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**Consciousness of Identity and Existence in William Styron's *Sophie's
Choice* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale***

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Bishnu Prasad Shrestha has completed his thesis entitled “Consciousness of Identity and Existence in William Styron's *Sophie's Choice* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*.” under my supervision. He carried out his research from November, 2008 to February, 2010. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voce.

.....

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Date: 2066-11-06

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Abstract

In the novels *Sophie's Choice* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, William Styron and Margaret Atwood depict female protagonists as the victimized sufferers of patriarchal subjugative ideology and their chronic sexual harassment which problematizes the identity and existence of females under the construction of phallogocentric practice of patriarchy. Despite the female protagonists' continuous struggle for the emancipatory identity and existence along with the transgression in different localities because of their consciousness about their situation, Sophie's and Offred's traumatic experience in patriarchal autonomy with subversive pictorialization and sexual deterioration harsens the existence and identity of females.

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I. *Sophie's Choice* and *The Handmaid's Tale*: An Introduction

William Styron's novel *Sophie's Choice* and Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* both focus on the issue of consciousness and identity of the female protagonists in that both novels deal with the patriarchal subjugation, subordination, exploitation as well as the submission to the females. Dealing with such the then societal structure dominated under the norms, conditions and values of patriarchal strata, Styron and Atwood, in their novels try to unveil the complexity of the females even for the survival and the position they deserve under the ideological consensus of patriarchy. In *Sophie's Choice*, Styron's presentation of the principal character Sophie both physically and mentally exploited victimized and suppressed because of the underlined construction of the patriarchy and her continuous attempt for the liberation searching for the identity in different locations of the world picturizes the complex arena of ideologically constructed male dominated patriarchal social structure. Under such construction it highlights the feminine attempt in order to liberate themselves searching for the identity within the societal structure. Likewise in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood's disclosure of Gileadean sexist ideology as the embodiment of patriarchal strata and its treatment on women like the protagonist Offred sets the paradigm of the submission, subjugation and exploitation on females. It is, with such presentation of the female protagonists in both novels, Styron and Atwood have attempted to present the politico-cultural complexity representing the different span of time.

The protagonists Sophie and Offred's traumatic experience shaped with the undercurrents of norms and conventions of ideologically constructed patriarchal social

structure problematizes the essence of identity and their attempt in searching for their identity harmonizes with the generating consciousness of the females in that society. Though their attempt leads them nowhere despite the further pain and agony which they experience throughout their life, writers through their novels have attempted to raise the consciousness about the atrocity and injustice done from the tyranny of patriarchy to the females of that society.

William Styron, a Southern writer born on June 1925 in New Port, New Virginia has written various novels with striking thematic aspects of feminine issues. Significantly, the phenomenon of psychic or physical death of important female characters is portrayed in each William Styron novels. Consistent with Ermarth's thesis, a patriarchal social consensus drives Styron women's character to the margins of social existence. For example in *Lie Down in Darkness*, all the female characters suffer from patriarchal social structure. They did not decide their fate like wise *Set This House on Fire* could be seen as an exploration of the language of males as they recount tales of violence against of females, they have known or whom they themselves protect and attacked mentally and physically. His another novel, *The Confessions of Nat Tuner* recognizes that Nat Tuner's times were regarded little more than chattel themselves. Women are marginalized and their access to the language in patriarchal semantic authority severely curtailed.

In *Sophie's Choice*, we see the dominance of patriarchal social structure to women. In the novel, females are presented as a liar but at the same time as hysterical, simpleminded and obsessed with sex and their own desirability. All female characters suffer undue treatment from the male. They are inflicted with injustice and violence which is often meted out upon them. Thus Styron's provisional thematic standpoint in

most of his novels to a large extent relies onto the issues on the female's positional notation in the society with realistic tenets where females' experiences of suffering, exploitation, oppression and their consciousness to struggle for the identity they deserve generate because of the socio-political complexity of patriarchal autonomy. In another front, this novel is the poignant and dramatic account of the European Holocaust conveyed through the story of the Polish Catholic woman who lost her children in Auschwitz-the Nazi concentration camp. Ever concerned with man's capacity both of evil and self redemption, Styron has depicted the ecumenical character of the Nazis' crime against humanity with the help of this novel.

Another prominent novelist Margaret Atwood throughout her novels has experienced with a range of narrative genres from Gothic romances and fairy tales to spy thrillers, science-fiction utopias and fictive autobiographies. As she has stated in 1982: “If writing novels and reading them have any redeeming social value, it's probably that they force you to imagine what its like to be somebody else which increasingly is something we all need to know” (112).

Her novels are eyewitness accounts which focus on contemporary political issues. The wide definition of politics accommodates all Atwood's enduring concerns. Her feminism , scrutiny to male-female relationships, her ecological interests, her nationalist concerns with relations between Canada and the United States, and her wider concerns with basic human rights under various forms of state oppressions are some of the prominent issues which she raise in her novels.

As her reputation grew, Atwood began traveling extensively to give reading and lectures; she also won literary prizes. Her output as poet, novelist and critic has been

prodigious: *True Stories and Bodily Harm* (1981); *Second Words: Selected Critical Prose* (1982); *Murder in the Dark* and *Blue Bird's Egg* (1986); *Interlunar* (1984); *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985); *Selected Poems* (1986); *Cat's Eye* (1988); *Margaret Atwood's Conversations* (1990); *Wilderness Tips* (1991); *Good Bones* (short fiction 1992); *The Rubber Bride* (novel 1993); *Morning in the Burned House* (poetry) and *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (criticism 1995); *Alice Grace* (1996); *The Blind Assassin* (novel 2000; and *Negotiating with the Dead* 2002) all mark her volatile personality in different genres of literature as well as philosophy.

Her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is an anti-utopian fable about the future of one woman's story of her life as a handmaid in the Republic of Gilead. As a handmaid in the Old Testament sense whose body is at the service of the patriarchs, Offred, the narrator has been deprived of her own name and legal rights. Assigned to a particular commander for reproductive purposes, she is a virtual prisoner in his household, under constant surveillance from his wife and the female servants. She is also forbidden to read and write or to form any close personal relationships. Her only outings are daily shopping expeditions with another handmaid and compulsory attendance at public events such as Prayvaganzas, Birth Days and Salvaging. Once a month, she has to undergo the grotesque impregnation ceremony with the commander in the presence of his wife. She continually lives with the fear of being sent to the colonies as an Unwomen if she does not conceive a child. Being trapped in such a circumscribed existence Offred chooses the freedom of refusal; she refuses to believe in Gileadean doctrines, she refuses to forget her past life, and crucially she refuses to be silenced.

If we glance upon both the novels written by different novelists representing the different span of time, though there is variance according to the construction of the society as well as theme and subject matter they bear we can find the affinity in the experience of female characters under the construction of “Manish” ideology which is very much pathetic, poignant and heart-rendering. In both novels, female protagonists are the victims of the domination of males all the time because the complex structure of the dominant society was aggressively phallogentric which had set its paradigms placing man as the pinnacle of superiority and woman as the inferior human beings. Because the structure of the society was inherently hierarchical with the derogatory remarks on females, Sophie's identity in *Sophie's Choice* and Offred's identity in *The Handmaid's Tale* remains all the time problematic. The anxiety of identity shaped with the consciousness or awareness about the atrocity of the male centrism leads Offred to revolt against the Gileadean sexist ideology and contrarily, Sophie to choose her death over her life.

