogging every day. “. . . she had her own money and clothes, when she could jog and go to the laundromat, and when she had family and friends. She looks back with longing and love for her husband Luke and her daughter, reminisces about her friend Moira, and thinks of her mother” (Stillman and Johnson 73). Actually, she had everything that a happy family needs. She longs to have such life again. However, the dystopian society looted her everything and made her beautiful garden a desert.

It is not only females but also the low class males like Nick are also exploited in the patriarchal mechanism of Gilead. They are deprived of getting good jobs; they

are not permitted to get married. Offred sees many weaknesses with him. Offred comments, “. . . Nick the chauffeur as a questionable character: in a lowly job, with apparently some shortcoming because the regime had not issued him a woman.”(Stillman and Johnson 73). In such a dystopian society, no one can escape from the domination and exploitation. All the people are used to maintain so - called good society. If the males are exploited in male made society what about the condition of females.

In the Gileadean society, the women are deprived of job and possessing any property. To live a meaningful, dignified social life, independency is one fundamental aspect of human being. To be independent, economical independency is a must. “. . . women were said to need ‘meaningful’ jobs in the paid labor force: women ‘can find identity only in work that is of real value to society - for which, usually, our society pays’” (Starr 296). But to make them like slaves women are disqualified for any job soon after new rule is established.

Immediately after new government began to rule in Gilead, all the women are deprived of their jobs “We're being fired? I said. I stood up. But why?”(185) Offred surprisingly asks with the agent of new rule. He does not clearly answer but says it is a new law. Not only this much women's bank accounts have been transferred to their close male relatives because “Women can't hold property anymore” (187). To enslave the women in Gilead to fulfill their mission, everything which may make them independent is abruptly captured. She tries to seek relief from her husband Luke: “Did they say why?” (188). Luke also seems indifferent toward the radical change. This is a good example to see how women are oppressed and ignored in the Gileadean society.

In Gileadean society, the Handmaids are persuaded to perform the roles of surrogate mothers. Aunt Lydia becomes loyal to the society. She persuades the

Handmaids to be surrogate mothers: “I’m doing my best. I’m trying to give you the best chance you can have” (65). Aunt Lydia is doing her best to enhance the patriarchal society of Gilead. Showing this immaturity of women Atwood wants to show women can add a brick to destroy the boundary of the existed society. Goldblatt claims:

Margaret Atwood has reconstructed this victim, proving to her and to us that we all possess the talent and the strength to revitalize our lives and reject society's well-trodden paths that suppress the human spirit. She has shown us that we can be vicariously empowered by our surrogate, who not only now smiles but winks back at us, daring us to reclaim our own female identities. (282)

Atwood seems to awaken the female from the males’ exploitation by cautioning the females that the males are using the females as only childbearing machines.

Atwood shows the pathetic conditions of women in the novel. Every woman young or old, fertile or barren is victimized in Gilead. Women are divided into different groups and the powerful begin to exploit the powerless. According to Goldblatt, “And authors have always dallied with the plight of women in society: young or old, body or mind, mother or worker, traveler or settler. The woman has been the divided or fragmented icon who, broken and downcast, has gazed back forlornly at us from the pages of her telling tale” (282). The society proceeds its reign by dividing the females of Gilead.

The major goal of women is to make the better future where every woman can live happily. They need to summit their right of freedom for some time. Aunt Lydia claims, “We are working towards the goal of a little garden for each one, each one of you-the clasped hands again, the breathy voice-and that's just one for instance. The

raised finger, wagging at us. But we can't be greedy pigs and demand too much before it's ready, now can we?" (172). Aunt Lydia tries to brainwash all Handmaids that they should work hard to give beautiful future for upcoming generation. It is possible, if they work together harmoniously. Aunt Lydia is appealing all working class women in Gilead to extend Gileadean mission. Otherwise, these women may unify themselves against its mission. Instead of joining their hands together to fight against women's suppression, the Aunts become agents of Gileadean mission. In fact, the patriarchy of Gilead uses Aunts to manipulate the Handmaids.

There is a kind of threat especially for women widely rampant in Gilead. There is violence, rape and sexual harassment everywhere in Gileadean society from which the females could rarely be saved. "Woman is subjected to terrible violence, potential rape, and constant sexual harassment" (Dodson 76). Such violence can come from anyone and any time. The Aunts, the Wives and the Commanders are the oppressors in the society. They use the any kind of violence to the Handmaids. The Gileadean society uses severe violence to control women. If any one goes against its new law then they are executed. "On the Wall hanged the three women from this morning, still in their dresses, still in their shoes, still with the white bags over their heads. Their arms have been untied and are stiff and proper at their sides" (296). This kind of violence makes the women psychologically weak and forces them to be the slave of males in the Gileadean society.

The Gileadean society exploits the Aunts as the controlling agency to Handmaids. The Aunts are used by the state to manipulate the motherhood of Handmaids. They in fact play a vital role in the state's sexual enslavement of the Handmaids as mother. They not only use their force for torturing and brainwashing them but also do everything they know and they can do to the Handmaids. ". . .

female control agency known as the Aunts"(320) are used as puppet means to exploit the fertility of the Handmaids though the Handmaids are not willingly accept it.