Critical Responses on *Sophie's Choice* and *The Handmaid's Tale*

William Styron's novel *Sophie's Choice* and Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* have got much more critical responses and interpretations ever since their first publication in 1979 and 1985 respectively. Critics and scholars have asserted their birds-eye-view along with the major theoretical and philosophical standpoint in order to interpret and analyze both novels from the variety of angles. Analyzing the novel *Sophie's Choice* as the provisional rebel in Christian masquerade, famous interpreter and scholar Samuel Coal views:

Styron writes at the end of Southern romance, or perhaps he has stretched the form to include the vision of the world that it can not contain that musky spurious mixture of Christian archetype and Manichean vision. Rational psychological explanations and Christian archetype cannot encompass such a fierce conjuring up of guilt; they can confine it. (19)

His anti-ecclesiastical interpretation incorporates Styron's crossroad beyond the fanaticity of Christian indoctrination which is, according to him, a provisional rebel. He also stresses that “Styron’s guilt will not be confined in any rational, religious scheme or design” (19).

Another renowned critic and scholar Richard G. Law, in his scholarly Journal, focuses on the issue of narrative technique in the novel *Sophie's Choice*. Assessing the narrator Stingo's positioning in the novel, he further views in relation to Sophie and Auschwitz:

Learning of Sophie's part and observing her eventual death constitute the chief means through which Stingo acquires an experience of evil .The two mysteries Sophie and Auschwitz and telescoped together, with Sophie serving as the focal point through which the mystery of Auschwitz can be glimpsed. (138)

According to this interpretation novel's narrative cluster sets telescopic paradigms in order to venture towards mysteries as Sophie and Auschwitz. Thus his method of interpretation relies upon the fact “the narrative displaces the mystery from it’s from as monstrous other to the familiar and near and from external to self” (150).

The novel has been interpreted as an exploration of the inner psyche of the protagonist Sophie. In this regard Elizabeth Harion-Sarafidls says:

Sophie's Choice is also again a narrative deeply engaged in exploring consciousness, in speaking the unspeakable in the charity of a quest for self-knowledge: The Sophie of the title is yet another fragmented self one more protagonist torturously enmeshed in feeling of guilt, like Nat Turner “pursued by an obscure, unshakable grief... shivering in the knowledge of the futility of all ambition”. What he sought to recreate, Styron explained in an interview, was the agony of the life women who was the inspiration for Sophie. (96)

The extent to which Styron's Sophie is an emotional cripple, someone whose identity has been irrevocably shattered, is a matter which is discussed only gradually to the Stingo whom she befriended on summer in New York in her life.

Issues of ego, journey of the narrator as a mature man, narrative technique, quotations used in the book, Christianity, protagonist as a fragmented self and dialogic worlds have been talked by different critics in their different interpretations and analysis basing upon different philosophical as well as theoretical stand point in which they rely on. With such variety of interpretations we can asserts that this novel has been widely interpreted novel.

Likewise, *The Handmaid's Tale* has also received a contradictory critical responding from the date of its publication. Regarding the themes, motifs, language and structure of the novel numerous critics have debated on the novel from several

perspectives. Interpreting this novel from psychoanalytical perspectives, critic and interpretive David's Hogsette focuses upon the language and structure.

... Offred demonstrates her control of language through the clever pun. In this heliocentric society, the pen is power and Offred has penis envy; that is pen in envy, she desires the power of the pen (is) that is monopolized by men and she wishes to reclaim her voice through language, through writing. But Offred accomplished more than just the reclamation of her voice. (270)

Viewing this novel from the perspective of power relation, the reviewer and interpreter Shirley Neuman says, "Logical extension of power" (857). Focusing upon the character of Offred, she says, "retrospective monologue ... reveals her as observant of the gardener configurations of power in both the personal and political realism, in both the time and the present of the novel" (857). Here, the critic method of interpretation dichotomies the male- female relationship under the canon of political perspectives.

Comparing and contrasting the narrative of the novel with 'opera', the interpreters and critics. Caryl Clark and Linda Hutcheon state:

The carefully worked out parallels between the operas two acts-both muscularly and dramatically-replace the realistic. Sense of random association so characteristics of this novel telling mode while aesthetically satisfying the symmetries of the showing mean too that Gilead's repressive power is felt as well as described. (818)

Going further down into the depth of the text, the critic Jennifer A. Wagner sheds light on the role irony plays in the characterization of the female protagonist. As she puts it:

“Offred makes her irony valuable. In the passage in which Offred turns down the doctor's offer of insemination, she tells us that it’s “too risky” that it’s the choice being offered? Offred articulates it and then locates its irony, “give me children, or else I die” (87). Jennifer states that the novel is not simply dystopian but anti-utopian in that the novels ironizes.

With such critical responses regarding the novels *Sophie's Choice* and *The Handmaid's Tale* it is worthwhile to mention here that these novels have got layers of individuals interpretations from critic and scholar of different thoughts and opinions, but these novels are still virgin in terms of comparatives analysis on the issue of consciousness and identity of the female characters - Sophie and Offred. Thus, through this comparative analysis the researcher aims to explore the situation of the female identity in different locations where patriarchy subjugates, subordinates and treats women as the “other”.

The present research has been divided in to four significant chapters. The first chapter is introduction in which the researcher briefly introduces the writers of these novels along with their major works and their thematic contents. It also briefly outlines the synopsis of these novels and their critical receptions and also sets the proposition for comparative analysis.

The second chapter particularly deals with the theoretical modality which is essential for the comparative textual analysis of present research paper. In this chapter the researcher brings the ideas, notions and conceptions from the feminist and post-feminist scholars who have dealt with the issues of identity of the females in the patriarchal society. Since feminism and post-feminism radicalizes the traditional concepts of

defining women along with the undercurrents of norms and conventions shaped by phallogentric hierarchical patriarchal social structure, this modality will be the apt tool in order to enter into the domain of textual analysis of both novels comparatively.

Along with the theoretical modality proposed in chapter second the researcher has attempted to prove the stated hypothesis being based upon the texts in chapter third. For this matter the researcher has traced out some relevant and significant excerpts from both texts for the lucidity of interpretation. Since this research paper is a comparative analysis, it tries to bring feminist and post-feminist ideological signations that explicitly focalize the strata of women, attempt to survey on both novels.

On the basis of textual analysis done in chapter three, chapter four is the conclusion of entire research work. After the thorough analysis of the text in considerable length the researcher tries to conclude this research project with the conclusion that the consciousness and identity of the females represented in these text is still shaped by the patriarchal norms, values and conceptions that problematizes the existence of females in society.

II. Feminism: An Introduction

Feminism is a school of thought which tries to dismantle the patriarchal social norms and values, that is against the natural law of equality, to liberate women. It, as a movement, declares that women are also human beings like to men. It is a massive complaint against patriarchal monopoly. It is a commitment to eradicate the ideology of domination to establish a healthy and equal society for both male and female. Feminism as “the movement for women’s liberation is a part of the creation of a new society in which there are not any forms of discrimination. Feminism focuses on physical, economic, political, and psychological, religions equality and opposes gender roles, stereotypes and discrimination against women based on the assumption that women are passive, weak and physically helpless.

Before 1920's women were confined only to the kitchen. They were supposed to live passively inside home. They were obliged to accept what the male member of the family provided them. Women were oppressed, so their voice was not heard. Gradually, women started to write their feelings and desires on diaries, pamphlets, love letters etc. 1960's saw the emergence of feminist group which advocated for women's liberation and social and political union. They fought for women's rights to vote and to receive education. This movement coincided with goals of other reform movements of the time, which included improved medical care, socialized property ownership, and class equality. Moreover, the works of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* written in 1792 and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1928) supports the thesis of these movements.