In the society the women especially the Handmaids are persuaded as the children to fulfill the vested desires of the patriarchy. Some of the women like Aunts are used and some other women like the Handmaids and Martha are misused by the patriarchal society. They are not treated as a complete human being. The Handmaids who appear at households as well as the Red Center are behaved as children. Offred remembers her husband Luke saying, "You must go to sleep, like good children" (93). Here women are depicted as children having no decisive role in the society. They are forced to do whatever is urged by the males with no question.

When the rebel captures the state, the Handmaids become confused what will happen next. The state sponsor agents try to soothe them fatherly and to console them. "Everything will be all right soon. I promise. There will be peace. You must trust" (93). The patriarchy of Gilead forces the women to believe its rule over them. What the state does is to restore the peace and happiness of the people. But the Gileadean society thinks that such type of peace and happiness is established only when females are made to do what it intends. In this way they can think of controlling the state.

After their control over the state, the women especially the Handmaids are needed to be trained for their new roles in the society. They are expected for bearing children to barren Gilead. According to Armbruster, "After training, Offred and the other handmaids are sent to bear Caucasian children for high-ranking officials. Execution is the penalty if they fail"(147). If they do not move as per the expectation of the society, they are pungently penalized. If they defy the system of despotic society, they are executed; hanged on the Wall as many people become the victims of it.

In Gilead, women are forced to accept every event happened to them due to their own fault. They are solely responsible themselves for what happen to them. When Janine was raped by a gang she was compelled to believe that she herself was responsible behind her gang rape. When she cries to outlet the pain of pain of being raped, she is asked to be taught by Aunts: “. . . *teach* her a lesson, *teach* her a lesson (82). The Aunts ask other women to teach her a lesson that she is raped because of her own social exposure. Actually, education is seen not for the libration but for the submission of women in Gilead.

In fact, education is the most viable weapon to impose the patriarchal ideology upon the women in Gilead. Because of pollution and warfare, many elite become barren. They become infertile so it is the handmaids’ duty to produce children to institute ruthless religious patriarchal society. For this purpose, they control the women’s reproductive capacity. According to Harriet F. Bergmann, “Reproductive control always implies control of women, and Gilead first deprives the female population of all economic power” (847). The Handmaids are the women who fall under this category because they have already justified their power to produce the children.

The State uses every weapon to enslave women. It uses traditional role, ritual, custom, law and what not to brainwash women’s mind as their role of mother. The Aunts educate the Handmaids how to take their maternal role and fulfill their biological destinies. The patriarchy of Gilead takes the Handmaids as mature seeds, who can give beautiful and useful fruits for it. So it distorts the women body as breeders. Woman’s values in the Gileadean society have been erased and even neglected except for the reproductive purpose. Aunt Lydia tells the Handmaids to “. . . think of yourselves as seeds” (28). This statement tells us everything about Gilead’s

judgment of women. They are nothing except womb. Women's identity as an autonomic entity is completely denied. They are the breeding tools in Gilead. Here seeds refer to offspring, the most needed pearl like thing in the infertile Gilead.

The Gileadean society brainwashes the females in such a way they cannot think of themselves in other way as opposed to the patriarchy. It is the females themselves they suppress another sort of females by bringing the issue of holy indoctrination. Aunt Lydia severely denounces to those women who are not prepared for the holy act of reproduction. Aunt Lydia becomes so critical with those women who are reluctant to bear children for Gilead as she says, "They were lazy women, she says. They were sluts" (123). Aunt Lydia becomes furious with the Handmaids who see no future in the Gilead. To control the women who are in front of her she is using such demounting words.

Either by teaching or by being furious, the Aunts want to manipulate the maternal role of other women in the society. The Handmaids' total job is nothing but breeding the infants for the society. The Aunts teach the prevailing patriarchal ideology i.e. Handmaids' bodies as mothers. The word 'pearl' is used by Aunt Lydia to praise the Handmaids who are able to reproduce. Here Offred reveals Aunt Lydia's comment, "We want you to be valued girls . . . Think of yourselves as pearls" (124). The Aunts take Handmaids extremely valuable objects like 'pearl'. What is valuable for them is not life; not Handmaids as human beings but as a child breeding machine. Their capacity of breeding for Gilead is very important.

In Gilead, women do not have freedom in food choice. They are forced to have such food which benefits more for their children than for their body. In the household, Marthas cook "the Handmaid special, healthy food (to prepare her for pregnancy)" (Stillman and Johnson 74). Even for food choice they are destined to

depend on other's choice. They eat not for their body but for the wants of the society. For its purpose the dystopian Gilead uses the Aunts even to teach the Handmaids to follow the food principle: "Healthy food. You have to get your vitamins and minerals, said Aunt Lydia coyly. You must be a worthy vessel. No coffee or tea, no alcohol" (75). The healthy food is necessary for healthy children. The vitamins and minerals are very essential for the healthy children, not the tea and coffee, so they are asked not to drink tea and coffee but vitamins and minerals.