Feminism began as a political movement in 1960's and slowly it gained momentum and integrity and started to become popular. Toward 70's it entered into the academia as a theory, of it was imperative to take it up to analyze various texts to see where women were repressed /suppressed. Feminism became a tool for reading text. These readings enhanced questions such as: Should women be allowed to receive higher education? Should they be allowed to vote and take part in politics? Should women be employed equally with men in business world? What about the role in relation to their husband in the domestic spheres? And these questions emerged from disciplines as diverse as philosophy, theology, medicine physics and mathematics.

Feminism is the organized movement which promotes equality between men and women in political, economic, and social stratus. Feminists believe that women have been oppressed due to their sex and they say this is the dominant ideology of patriarchy. Patriarchy is the system which elevates men to positions of power through the notion of Pater or father, placing men in an economic and social executive position within the family unit, the market place and the street. Patriarchy represents all system of male dominants and is regarded as the root of most social problems. In other word, patriarchy has a male culture reform that wherever it is pre-eminent it has oppressed and dominated women, of all socio-economic classes and races. Throughout history men have had greater power in both the public and private spheres. To maintain this power, men have created boundaries and obstacles for women, thus, making it harder for women to hold power, it is the male always in supremacy.

Feminism studies the situation of the women who are oppressed or suppressed or deprived from patriarchal society. All writers who struggle against patriarchy in favor of

womanhood are generally considered as feminists. In this relation, feminism is also a political theory and practice to break the social bondage of patriarchy. Focusing on this aspect, Toril Moi, states: “The word feminist or feminism are political levels indicating support for the aims of the new women's movement” (135).

At the same time, Toril Moi, makes clear what feminist criticism is in her book *Feminist Literary Criticism* saying: “Feminist criticism, then, is a specific kind of political discourse, critical and theoretical practice, committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism, not simply a concern for gender in literature” (204). These lines show that she has focused on the nature of feminist criticism which concerns gender differences and likewise its development as theory and its application which are useful to learn, institutional and personal power relations between the sexes.

Likewise, Elaine Showalter in her book *Literature of Their Own* focuses on not only the reorganization of women's but also on rethinking the concept of literary study. She says:

Feminist criticism has demanded not just the recognition of women's writing but a radical rethinking of the concept of literary...feminist criticism is international in its resources and feminist critic's crisis-cross national boundaries. (181)

Feminists today have finally recognized that the world they have described is not the whole world because its central concern is social distinction between men and women. So, it is committed to eradicate the ideology of domination and discrimination.

The marginalization of women role is itself become the central focus of female thought and they tried to raise voice against male domination. The feminists who talked

about subverting male roles put women in equal rank. They study female space and try to place them in equal status, whether it is in social, political, moral or artistic sphere.

Feminism examines the ways in which literature reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social and psychological oppression of women. Feminism seeks female identity, raises voices against patriarchal trait of pronounced like 'inclusive he'. They question on the differences what possible differences could it make if we continue to use the 'inclusive he' to refer to member of both sexes? Women have been misrepresented /misinterpreted in social, political, cultural, biological, religious world and in the works of art and literature by generation of people to justify and maintain patriarchal system.

By the time women become conscious of their position in society and discrimination between men and women, many feminist emerged who forced upon women's mind, their well being and emancipation. They emerged from different nations, focusing on various aspects responsible for women's suffering and secondary position in society. Patriarchal society has indeed been well served by masculinist images, where all images of women have been male centered.

Misogynist distrust of women is an integral part of patriarchy. It includes the incompetent, castrating, over emotional etc. Such misbeliefs can easily be seen in the views of Aristotle a prominent philosopher declared that "the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities" (134 Selden). So, feminist views that such beliefs must be controlled, dominated, subdued as well as eradicated.

The notion that women are physically weak by nature was universally accepted in patriarchal society and it had become a means of controlling women in every sphere- social, political, and even literary. Focusing on this aspect Raman Selden writes:

Women have been made inferior and oppression has been compounded by men's belief that women are inferior by nature. However the abstract notion of equality receives lip service but demands for real equality will usually be restricted. (Selden 135)

Feminist writer view that 'feminism' is a second and cultural constructive form of women. When women reach a certain age and understand their gender, they are loaded with concept of feminist which is set of cultural norms reserved for females. Society considers women as objects rather than human beings of flesh and blood. In this concern Beauvior says, "Feminity is cultural construct. One is not born a women, one become one" (209). The role of women in society is cultural construct because female infants do not know what they are: they are just clay and it is the society which shapes them as females.

However, it is not an easy task to remove the deep rooted structure of society. It has taken a long time to realize and establish women's identity. The feminist view is that since women are equal participants in social construction, they should be indeed not treated as outcasts. So, feminism aimed to end the notion that one's biological sex is superior or inferior to the other.

The first blow on patriarchal structure however was given by Virginia Woolf in her book *A Room of One's Own* (1928). She said women always had to face social and economic obstacles to their literary ambitions. She was very conscious of the imposed

limitation on her own education. In this book, she explores deeper concerns of men's anger at women, misunderstanding between sexes and above all psychological conditions under which women are brought up. She says that to write anything at the time was considered a sin. Their attempt was not only criticized and condemned but also at the time they were disfigured and deformed. Society prevented women writers from writing openly. She writes: "She must have shut herself up in a room in the country to write and been torn asunder by bitterness and scruples perhaps, though her husband was of the kindest and their married life perfection" (819). Due to lack of separate writing room, women writer had to do her writing in a common sitting room.

Patriarchy and Identity: Feminist and Post-Feminist Glance

Analyzing the genealogical spectrum of the evolution of feminist literary criticism via the critical lens of feminism and post-feminism, one can fathom out its many zigzagged and streamlined marching ahead up to present era-the era of post-feminist insights and cognitive thirsts. Undoubtedly, from the initial phase of feminist criticism, there arise numerous homogeneous, and most often the heterogeneous, internecine conflicts and contradictions about its ultimate goal, the destination towards which the cognitive bullets have been fired out.

Obviously, so far the development of feminism in western academia is concerned; female "identity" is the nerve centre around which other critical insights revolve. The central concern of feminists rests on ensuring that the female identity that is different from essentialist, monolithic, and universalistic claim of patriarchal lobotomical thought structure-exists. Moreover, the western history crystallizes the "otherness" or even the "secondness", of female from eschatological affirmation of Bible to the historical

tendency of Derridean deconstruction. The idea of binary opposition (male/female) is ubiquitous and omnipresent that has been deeply engrained in every letters utilized for creating a “coherent” male identity, the language itself is male-biased. Hence, in a recent anthology of feminist criticism, it seems critiquing phallogentrism helping women to recognize themselves unfettering from the fear of losing one's unique identity. Feminist literatures have equated their consciousness of oppression and the consciousness of identity.

During the post few years, feminist critics have approached writing by women an abiding commitment to discover what, if anything, makes women's writing different from man's and a tendency to feel that some significant differences do exist:

The most common answer is that women's experience differs from men in profound and regular ways. Critics using this approach find recurrent imagery and distinctive content in writing by women, for example, imagery of confinement and unsentimental description of child care. The other main explanation of female difference posits a ‘female consciousness’ the produced style and structure innately different from those of the masculine mind. (Gardiner 248)

The literary production by women, in recent years, portrays the female's awareness of self-existence both thematically and structurally by means of the varieties of literary flavors: characters, symbols, images, language and so on. Through the relationship between the narrator and the reader, such fictions, re-create the ambivalent experiences of ego violation and mutual identification that occur mother and daughter. The women writer allies herself intimately with her female reader through their identification,

together they explore what is public and what is private, what they reject and what they reflect.