Women do not have any power in the Gileadean society except the power of motherhood. According to Casari, "Mothers in a patriarchy have no power" (206). The women specially the Handmaids are powerless creatures in the Gilead. They have no choice about what they eat or drink. They only can eat what the authorities think will improve their fertility and health.

A Handmaid is confined within the house of her commander. Her activities are limited. "Daily she shops among the scarce supplies of food, standing in lengthy lines, buying only what the Marthas request, using tokens not money. Monthly she has intercourse with her Commander" (Stillman and Johnson 74). Otherwise, she leads a boring life in which vast spaces of time will be without significance. By observing this treacherous fact, one can easily know that how the females are exploited in the name of the state benefit. They even lack the friends to share such exploitation in their household. No male machinery intends to hear and share the females' sentiments. "Lacking friends in the household, where every woman is of a different rank (Stillman and Johnson 74). Though there are some other women in the household, they assert themselves as superior and hence do not listen to anything of other sort of females.

The control over the food choice has direct connection with the maternal role of the Handmaids in Gilead. Having meals is the way to impose ideological principle

of patriarchal society to females. Furthermore, the Handmaids are controlled by their natural identity of reproduction. Under the teaching of the Aunts, they are taught to believe themselves as breeding animals. Offred mockingly compares herself with a “queen ant with eggs” (145). How precarious the situation of the females in Gilead as they are no more different from the ants with eggs. Their role in the society is only for procreation.

Gilead is said to have imposed pregnancy which can be taken as a kind of threat to the self of the females. In such a world women cannot get their identity. “Gilead also adopts measures specifically aimed against women, their individuality, and their identity.” (Stillman and Johnson 73). The society adopts societal measures which play pivotal role for bracketing the self of women. The society creates such a set which forces them to be mother for identity. Therefore every woman wants to be mother. But they do not know motherhood is easy means by which they become victimized under the grip of patriarchy.

Fertility and pregnancy are taken as authentic means for the submission of women in the Gileadean society which can be exemplified by the experiences of Janine and Offred. In the novel pregnancy of Janine is depicted as her submissive Handmaid. Offred is also preoccupied with her role of surrogate mother and accepts Gileadean societal role. Besides, Aunt Elizabeth teaches the Handmaids to enjoy their identity with their role as mothers. Primarily, Offred is worried towards her fertility, which conditions her identity.

In the novel Atwood indeed focuses the destiny of women’s bodies. They cannot escape from their ultimate destiny. “A woman can never escape her ultimate biologic destiny, reproduction” (Ann Oakley 613). The state forces the Handmaids to give birth of child, as Aunt Elizabeth coaches the Handmaids as she “...will greatly

multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shall bring forth children”

(124). The Aunt is warning the Handmaids if they cannot give children for the society, they will be punished by her. At any cost, they should mother a child for the Gileadean society. To encourage their duty of Gilead, the Aunts also show films.

The films show the role of a woman in the society. In Red Center, Aunt Lydia shows the Handmaids a film of childbirth in a hospital so as to motivate them for their role. In the film, the process of delivery is shown. The male doctor examines woman-using machines. The patient does not have any choice. “Women have had a long history of dying in male- dominated hospitals. Midwives were scorned; life was so cheap that few doctors listened to . . . Even when puerperal fever was under control, women were still not in charge of their bodies” (Casari 206). Even in the hospital, the females could not get good manner and hospitality from the males. The doctor used to give the delivery of the baby as they desire. No one knows the politics behind the role of male doctor even in child delivery system though there are sufficient midwives in the film.

By the projection of film, set in the hospital, Aunt Lydia tries her best to indoctrinate the Handmaids to be prepared to give birth of a child the way the woman within the film is giving birth a baby under the operation of male doctor with technological support. Offred comments:

A pregnant woman, wired up to a machine, electrodes coming out of her every which way so that she looked like a broken robot, an intravenous drip feeding into her arm. Some men with a searchlight looking up between her legs, where she's been shaved, a mere beardless girl, a trayful of bright sterilized knives, everyone with masks on (124).

But, in Gilead, all the medical machines and equipment are neglected. The society does not mind if a Handmaid dies. They are replaced by other Handmaids. Such a film is shown for females just to blackmail the women and control the motherhood of women in the male dominated society.

When a handmaid is in the process of delivery, the other women are supposed to sing a song under the Aunts' direction to the entire birth process "Come, come, come, come, sing the basses" (92). This is a kind of ritual in Gilead. Even by the patriarchal ritual, they are manipulated to shoulder their responsibility of motherhood. During the time, the Wives assist the Handmaid's delivery by catching and letting them lie on their bed while bearing babies.

The society brainwashes the women, they even do not think to revolt against the exploitation. "Offred at first accepts the totality of the regime that rules Gilead, and accepts its vocabulary without resistance, not even telling the reader her real name. In her attempt to adapt and so to save her own life, she has made her new world and its language her own" (Bergmann 850). The females of Gilead are compelled to obey every ideals constructed upon them as females though they know that such ideals never speak of their true identity or existence. They are forced to own the grammar and vocabulary of the patriarchy.

Gender inequality is the main cause of women's domination in maternity. They are used only for breeding purposes. The Handmaids as a surrogate mother need to surrender themselves to the state in order to have children. "Women, it seems, must be made malleable to men's desires, accepting their proposals, their advances. They must submit to their socially determined roles or be seen as 'demons'" (Goldblatt 277). They are intended to be submissive to their male partners.

The republic of Gilead differentiates the males and females due to their different functions. They cannot even imagine the gender equality in such bleak of exploitation. “Women with ambitions of male dimensions-are considered less female, lesser women” (MacKinnon 530). If any woman considers herself superior, she is thought lesser than woman. In the long rotted patriarchal society, the culture is in males support. The history is written from the male’s point of view. In such condition equality is almost impossible. So women are at abyss of males’ discrimination and exploitation.

Gilead is such a state where half of the women are sterile and only the Handmaids are to be seen as the lucky ones. So the society using role of maternity oppresses women. Some of the oppressors are actually women themselves. They are obviously brainwashed by men. The ones that are highest in the rankings of women are the Aunts and the Wives. Men are not necessarily to be seen as the worst ones in Gileadean society. The most terrifying oppressors in the story are not the males but the high-ranking Wives and Aunts, who regulate and mutilate the Handmaids. In Gilead, women’s official record is destroyed. They are fired from their job, disqualified to hold any kind of property. According to Ketterer “. . . women who were not officially recognized” (209) are rather divided into different groups as Aunts, Wives, widows, or lower-class Econowives, Handmaids etc. This category is just not to better the women’s life but handle them in favor of the state.

The novel obviously depicts the jealousy between the different ranks of females and this jealousy leads to a lot of hatred among them. There is an “. . . envy between women along with jealousy and competitiveness” (Jean Wyatt 37). We get lots of evidence for this envy in the text. One of the Marthas in the house proves this envy, “In this house we all envy each other something” (57). The patriarchy creates

the hierarchy among women, which paves the way envy and hatred among them and prevent them to be united. Categorization is a tool they used to stop women from uniting and rising against them.

The commanders of Gilead make hierarchy in such a way that creates the female envy. The Handmaids and Marthas are hated by the Wife and Marthas also hate the Handmaids because of their capacity of breeding. The Handmaids experience the hatred of all the other women but they also know this hatred. In Gilead, women are divided into different groups according to their role they are assigned to perform. According to Bergmann:

Patriarchy divides them into five subjugated classes: "Aunts," who do the dirty work of the revolution; "Wives," who, past childbearing age, are married to the commanding elite; "Econowives," women incapable of producing children, who marry the working classes; "Marthas," servants of the Wives; and "Handmaids," who have previously proven their ability to produce children and now are to do so for the elite Commanders (847).

By categorizing the females into different groups and creating the envy and jealousy amongst them the patriarchy succeeds its rule. Their principle is to divide and rule the females.

In Gilead only the Commanders' Wives and Aunts are given limited power. Due to this limited power they believe they have meaningful existence in the society albeit they are fooled by male attributing a bit power. This signifies that women are divided due to the power to privileged women. The marginalized women are envious to the privileged ones that males essentially want. In the household, the privileged women seem more powerful than the Commanders do. Offred says, "He wouldn't be

able to intervene, to save me; the transgressions of women in the household, whether Martha or Handmaid, are supposed to be under the jurisdiction of the Wives alone” (170). Offred further views that the relationship between males and females is filled with hatred and envy. Here what we can assert is that it is the intra- gender conflict that paves the way for inter- gender conflict. The envy and jealousy among women ease males to dominate and oppress them.

By being influenced by the patriarchy the Aunts brutally act against the Handmaids. The Aunts do not show humanity. They are severely beaten by the Aunts. The Aunts cannot understand the human feelings. “Remember said Aunt Lydia. For our purposes your feet and your hands are not essential” (102). The hands and feet do not belong to reproduction system what is the main organ of reproduction system is ovary. “Defined in terms of her reproductive potential, she has little to be, other than a set of ovaries, a receptacle” (Stillman and Johnson 74). It is only the Aunts who can punish the Handmaids.

Albeit handmaids are marginalized, they feel sense of security and having a little bit power only when they are pregnant and become mother of a child. When the Handmaids become fertile in barren Gilead, they obviously have the sense of power and security. “Only during pregnancy and childbirth do handmaids briefly assume power. For the most part, the handmaids, servants, and Commanders' wives show similar passivity” (Joan L. Slonczewski 123). Atwood shows Aunts as active characters who train the handmaids about their role in the society. Aunts are seen to be active but their roles are always guided by the patriarchal ideals and norms. In reality they are the puppets of the males to precede the patriarchal domination.

Ironically Aunts and Wives are not significantly different from other women characters in the grip of Gileadean patriarchy because almost all the women

characters are passive. They are subjugated in the society. Even the Wives or Aunts become the voyeurs of women's domination. "The subjugation of women is the major focus of *The Handmaid's Tale*, and the concern for women's strength is demonstrated mainly by its appalling absence. The heroine Offred is a passive character"

(Slonczewski 123). Only Moira dares to escape from the suppression of women.