In a male-dominated society being a man means not being like a woman. As a result, the behaviors appropriate to each gender becomes severely restricted and polarized. The primary identity of women remains relational throughout life, and girls from the gender identity that define them as women easily, seriously and permanently. Since women do not like men, experience gender itself as problem, social attempts to make it a problem for them may cause confusion and anxiety. Many pioneering works of female modernism, like those of Woolf and Stein, create fictional universe which question patriarchal assumption about the conformity between gender ascription and other aspects of personality:

Women in recent novels do not fear loss of their lovers not do they seriously recent male infidelity. The husband who goes off with another woman leaves his wife poorer but freer. The sexually alienates women heroes are not guilty, nor they find sexual love redemptive. At best it offers women temporary warmth and sexual exhilaration; more often, it confuses women and alienates them from themselves. (Gardiner 360)

In this way, the vector of women's literary production inclines toward the unfettered self-expression and self-realization, free from the patriarchal ideology.

A confrontation with feminist novels of the last twenty years or so can generate the fruitful question for feminist criticism not only about the representation of feminism itself and our retrospective readings of them but also about the concerns and the language

of feminism about the fantasy and about a posited 'feminist subjectivity'. In this regard, Maria Laurent says:

Notion of women as a unified category of 'feminism' of women's writing and of 'feminist criticism' itself have been effectively deconstructed, thereby undermining the possibility of feminist reading of feminist, fiction without the use of inverted commas. It there are no many feminisms, many types of feminist criticism (even if the articles tend to suggest) there are also many different possible feminist readings of the same novel. My example of socialist-feminist reading of *Tara Episode of Veda*, which focused on a utopian moment in an otherwise rather depressing novel and took that as central could be countered by a different reading in which the possibility of social change doesn't have such a central place...(97)

In this regard, feminist fiction draws on and subverts the hermetic literary boundary and the foundational presumptions of generic definition.

Women in the 1920s had achieved a measure of emancipation-suffrage, wider education, job opportunities as well as the degree of sexual freedom. But these developments looked both fable and distorted beside the full-grown, healthy liberation and social relation. Indeed, a group of radical women in Greenwich Village rededicated their publication *Judy* to human liberation beyond the now-resolved male-female dialectives; they called this new position of their "post-feminism". By addressing the idea in her essay "Killing Patriarchy: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the Murder Mystery and Post-Feminist Propaganda" Lillian S. Robinson says:

... our times were now post feminist was one where, for the first time in history, we had attached names to a range of experiences that had long marked women's lives—names like domestic violence, sexual harassment, acquaintance rape. Those changes in the discourse meant we were at the beginning of other changes, not surely at the end. But, there is no denying that, in the thirteen or fourteen years since the term 'post-feminism' arrived like a uninvited guest in our common lexicon, there has been an overall shift in the social debate, a rightward movement of the entire frame of political reference that has influenced and in many ways distorted the further development of feminism. (274)

But with the beginning of the 1990s, we are once again being told that the women's struggle for existence has been over: “The lessons of Upanishad are less ambiguous than the text itself... The authors of feminist mainstream fiction, join the writers of feminist murder mysteries in agreeing that it is... (above all) post-feminism require that feminist representations and remedies remain true to the difficulty and complexity—the mayhem-of women's lives, writers and readers to be not only unpunished but unfettered in the production, reception, proliferation and the interpretation of text triggering the voices, views and visions of females, and the trajectory, and the psycho dynamics of female creativity.

The period of late 1980s and early 1990s, was characterized by several interwoven strands of post-feminism. Post-feminism is also a way of taking feminism for granted. But instead of asking feminist questions as a matter of course, post feminism incorporates some of the inside about the social life and power arrangements of feminist

discourse without making them an explicit focus of analysis and debate. To clarify this very concept of post-feminism, Becker says:

One strand of post-feminism is the idea that feminism as a social movement, having pushed us towards a more egalitarian society (...), is now essentially over and the radicalism associated with it has been appropriately replaced by approaches to gender that seek consensus and value men's experience. (399)

In this way, the concept of post-feminism is not limited within the boundary of certain rules and regulations which are related to men and women but it has its oscillation with society and religion:

...By definition, women participated in religious institutions because they want to do so, because their needs are met, criticizing these choices seems at best patronizing and at worst undemocratic. While I do believe we are all in one sense agents, I do not share the view of agency upon which they were basing their either/or dichotomy [...] In my "agency is more complicated than that", argument, that they are a straightforward hegemony theory which was not there thinking that I meant women suffered from some pernicious form of false consciousness. We talked past each other, in part because I did not yet have the theoretical to make my case clearly. (400)

In such an environment, post-feminism confronts the young feminist as something of a briar patch to be negotiated with care. But post-feminism has forsaken any theoretical

ground from which to address issues of power in areas upon which there is no such taken-for-granted feminist consensus:

In this new project, I have tried to push myself to ask how post-feminism has influenced both on perspectives and the precious sociological work on family and religion that I have encountered. I don't have final answer to question about the usefulness of a post-feminist interpretation of religion and family. But there are some silences that I have become determined to fill in, if I can; and sharing those may be useful to others thinking through similar issues. (402)

In this manner, religious institutions have powerful effect on marital formation and stability. Religion is understood as private in the religion and family literature in several mutually reinforcing senses of that word. A voluntary institution, if embraced or rejected by choice. It operates inside the heads of individual influencing is the individual behaviors and forms of what have traditionally been considered private life, the life of family and interpersonal relationships: sometimes, of course, religious groups 'go public' in the form of inspiring publicly-visible utopian subcultures which critique the larger society, or in the form of religiously-based social movements on issue such as abortion and birth control; or in the public statements of religious leaders about what constitutes a good family. But this activity is generally seen as an attempt to impose upon public discourse values that originate in a private sphere. Even though the sphere are "bridged" by such activity, the idea that public and private are distinct and that religions is most certainly located in the private remains intact in such treatment. (404)

As a result, a boundary is erected between sociology of religion and others who study the family from a human development feminist theory, or gender-and-work perspective. The latter that usually have no explicit feminist commitment, often ignore religion entirely or assume that any religious influence in family life is harmful to women. By raising these questions here Becker remarks:

I am feeling more combative, or at least constructively critical about theories that neatly divided society into a “public” and a private realm, while systematically devaluing those feminine things (religion and family) assigned to the private. I am not sure where it will lead but it feels right to begin pushing back the boundaries of post-feminism by asking a different set of questions. (406)

Elizabeth Ermarth has written in her book *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel* with insight on the phenomena of female casualties in realistic fiction by men. She explains that, “In representations fiction there is preoccupation with the conflict between and individual and societies or between individual and what Ermarth calls the “Prevailing Consensus” (Ermarth 1983, 10). She states further that the relatively high proportion of important female casualties' results primarily from situation in which women's psychic needs are not understood and therefore not met in this prevailing, inevitably patriarchal, consensus. In such fiction, the heroine is out of from the chief resource in her community. These breakdown/casualties are fatal to a surprising number of heroines who reached at the stage of suicide. Because of their extreme victimization, fictive heroines do not participate in the objectifying consensus but instead they are objectified by it. So they are represented in the margins of social existence, becoming irreversibly isolated from the

main stream and thus cut off from the life world of the community. If a woman, despite of a narrators sympathy challenges the system she may given to a psychic suicide, a denial of her will, of which physical death is at times only a final solution (Quoted in Hadaller, 9).