Offred tells us Moira's escape using the Aunts clothes. "I'd like to tell a story about how Moira escaped, for good this time. Or if I couldn't tell that, I'd like to say she blew up Jezebel's, with fifty Commanders inside it. . . . I don't know how she ended, or even if she did, because I never saw her again"(262). This can help us to justify that the Aunts are so- called powerful in Gilead but they never dare to escape from the domination of males. So the power enjoyed by the Aunts is also not the real power, it is controlled and regulated from somewhere else i.e. the patriarchy.

Moira manages to escape the Red Center by wearing the clothes of Aunts. This escape suggests that Aunts dress is much more powerful than Aunts themselves. The time Moira veils herself with Aunts' clothes; she becomes a respectable and powerful woman in Gileadean society. Here nobody suspects about her. Aunt's clothes make her not to explain the whereabouts she is to any of the male security personnel as well as any other women in Gilead. As Moira explains to Offred, "I couldn't believe how easy it was to get out of the Center. In that brown outfit I just walked right through. I kept on going as if I knew where I was heading, till I was out of sight. I didn't have any great plan" (256). She walks the Commanders' club under the watchful eye of an aunt, but she is not executed.

The patriarchy mobilizes the Aunts in such a way that the common people think that the Aunts are much more exploiting and dominating than the males in Gilead. The Aunts ". . . train the Handmaids in the way they should go, promising

salvation by childbearing under threat of dismemberment and death” (Janet L. Larson 40). In Gilead the males themselves do not involve to dominate rather they use the female agent Aunts to hegemonize the other women.

In Gilead what social values the Commanders undermine Aunts promote them. The Aunts do not only play the role to dominate the Handmaids physically but also they play seminal role to use them as the agents of the transmission of patriarchal culture. The Aunts say the Handmaids are “. . . transitional generation. It is the hardest for you... For the ones who come after you, it will be easier" (127). The Aunts tell the Handmaids that even if it is difficult for them to follow the new rules of the Gilead, the coming generation will accept their duties with willing hearts. The Aunts have a greater ability for estimating what the future will be like for women in Gilead for which males seem indifferent.

In Gilead, there are rules that are strictly followed by the women particularly that of the Handmaids. The rules are not taught, written, spelled out but every woman knows them. “I remember the rules, rules that were never spelled out but that every woman knew: Don't open your door to a stranger, even if he says he is the police . . . Don't stop on the road to help a motorist pretending to be in trouble. Keep the locks on and keep going. If anyone whistles, don't turn to look” (34). The Handmaids cannot help any stranger; they cannot even talk with the people who are new to them. These kinds of boundary make the Handmaid isolated and frustrated in the society. If they do not follow the rules of the society, they are sent to the Colonies and burnt them up and shot out.

Atwood portrays the Aunts, as an effective means to control women and regulate the new society otherwise it would be challenging to normalize the new despotic system. Even if they are the powerful women, they were not completely

trusted by the regime as they are regulated under the regular males' supervision. Offred states "No guns though, even they could not be trusted with guns" (14). Because male dominated society is only using some women like Aunts for their motives.

On the other hand, the Handmaids' group is the most victimized group in the hierarchy of patriarchal set up. They are only used as tools to breed citizens for the sterile Gilead. Offred views themselves as, "We are containers; it's only the inside of our bodies that are important" (107). She metaphorically compares her position as the container. The Handmaids are made to wear red dress in such a way which covers their head to toe. They do not have choice even selecting and wearing clothes. In every mechanism the activities of the Handmaids are controlled.

The Handmaids cannot be proud of their role of motherhood rather they live only for the fulfillment of Gileadean mission. If the Handmaids fail to concretize the Gileadean mission, they are sent off to the Colonies as Unwomen. Moira believes that her friend Offred will, ". . . never be sent to the Colonies, she'll never be declared Unwoman. That is her reward" (137). If a Handmaid conceives a baby, that is considered as her reward. This is next evidence how women's motherhood is exploited. Women in Gilead are treated as objects to actualize Gileadean dream. In Gilead handmaids are dehumanized. They are nothing more than dogs or animals. We know the worthiness of handmaid's life. "If your dog dies, get another" (197). Here the Handmaids are as valueless as mongrel.

Similarly, in the Gileadean hierarchal setup, Marthas are assigned to carry out their responsibility in the Commander's kitchen. They wear 'a green-dress'. They work very hard. They are envious at the Handmaids' duty. Unwomen are women who do not fit into the society. When they cannot mother a child they are tagged as non-

human. In Gilead, the women who failed to mother “. . . experienced guilt when she alone could not give her children all they needed. Exhaustion stifled her artistic creativity. Without children, she risked being a ‘non-woman’; with them, she was rendered a ‘non-human’” (Casari 206). They usually belong to groups of women who are not accepted by Gilead. They also include those Handmaids who cannot mother a child. The Colonies are the worst places in Gilead. The very name colony is sufficient enough to decipher the nightmare condition and life experience of those women who cannot beget a baby. The different categories of women lead to hatred as stated, but this hatred is surprisingly found their acceptance of their new roles of life.