With such underpinnings of basic philosophical and theoretical tenets marked by feminists scholar from different philosophical grounds, it is worthwhile to come to the conclusion that feminism as a movement has attempted to establish the position of women in the society. Along with the disclosure of subjugation, subordination, and exploitation done from the patriarchally constructed ideology in linearity, feminism tries to raise consciousness on women regarding the position, situation they deserve and the existence which germinate towards the identity of women under the construction of that ideology. It is with such consciousness females can raise their voice against the patriarchal ideological strata according to feminism.

III. Identity and Existence in *Sophie's choice*

William Styron's novel *Sophie's Choice* presents the principal character Sophie as the penetrator searching for the autonomous existence surrounding the different locations in the structuration of phallogentric epitomized ideology which intends to proceed ahead the idiosyncratic notions to perceive and define females. Under such teleology of fanatical patriarchy Sophie generates her consciousness and tries to escape from that by committing suicide at the end of the novel which provides her existential liberation under the redundancy of illusion of the identity.

Sophie has the most complex identity problems of the three figures in the book, perhaps in part because she relies on others for her sense of self. For the most part Carolyn A. Durham is correct when she asserts that Sophie's identity is "entirely relational" and dependent on the men around her. In her youth in Poland, she was tied to her father, a man who had "no more feeling for me than a servant, some peasant or slave" (246). She is a dutiful and respectful daughter, and later she becomes the wife of a man who appears to be a carbon copy of her father, but when these men are killed, her sense of self is shattered. In such vulnerable to the pressure of Wanda, who urges Sophie to become involved in the resistance movement. When Wanda says, "I am appealing to you in the *name of humanity* I am trying to appeal to your sense of *decency*, to sense of yourself as a *human being* and a pole" (370), her strategy is essentially a plea for Sophie to consider her "identity" in the broadest possible terms. Sophie responds to Wanda's entreaty in very specific terms: "I *can't* risk it, with children" (370). When Wanda presses her, Sophie utters one of the strongest assertions of who she is: "I told you before, I'm not *other women.*' and I'm not in the Home Army... I'm *myself!* I have to act according to

my conscience. You don't have children" (370). Sophie here makes her choice in the name of motherhood, a part of herself that she has salvaged from the loss of her father and husband. Ironically and tragically, it is her identity as a mother that is so cruelly assaulted when she is forced to choose between her two children at Auschwitz. As Stingo says, "That preservative and maternal passion hers which in Warsaw... Wanda had deemed so selfish, so indecent, was something that, brought to its cruelest trial, Sophie could not overcome..." (399).

In the camp Sophie is stripped bare, physically and psychologically, and "tattooed for identification" (379). As in the encounter with Wanda her confrontation with the SS doctor forces her to declare who she is: "I'm not Jewish! Or my children-they're not Jewish either... They are racially pure. They speak German... I'm a Christian. I'm a devout Catholic" (482). Dr. Jemand von Neimand responds, you're a Polack, not a Yid. That gives you a privilege-a choice" (483). The choice he offers her demands she betray that shred of herself that is left, her role as mother. When her daughter is taken away, Sophie is reduced to pleading that her son becomes a part of the Lebensborn program.

Though it will save him from death, Lebensborn will also guarantee he will be lost to her forever because his identity will be transformed. Sophie is cautioned by a friend that if Jan is accepted into the program she should no look for him because she would find him everywhere, in every face: "They took away the identities of these children in Lebensborn, changed their names so fast, turned them so quickly in Germans..." (493).

Styron reinforces the identity motif with two other signification scenes is Hoss's house. After being unsuccessful at saving her son, Sophie contemplates stealing the radio

for Bronek and the others in the camp's underground movement. She stands up in the hallway beneath the head of an antlered stag and as she stares up at the glass eyeball of the deer, they “gave back twin images of herself; frail, wasted, her face bisected by cadaverous planes, she gazed deeply at her duplicate self, contemplating how in exhaustion and in the tension and indecision of the moment, she could possibly hold on to her sanity” (394). This is a powerful image for the novel. Sophie sees herself reflected in the glass eyes of a dead deer, her image split in two, and she fears insanity. Though a dominant theme for the schizophrenic Nathan, the insanity motif is at the center of Sophie's shattered sense of herself and divided loyalties.

Another cluster of images having to do with Sophie's identity occurs some minutes later when she faints in Emmi Hoss's room, and she “had the feeling that she was the performer in a play from which the central act was missing” (397). Emmi Hoss comes to Sophie's aid, but her brusque treatment leaves Sophie with the “feeling of being simultaneously ministered to and victimized” (397), a feeling that foreshadows her brutal and loving treatment at the hands of Nathan. But Sophie's experience with Emmi is more than foreshadowing; Emmi also serves as the antithesis of Sophie, for this child of the Nazi commandant is the embodiment of ego. The girl's strong assertions as she shows Sophie her photograph album underscore her confidence in who and what she is: “*Das bin ich... und das bin ich,*’ Emmi continued in her childish drone, stabbing at the photographs with her button thumb, the rapt ‘*me me me*’ uttered again and again in a half whisper like an incantation” (398). In sharp contrast to Emmi, Sophie lacks a sense of self. Nathan comments: “My darling, I think you have absolutely no ego at all” (340).

Nathan's observation is true of Sophie through much of her life, especially after her experience in Auschwitz and the loss of her children.

Stripped of any identity except for her tattoo, Sophie comes to America. When she first arrives at Yetta's rooming house she is disoriented: "She would for long seconds be so unable to name or recognize either herself or her surrounding that she felt herself to be in a somnolent trance, like the enchanted maiden in one of those Grimm fairy tales of her childhood, transported after a nocturnal spell to a new and unknown kingdom" (90). This sleeping maiden of fairy tales is another central metaphor for Sophie, needs a Prince Charming to wake her. Indeed, it is the imagery of rebirth that fills Stingo's account of Sophie's early months in America. Even before she meets Nathan, her life in America feels like a "rebirth" and she possesses "a great deal of the helplessness of a newborn child..." (91). Sophie really is reborn in America, and with Nathan she dresses in the costumes of their shared fantasies.

Costumes are another central image that contribute to the identity theme. Soon after he meets them, Stingo is invited to go to the beach with Nathan and Sophie. He enters her room, and the two make their entrance.

And from behind the screen, hand in hand, flashing uniform vaudevillian smiles came Sophie and Nathan dancing a little two-step and wearing some of the most bewitchingly tailored clothes I had ever seen. More nearly costumes really, they were decidedly out of fashion-his being a white chalk stripe gray flannel double-breasted suit of the kind made modish more than fifteen years before by the Prince of wales; hers a pleated plum-colored satin skirt of the same period, a white flannel yachting jacket, and a

burgunding two relics, they were clearly expensive and too well-fitting to be anything but custom-made (62-63).

Nathan explains to Stingo who is feeling “desolate in my white Arrow shirt and its rolled-up sleeves and with my nondescript baggy slacks” (63), that this was “just a little hobby”, helped along by the talents of an obliging tailor. The period costumes Sophie and Nathan wear suggest their shared desire to escape the present: Nathan explains that “Today we’re wearing early thirties. But we’ve clothes from the twenties, World War One period, Gay Nineties, and even earlier than that” (63).

Nathan tells Stingo that the origin of their “little hobby” appears to have been Sophie’s desire to counter the dreary conformity she sees around her:

“It was Sophie’s idea,” Nathan explained further, “and she’s right. People look drab on the street. They all look alike, walking around in uniform. Clothes like these have individually style. That’s why it’s fun when people stare at us... Dress is important. It’s part of being human”. (63)

The allusions to uniforms in this passage suggest that the costumes are inspired by Sophie's experience in Auschwitz. Another passage describing the rape in the subway also supports the idea that Sophie's interest in costumes has its origin in her naked state in Auschwitz, “She, who had for so long been off and on literally naked and who, these few months in Brooklyn, had so painstakingly re clothed herself in self assurance and sanity had again by his act, she knew, been stripped bare” (93).

Sophie is easy prey to Nathan's fantasies and masquerade because they provide her with an identity she lacks, illusory though it is. When she and Nathan put on their costumes, they are in effect donning new identities. Both of them, ill in different ways-

she is devoid of a sense of herself; he has many identities- create new fantasy selves through their clothing.

Styron buttresses the masquerade imagery with references to Hollywood. When, for example, Nathan first rescues her he tells she will soon be able to swim like Esther Williams (136) and later when the two of them anticipate their marriage, they buy “a trousseau fit for a Hollywood princess” (439). Also Sophie, as Stingo recalls, wears costumes that make her look like movie stars (Clara Bow, Fay Wray, Gloria Swanson [502]), and at various points in his narrative Stingo records that Nathan and Sophie together look like Hollywood couples, John Garfield and Lana Turner, or William Powells and Carole Lombard, the “romantic strangers of Hollywood daydreams” (99). Lacking a sense of herself, Sophie, with Nathan's help, can create the illusion of an identity by dressing like Hollywood figures.

There is a final element of the identity motif that pertains to all three characters. “Names” imply identity, and Sophie has more than one name in the novel. Legally she is Sophie Zawistowska and Nathan affectionately calls her Sophie love, but she is also called Zosia, her family's nickname for her and, in Nathan's mad phase, Irma Grises, an epithet intended to implicate her in the Nazi crimes. Besides specific names, Nathan calls her by other terms, including “whore” (46), “an anti-Semitic Polish pig” (82), “that sweet siren of Cracow- that inimitable, that incomparable, that tragically faithless daughter of joy, Poland's gem and gift to the concupiscent chiropractors of Flatbush-Sophie Zawistowska” (202). Sophie’s confused identity is evoked in part by the names or epithets others apply to her.

As Sophie was dependent on men in Poland, so she is in America. The two men she knows in Brooklyn, Nathan and Stingo, play roles she needs: she is wounded and ill, and Nathan plays doctor; she is guilty, and Stingo plays spiritual confessor. It is to Stingo she can turn to get in touch with that self that she has left in the past. This process of self discovery is, to some extent, Sophie playing the prince to her own past by verbally recreating herself for Stingo. Her tragedy is that she cannot live with what she finds there. Sophie's story is a confession, and psychologically she strips herself down to the naked truth. Literally stripped, she goes to bed with Stingo in Washington Hotel. Bare and naked in bed with Stingo, she has the choice, as Stingo once implores, to "Love me! Love life!" (349). She has concealed herself, sheltered and protected her secrets because she lacks the strength to face herself. Ultimately, when she and Nathan escape in to death, the vestments of their fantasies wrapped about them, their costumes are the shrouds that mask madness and guilt.

Sophie's story is also, however, a story of a woman's lack of identity, of a victim who needs again and again a redeemer to save and protect her. Sadly, it is a story of false redeemers. Her father, Hoss, she erroneously feels, will be her salvation if she knows his pamphlet to the Nazis. Nathan had appeared to Sophie "like a redemptive knight from the void and restored her to life" in the library (312), but they die together. Stingo, though he plays father confessor, is obsessed with his own visions of her as "the chatelaine of manor", the mistress of his peanut farm (490). Ultimately, none of the men in Sophie's life can save her, or can they be expected to provide her with what she lacks a strong core of identity.

In chapter ten of the novel, Stingo recounts that when Sophie's father and husband are murdered by the Nazis, she feels "a devastating sense of loss; her entire sense of self identity was unfastened". A few pages later Stingo describes Sophie standing at the window in Hoss's house, smelling the stench of the crematoriums: "She realized that she could not remember her own name. 'Oh God *help me!* She called aloud. '*I don't know what I am!*' " (266). The identity motif set forth here has a prominent place in the structure of *Sophie's Choice*. Evoked by imagery of costumes and masquerades, mirrors, names, and schizophrenia, it is part of a general pattern in the novel involving Stingo and Nathan, as well as Sophie. One of the ways Styron achieves artistic unity in *Sophie's Choice* is through his consistent use of this motif.

Thus, the novel unfolds the subjugation, subordination, exploitation and atrocity as well as tyranny done from the sexist patriarchal social structure to women in every sector. Women are not only carved as the objectified "other" in the picture of patriarchy their domination undercuts their identity and existence as free and autonomous human universals which can be measured through the interpretation of the protagonist Sophie in *Sophie's Choice*.

Consciousness of Identity and Existence in *The Handmaid's Tale*

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the protagonist cum narrator Offred's perception on the Gileadean sexist ideology constructed under the norms and values of patriarchy and the treatment of women or females within that construction provides the ground to understand the condition of the women under that social structure. Within the limits of subjugatory experience which Offred gained being handmaid in Gileadean camp, she generates the consciousness for the provisional revolt to get rid from the patriarchal atrocity, which makes her conscious about her identity and existence.

Most of the plot of the novel is set in the Camp, where 'women' are treated as 'Handmaids', 'unwomen', 'loose women', 'two legged womb', and have no identity. They have been restricted from reading and writing and create close relation to each other. In chapter one, there is an old gymnasium that appears to be like a women's prison, this sort of introductory part suggests that the location may be the United States of America. It manages to evoke not only regimented discipline with the lines of army cots and the aunts on patrol but also the young women's ability to find ways of resisting the system of control. Here, Offred narrator and the protagonist of the novel, who acts as handmaid, that has been assigned to the service of patriarchy. Not only Offred but also Serena Joy, wife of commander, is trapped in a patriarchal system which rigidly controls all women. The rigid colour coding of the women's clothes indicates that in this society their individual identities are lost in prescribed roles. In chapter two it reveals without explicitly stating that Offred's role in the household is to be a surrogate mother, a handmaid, bearing a child for the commander and his ageing wife. This is clearly not a voluntary agreement but the result of a Gileadean government order. For Offred it will be

a crucial time, if she does not produce a child she will be sent to the colonies.

Handmaids have assigned their duty in serve their male partner. Males whoever gets to form sexual relation with women and do not care about their problems.

Atwood here attempts to portray the reality of the Handmaids under the patriarchal system, and we can see some sort of existential premises. As a Soren Kierkegaard asserts that Christian doctrine and its quest for objective truth have nothing. Here also commander prays God through he does not care for the sufferings and torture of the handmaids, neither does he sympathies.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood complicates such a socio-political paradigm by creating a futuristic society in which women do not have overt powers of choice, do not have many options from which to choose, and are denied the opportunity to read and write, that is the opportunity to learn and to express what they feel and think. In this sense in chapter fourteen Offred says:

My name isn't Offred. I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden. ... your name is like your telephone number, useful only to others; but what I tell myself is wrong, it does matter. ... I lie in my single bed at night, with my eyes close, and the name floats there behind my eyes, not quite within reach, shining in the dark. (94)

Women become no persons-individuals who lack the rights and opportunities that might enable them to counter openly society's construction of them as Martha, wife, and Handmaids and their society strips them of any resources with which to create their own subjective reality. Atwood presents Offred as 'object' that males are satisfying their libidinal desires by playing with her sexual organs. In leisure time she used to watch the

films, those films which are allowed to be seen themselves have been commodifying.