The novel carefully portrays the politics of patriarchy i.e. 'divide and rule'. Categorizing the women into different groups and letting more power to some women so as to continue their goal of exploiting women by women themselves is the goal of the patriarchy. Inter-gender equality is almost impossible in the absence of intra-gender equality. But the Gileadean society is not in support of attributing the intra-gender equality so there is always inter-gender exploitation.

Thus, the novel exposes how Gilead oppresses the motherhood of women. The society takes the women as sexual objects and childbearing machines as if they don't have any other role and ability to do any other task. Religion and education are prime sources to brainwash the women in the society. The Handmaids are trained under the Aunts' indoctrination to function only as reproductive tools for males. The novel shows a very pathetic scene of male domination. By using privileged women like Aunts and Serena Joy as means over other marginalized women like Offred, Ofwarren, Ofglen, Moira, etc. the regime controls the women's body and reproductive power.

The women of Gilead are doubly marginalized whereas Handmaids, Unwomen and housemaids are triply marginalized in the society. The household servants seem to enact the role of housewives who assist in the reproduction process. Instead of joining their hands together to fight against the common problem created by patriarchal set-up i.e. extreme domination, they are envious of their own sex. This circumstance paves the way for the males to persist their inter-gender exploitation which lets the females be inimical to one another.

## **Chapter – Four**

### **Disharmony of Women**

The patriarchy of Gilead tries to isolate the females from the women themselves. By creating solidarity among the women, the patriarchy successfully breaks the unity of them. In Gilead, all people are not equal; Aunts are a bit more powerful than other women. Since there is the matter of power, many women want to become the Aunts in Gilead. "In the case of Gilead, there were many women willing to serve as Aunts, either because of a genuine belief in what they called "traditional values," or for the benefits they might thereby acquire"(320). In the patriarchal society, certain women are created to control other women. The direct threat for the women is not male but female. "'... the most direct common threat' faced by all women and continues by asking, 'How then do we account for the fact that the most irreconcilable angers, jealousies, and hostilities plaguing relationships between women'"(Jennifer Griffiths 10). There is a kind of anger and jealousy amongst the females themselves.

In Gilead, unity among women is destroyed. The patriarchal society wants to disunite between and among women so that they can oppress women's maternity and sexuality. The Handmaids in the novel cannot even talk each other for long in front of other authoritative people. They are strictly monitored by the elite women Aunts and other Eyes in Gilead. According to the Aunts, "Friendships were suspicious"(81). Offred remembers that though she and Moira are so close they cannot talk even in the mealtime. They just look each other but not communicate each other because friendship is suspicious in the dystopian society. "'... the only danger from the others'" (81). If other people see their closeness, they are severely punished. Gilead prevents the women from sharing the views to one another.

The society does not want any woman to be familiar to the next one. The Aunts are not close with the Wife; the Wife does not care with other females in the Gilead. Similarly, the Handmaids are ignored even by the household servants like Marthas, as Offred clarifies “Marthas are not supposed to fraternize with us” (21). Actually, working class people are brainwashed not to socialize each other. Therefore, they are following the rules of the society. The society divides women into groups. The marginalized women like Handmaids, Marthas, Unwomen cannot read and write. They are deprived all sorts of power by the state. However, the Aunts have a bit more power than other women do in the society. As Offred comments, “The Aunts are allowed to read and write” (139). Creating the division between and among the women, the patriarchy enjoys their unnatural rights.

The patriarchy never lets women to be united “. . . unity among women is a problem” for patriarchy (Adele Murdolo 80). Therefore, it creates disharmony among women. There is hatred among women. The Aunts do not like the Wife, the Wife and Marths almost hate the Handmaids and the Handmaids naturally do not like other women in the society. The patriarchy wants to make a strict control on women so that they can lengthen their regime. In the society, women are seen as a threat, and therefore, require strict control. They are banned having job and forbidden to own any property. They are confined within their home. This women’s confinement prevents the females from being united to one another and hence they are divided.

There are different categories of the women, which are ruled by the males. In the society, unity among the women is almost impossible. Aunt Lydia states, “Women united for a common end” (171) in the future. Instead of joining hands in hands to fight for equality, independence, and freedom from such domination, they do not believe one another. Aunts extremely dominate other women like Handmaids,

Marthas, etc. in the novel. Generally, the elder women are supposed to manage the family disharmony. But in Gilead just opposite happens because of the Gileadean mission. “For their part, adult women, especially elder women and senior wives, were responsible for settling disputes and controlling the behavior of younger women and children in order to ensure a peaceful life within their households and homesteads” (Dorothy L. Hodgson 48). In Gilead, the females are seen in total disharmony and disintegration.

The elite women refer to a group of women who attempt to regulate the society. “. . . women's historic role as "guardians of morality" for the society, in particular as members of bourgeois reform movements which regulated marginal groups under the banner of refinement and decency” (Miller 346). Here in the novel the Aunts are such women who teach the so – called morality to the Handmaids. In the name of teaching morality they are severely dominating the Handmaids. The Handmaids are at the bottom of Gilead's survivals. After being arrested for participating in non-traditional relationships that is second marriages or other extra-marital affair the Handmaids are sent to the Aunts for training in re-education centre. “. . . women are also trained in complacency to shun forms of thought and language, especially those grossly misshapen by prophetic anger.”(Janet L. Larson 40). At the Rachel and Leah Re-education Centers, the Aunts indoctrinate the Handmaids in Gilead. The Aunts are assigned with the vital duty of training the Handmaids because they rank the most powerful female agent of the patriarchy of Gilead. In full consent of male leaders of Gilead, the Aunts start to suppress and domesticate the Handmaids during their initiation.

The common women get no power in the society. They are almost imprisoned under the patriarchal boundary. In such bleak world of confinement, a little power is

very important for them. So women in Gilead think lucky if they are selected to hold the role of Aunts. “When power is scarce, a little of it is tempting. There was, too, a negative inducement: childless or infertile or older women who were not married could take service in the Aunts and thereby escape redundancy” (320). To compensate of being barren, the elite mature women attempt to be the Aunts. The job of the Aunts in Gilead is just to control the other women especially the Handmaids and Marthas. They use every method to control the other women. Offred remembers the Aunts patrolling the Red Centre. “. . . the lights were turned down but not out. Aunt Sara and Aunt Elizabeth patrolled” (13\14). Even in the night, the Aunts monitor all the activities. Offred as well as other Handmaids mourn their lost freedom, and lost identity. The Handmaids become national property or resource whose job is to beget to regulate for the new society. They have lost their humanity. Now they are nothing more than reproductive machines.

Patriarchy of Gilead believes that unification of women destroys the Gileadean mission. That is why they use the principle of ‘divide and rule’. “. . . women as agents, not victims, of social control. In any debate over the question ‘Which side are we on?’ Women must recognize that they have in fact been on both sides-controlling and controlled - for some time now” (Miller 353). For that, Gilead gives some more power to upper class women than Handmaids, Marthas and Unwomen.

The danger for the patriarchal society is unity among the women. If the women unite, they can fight against male’s domination and can liberate themselves with the male mechanism. They can destroy the evil intention of the patriarchal society. At the same time, disunity becomes a threat for women. “The greatest danger is disunity. If we do not show our strength because of our absorption in factionalism and internecine squabbles, the gains women have already made will be undermined

and we will find ourselves fighting a rearguard action” (Murdolo76). The division among the women is not beneficial for the women. Rather it is a dangerous mechanism of the patriarchy. This disharmony forces women to work only for the patriarchy and force to compromise personal right. Aunt Lydia, a social agent, strongly claims that she is doing her best to better the life of the women as well as the Gileadean society. Her best attempt is to better the life the Handmaid is brainwashing and humiliation. By doing thing, she forces the Handmaids to breed for the barren society.

The Aunts also enforce the Handmaids to watch the pornographic films. These films are the tools of Aunts to teach or brainwash the Handmaids and other women. Why the Gilead shows such pornography is just to brainwash and prepare the breeding tools to breed. Such movies who watch them obviously make the women weak and begin to feel safe if they mother a baby. Knowing this fact patriarchy of Gilead uses the pornography as their good tool. By one way or another way the male theocratic regime wants to enslave the females.

In Gilead, the Aunts are so- called moral police who teach the moral lesson for other women. They seem they are a safe guard of the society. Ironically, they are using pornography to teach the women’s role in the society. “. . . in fact that women have played the role of social control agents - society’s moral police” (Miller 346). Aunt Lydia believes that women are merely bodies for men to use and abuse. They can be used by men as they please.

The Aunts are working as agents for Gilead. They try to restore the Gileadean society. “. . . women as agents of (informal) social control is directly analogous to the effort to restore visibility to house- and reproductive work as "real" work. From this perspective women who deny that other women have been or are presently acting as

social control agents” (Miller 352). At first, the Aunts use the psychological method to control. To weaken the women, humiliation is one of the techniques of the Aunts. One good example Janine is not allowed to go restroom so she soils herself in front of the group. On another occasion, when Janine is gang raped, Aunt Lydia condemns her instead of consoling her. The Aunts are seen to take recourse to the means of physical violence to make the Handmaids work on their favor. “. . . traditional role of women as agents of social control and considered the erosion of the allegedly natural moral authority which once grounded their campaigns to "refine" behaviour in the home” (Miller 358). Offred describes some examples of physical violence that the Aunts use over the Handmaids. The Aunts severely beats at Moira’s hands and feet because they are not important for reproduction.

Offred knows that it is not only the Handmaids but also so-called elite women like Serena Joy are victimized by the Gileadean society. “The Handmaid comes into Serena Joy’s house with the dream that sharing their plight might strengthen them: ‘I wanted, then, to turn her into an older sister, a motherly figure, someone who would understand and protect me . . . I wanted to think I would have liked her’”. (Dodson 77). However, Offred cannot get any sort of consolation and solace with Serena Joy. She has a good hope of being protected. Instead, Offred is neglected by her. Here, Offred is “. . . discouraged by her recognition of the division between them” (Dodson 77). Here she is dissatisfied with Serena Joy. Offred wants to get motherly love from her and share her pain from her because both of them are the oppressed by the society but she misunderstands Offred. It is the society that does not let them share their pains and sufferings. If they do so, it may help to be unified and resist against the society; the patriarchy cannot lengthen their evil intention in Gilead.