When Offred meets Aunt Lydia, Aunt Lydia didn't show other kinds of movies. She has been seeing the pornographic sort of films. Offred elaborates in chapter twenty.

Sometimes the movie she showed would be an old porno film, from the seventies or eighties. When 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, and killed... (128)

From the above extract we come to know that not only Offred suffering from patriarchal system but since many decades ago women had been treated as 'object'. As Heidegger asserts the belief that men should face explicitly the problem of being, he has to determine his own existence in this respect. Atwood's, Offred is in search of her existence, she says, "I want to be held and told my name. I want to be valued, in ways that I am not; I want to be more than valuable. I repeat my former name. Remind myself of what I once could do, how others saw me" (108).

Similarly, Atwood presents existential idea by representing the protagonist Offred and other Handmaids. Though here in this text, through the feminist angst of reading that women have been treated as 'object'. Handmaids have nowhere been safe. Even in doctors' clinic where they go for their live sake but no security feeling. In chapter Eleven, Offred portrays the doctor's treatment she says; "I take off my cloths, behind the screen, and get me down on the examining table, on the sheet of chilly cracking disposable paper. I pull the second sheet, the cloth one, up over my body" (70). She has been taken to the

doctor's once a month, for tests; urine, hormones, cancer smear, and blood test. Though she has no security, rather she is raped. As she states:

My breasts are fingered in their turn, a search for ripeness, rot
 The breathing comes nearer; I smell old smoke aftershave, tobacco dust
 on hair. Then the voice, very soft, close to my head; that's him, bulging
 the sheet. "I could help you", he says, Whispers.
 "What?" I say
 "Shh", he says. "I could help you. I've helped other's. "Help me?" I say
 my voice as low. "How?" (70)

In this extract existence identity has nothing at all regarding to the women, they have no voice that will be heard by someone. They cannot raise any question against any kind of suppression. If someone raises the question against patriarchy then they will be sent to the colonies where they will get death punishment. Doctor says "Lots of women do it" (71). Offred says to the doctor "give me children or else die" (71). In the Gileadean society if women couldn't give birth they would be hanged by sending them to the colonies. Males are always superior from earlier period. "Commander" represents the household, "the commander is the head of the household. The house is what he holds to have and to hold till death do us part" (91).

Atwood, in this text, has presented the protagonist Offred who successfully sketches the reality of the contemporary Gileadean society who does not get any sort of love that she feels secure birth but merely compelled to give her body reluctantly for sexual satisfaction. She says' "...nobody dies from lack of sex. Its lack of love we die from. There's nobody here I can love, all the people I could love are dead or else where.

Who knows where they are or what their names are not? They might as well be nowhere as I am for them; I too am a missing person” (113).

Offred could not feel any sort of love she closely studies other handmaids who have not away from these miseries, sufferings, and tortures. Serena joy, wife of commander even she not got security, she has not her own identity. Offred say;

Serena Joy it could say on the bottle, with a woman’s head in cut paper silhouette on a pink oval background with scalloped gold edges. With everything to choose from in the way of names, why did she pick that one? Serena joy was never her real name, not even then. Here real name was Pam. I read that in profile on her, in a news magazine. (55)

From the above extract we come to know that not only Offred suffering from patriarchal system but since many decades ago women had been treated as 'object'.

Indeed Atwood's primary concern in *The Handmaid's Tale* is to examine the political nature of language use. Offred gradually recognizes that she can manipulate language in order to create her own subjectivity, a subjectivity that can enable her to act as a subversive against the oppressive reality created by the Republic of Gilead. However, Atwood's epilogue brings into question Offred's political effectiveness thus foregrounding a sub textual dimension to Atwood's primary concern. Atwood not only explores the political potential of the user of language, but also suggests that the receiver of language-listeners or readers must properly interpret the language the political agent users for language truly to create a self empowering subjectivity and reality.

Offred begins to realize the existence of a relationship among language, the self, institutions and power. For example, when Offred first meets Serena Joy, Offred

carefully considers how she should respond to Serena's question (20-21). Offred realizes her lowly position and doesn't wish unduly to magnify her social oppression by having her words misinterpreted as an insult. Offred apparently already understands that language must be interpreted and can therefore be misinterpreted and that language and intuitional power are related. She doesn't worsen her already lowly effects of Serena's possible misinterpretation not only reveals how quickly Offred has learned the power dynamic of oppressor and oppressed but also provides a basis upon which she gradually builds her understanding of the political, social and humanistic ramification of language. Her first step towards that realization comes when she ponders the multiplicity of meaning of single word. For example, as she waits for her dinner one evening Offred contemplates the various levels of meaning associated with the word 'chair'.

I sit in the chair and think about the word 'chair'. It can also mean a mode of execution. It is the first syllable in charity. It is the French word for Flesh. None of these facts has any connection which the others. There are kinds of Litanies I use to compose myself. (120)

Furthermore, the Handmaids become the possession of their respective commanders, and when any fault is found in the women they are sent to the colonies and hanged. Offred says:

We are for breeding purpose; we aren't concubines, geisha girls, courtesans. On the contrary; everything possible has been done to remove us from that category. There is supposed to be nothing entertaining about us, no room is to be permitted for the following of flowering of secret lusts; no special favors are to be wheedled, by them or us, there are to be

no footholds for love. We are two-legged wombs, that's all; sacred vessels, ambulatory clichés. (146)

With a newly awaked sense of her individuality she gives some details about herself, her age and her appearance, and her mood is higher. Not only does she tolerate whatever she got, she analyzes critically the role of women and treatment of male or the female. Offred asked herself “why don't women have to prove to one another that they are women?” 83.

In the same token, Aunt Lydia says “Men are sex machines, and not much more. They only want one thing. You must learn to manipulate them, for your own good. Lead them around by the nose; that is a metaphor. It's nature's, It's God's device. It's the way things are” (153).

The Handmaids are for the sake of patriarchy, they cannot do anything without taking their permission. Atwood gives a brief history of the North American feminist movement in chapter twenty. When Offred has been watching film there she has seen her young mother who was at one of the feminist rallies about anti-pornography and pro-abortion in the 1970s holding a banner; “freedom to choose every baby a wanted baby. Recapture our bodies. Do you believe a woman's place is on the kitchen table?” (130). Women raised their voice of unity in against of the patriarchy, Offred's mother were violated the patriarchy domination by chatting the slogans against that society. Here Offred further says:

Now my mother is moving forward, she's smiling, laughing, they all move forward and now they're raising their fists in the air. The camera moves to the sky, where hundreds of balloons rise, trailing their strings; red balloons, with circle painted on them, a circle with a stem like the stem of an apple,

the stem is cross. Back on the earth, my mother is part of the crowd now,
and I can't see her any more. (130)

Offred realizes the consciousness of the past; she feels the torture of present is the result of unfulfilled demand of the past. Offred chooses the freedom of refusal; she refuses to believe in Gileadean doctrines, she refuses to forget her past life, and crucially she refuses to be silenced. Offred imagines her past and regret from the present. She realizes much more responsibilities from the past that she has to do a lot for her mother's sake.

In this way, this novel explores the dissatisfaction created because of the hegemonic structuration of male female dichotomy that always places females on to its base subordinating females by male oriented superstructure. The consciousness of this hegemony leads the females like Offred in this novel to revolt the status quo of patriarchy for the egalitarian perception to think not in male female dichotomy but as human beings.