Furthermore, the Handmaids are completely isolated in Gileadean society. Neither the commanders' wife like them nor the household servants do so. They are the object of hatred even by the other women in the house. "The structure of the household isolates Handmaids: each is the only Handmaid in the house, usually disliked by the Commander's Wife, and more trouble than help to the Marthas" (Stillman and Johnson 74). In place of receiving the help, love, sympathy or co-oppression from other, they are troubled.

Thus, the patriarchy of Gilead indoctrinates different groups of women in different ways. It has used the groups of Aunts to exploit the groups of Handmaids so as to ease the patriarchal domination and suppression over them. The Republic of Gilead believes that the society operates on the principle of divide and rule. Therefore, their prime concern is always to separate the females and lengthen male chauvinism and oppression. They believe that inter-gender exploitation is further intensified at the backdrop of intra-gender exploitation. In this regard, the one and only objective of intensification of the intra-gender discrimination is to disuniting unified women which ease for their exploitation.

## **Chapter – Five**

### **Conclusion**

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is thus regarded as a novel that speaks of the intra-gender domination intensified by the inter-gender domination. It presents a state where liberty for women is extremely restricted because of the new Christian government's policies, which are formulated and regulated by the males on their own favor. She discloses the patriarchal oppression of women in the Republic of Gilead in the text. Females of Gilead are suppressed, oppressed and eventually disunited in the name of sexuality and motherhood. The institutionalized heterosexuality and motherhood are used to exploit women.

The Gileadean Society has the sole intention of sustaining the upcoming generation of the state at the cost of giving any sincere attention of the females especially the Handmaids. The society is not only indifferent to the problems of females but also cruel and coercive to implement its theocratic policies on Handmaids. Atwood expects human equality and a harmonious gender relation and hence presents this text to the readers in order to awake them from such exploitation. She is of the opinion that it is the equality that brings happiness in human life. In this thesis, the researcher has tried to read the novel from a feminist perspective and made an intensive analysis on gender inequality, women's problems and genuine cause of disunity of women on which the author seems to contemplate.

In the Gileadean society, the females are not regarded as the human beings at all. Rather they are treated as the socio-political tools used to sustain the livelihood of the barren state. In the name of motherhood, the Handmaids are indoctrinated in such a way that they are ready to conceive the children of the Commanders to keep up the Gileadean patriarchy. They have become indeed the tools, nothing more than that. It is only the male elites who take benefits from such exploitation in the society. To strengthen the female exploitation, the males use the elite females themselves to

indoctrinate about the importance of motherhood and their roles as the mothers in that barren land. The patriarchy has become so clever that it uses the females to persuade the females in order not be involved in an indirect exploitation. Females, especially the sexually- enslaved Handmaids like Offred experience severe oppression at the hands of the Aunts for the favor of their male Commanders. Women are deployed as the means to run that theocratic society. Here actually women are used to control the women themselves in order to facilitate for the regulation of the patriarchal society. Because of this strategy, inter-gender domination intensifies.

In the novel Atwood presents the Aunts, having some power as compared to the Handmaids but it is all done by the patriarchy in order to disunite the females themselves so that they can lengthen the patriarchal regime. The Gileadean patriarchy views that the best and most effective way to control women is through women themselves. Here in the novel, the Aunts control almost every activity of the Handmaids. The Aunts have more implicit responsibilities than merely educating Handmaids. But these responsibilities performed by the Aunts are not in favor of the females but in favor of the males. The Aunts are thus exploited to exploit the Handmaids. From this it is clear that the inter-gender exploitation is further intensified by the intra-gender exploitation in Gilead.

Instead of joining hands in hands to fight against domination of the patriarchy, the females are made jealous to one another. This circumstance paves the way for the males to persist their inter-gender exploitation. The patriarchy wants to sustain by dividing the females into different categories and hence rule over them. Categorization of women is a tool, which prevents women from being united and raised their voice against males. The novel meticulously portrays the politics of patriarchy that is 'divide and rule'. Categorizing the women into different groups and

letting more power and privileges to some women and making rest of the others powerless, helpless is a means of sustaining the patriarchy. When the society operates on such categorization, the gender exploitation will be obviously intensified. This intra-gender inequality further proliferates the inter-gender inequality in Gilead. The patriarchy of Gilead teaches the marginalized women that they are nothing but sexual objects by the use of pornography. Offred watches pornographic films in the Red Center. Watching such films make women weaker but males as powerful ones who can use the women as they like.

Thus, the novel depicts the exploitation of women in the socially institutionalized heterosexuality and motherhood by means of sexuality, maternity, rape, pornography and so on. The women are deprived of their sexuality because of the institution of heterosexuality in a male-dominated society. In Gilead, the Handmaids are forced to perform the roles of mothers so as to produce the children to the barren land. And to exploit one sort of females another sort of females are also equally exploited without letting them know that they have become the puppets in the hands of patriarchy.

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