Consciousness, Identity and the Situation of Sophie and Offred: A Comparative Analysis

The situation of the protagonist of the novel *Sophie's Choice*-Sophie and the protagonist in *The Handmaid's Tale*-Offred in terms of their identity and their deserving consciousness being the female under the complex construction of patriarchal societal dogma harmonizes in terms of their experiences proliferating the need of struggle for the sovereignty to survive being free and autonomous individual. Despite the variances of the locations under which they have been survived, the nature of subjugation, subordination and exploitation which they are facing under such societal construction is affine. As Offred states her experience in Gileadean sexist society:

On the wall hang 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 united and are stiff and proper at their sides. The blue one is in the middle, the two red ones on either side, though the colours are no longer as bright; they seem to have faded, grown dingy, like dead butterflies or tropical fish drying on land. The gloss is off them. We stand and look at him is silence. (295)

Offred's normal life is shattered by the disappearance of Ofglen. Here, no one is cared about the death of Ofglen, only Offred takes seriously because she has challenged to face it. She realizes more about the real existence of women's in Gileadean society. Owners do not care about the individual's problem rather they are worried about the replacement of the lost one. Every person has their own selfish and own intention but no one became serious to the others. Such type of patriarchal brutality onto the woman materializes the

existence and identity in that the value of women in that society is less than the animals since they are taken into consideration in order to merely fill-up the purpose of man. If in any case they could not be able to satisfy the utilitarian perspective of patriarchy they would be treated very badly culminating into the verge of death.

Sophie's experience in the Nazi concentration camp of Auschwitz where the Jews were imprisoned is also the pathetic one because while remaining there she was exploited both physically and mentally from the male figures. Even though she became able to survive simply because she was not the Jew, she had to sacrifice her children. In her attempt to survive one of her child she had to indulge herself for the sexual activity in order to fulfill the hunger of captain Hoss which was totally her exploitation. Despite her consciousness about the exploitation, there was no way out except accepting that proposal of captain Hoss. As she later recounts her situation in Auschwitz concentration camp:

‘Then I heard Hoss say, “Get to your feet! Demonstrations like this Offred me. Get up!” But when I began to get up his voice got softer and he said, “Certainly you may see your son, Sophie”. I realized that it was the first time he ever spoke my name. Then-oh Jesus Christ, Stingo, he actually embraced me again and I heard him say, “Sophie, certainly you may see your little boy”. He said, “Do you think I could deny you that? *Glaubst du, dass ich ein ungeheuer bin?* Do you think I am some kind of monster?” (349)

After all because of the stereotypical idiosyncrasies which profligate the structuration of manish norms, values and morales, both Offred in gileadean society and Sophie in

german concentration camp suffer much with sexual as well as mental exploitation that deteriorates their perception about the status quo resulting their provisional revolt from that atrocity. As a form of revolt both characters flee from the particular place where they were staying. Sophie being aware about the nature of exploitation in the concentration camp makes her journey towards the territory of America whereas Offred also escapes from that societal strata but we don't know where she goes. In this point we can see the commonality in terms of the consciousness about the existence and identity of both characters as we are informed that the obligation to escape from the place is not because of the place but because of the constructed ideological signations under the rubric of patriarchy that demarcate the positional notation of females as always submerged and in Aristotelian sense placing them just as the means to fulfill the desires of male figures.

Sophie's identification and attachment again in the American location with the male figures problematizes her existence and identity. In this new world also she is exploited, submerged and codified with the same ideological patriarchal signations.

Though, she is aware about the fact that her identity is in problematic situation, she can't escape again from the attachment with male figures realing the universal resemblance of the empire of patriarchy rather she seems to accept her placement as the puppetified victim of the patriarchal ego. Unlike Sophie, Offred on the other hand, is not ready to commit the same mistake again rather she vanishes herself from the totalitarian fanaticism of patriarchy that sets the hint on the provisional rebel against the dichotomical representation of patriarchal hierarchy.

Atwood by presenting protagonist like Offred projects patriarchy as the evil of society. In Gileadean society, women do get sent off to the colonies or commit suicide,

which Offred herself refuses to do. Offred and Moira both women are presented as the feminist heroines in this text, by showing women's energetic resistance to Gileadean system, but there are no winners. Women are dehumanized and subjugated under the domain of patriarchy. Neither compromise nor rebellion wins freedom, though it is likely that Offred's rebellion wins freedom, Offred is rescued by Nick. However, their values lie in their speaking out against the imposition of silence, challenging tyranny and oppression. Their stories highlight the actions of two individual women whose very different private assertions become exemplary or symbolic.

Resistance against patriarchy has become a dominant mode of literary expression that we find in feminist writings. Atwood has always insisted on the importance of Offred as narrator and on storytelling as her means of resistance to the oppression of her Handmaid's role in *The Handmaid's Tale*, before and after, Atwood says: "It's the story of one woman under this regime told in a very personal way, and part of the challenging for me was the creation of her voice and view point" (223). This is after all a woman's survival narrative where Offred lays claim to many things forbidden by Gilead to her name, her room, and her memories of the past. Contrarily, in *Sophie's Choice* Styron has depicted the male character Stingo in the form of narrator who sketches the character of Sophie along the lines she talks with him. This may signal the socio-cultural epitomization to depict the reality which is handled by patriarchal autonomy.

Furthermore, sexual perversion as well as physical violation done even in American location by Nathan and Stingo to a helpless woman like Sophie creates the patriarchal platform for the treatment of woman as non-human creatures. As Nathan physically violates Sophie by breaking her rib:

...He broke one of my ribs when he kicked me. One of my *ribs!* He had to take me to a doctor - not Larry, thank God - he had to take me to a doctor and I had x-rays and I had to wear all this tape for six weeks. And we had to invent a story for this doctor- that I slipped up, and fell and crack my rib on the pavement. Oh, Stingo, I'm glad I'm rid of such a man! Such a cruel person, so... so malhonnete. I'm happy to leave, she proclaimed... (429)

Though Sophie is facing this sort of situation time and again from the male figures i.e. her father, her husband, Captain Hoss, Nathan Landau and so on and she has the knowledge that she is receiving the mistreatment from the attachment with such male figures, she is destined to accept the exploitation, brutality, and violence because she cannot go against the totalitarian dogmaticity of phallogentrism. At the end she chooses her death because of the death of Nathan which provides us the glimpse of the situation of Sophie.

On the other hand, Atwood's sketch of the female character like Offred as the puppetified and commodified victims of the masculine superstructure can be envisioned when the patriarchal structure forces them to motivate towards sexuality by showing the pornographic films. As Offred states:

Sometimes the movie she showed would be an old porno film, from the seventies or eighties. 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. Once we had to watch a woman being slowly cut

into pieces, her fingers and breasts snipped off with garden shears, her stomach slit open and her intestines pulled out. (128)

All in all, the protagonists of both novels- Sophie and Offred - are the victim of patriarchal social structure which sets itself in dichotomical stand point placing males at the supreme position of that hierarchy and females as the “other” or marginalized position. Though the situation and geographical location in setting these novels is different but the nature of exploitation, subjugation, subordination and victimization done by males to females is similar in both novels so far as the response towards this situation is concerned, Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale* does not bow rather she chooses to miss from that society whereas Sophie chooses to be submerged thinking that revolt may be futile and ultimately chooses her death in the lack of her attachment with male figure- Nathan. Thus presenting such characters into their novels the writers of both novels have attempted to reveal the paradigmatic disorder of prevalent society which is phallogentric in nature where females even though they are concerned about their existential identity cannot get the egalitarian world view or perspective from that society.

IV. Conclusion

William Styron's novel *Sophie's Choice* and Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* both attempt to disclose the situation and stand point of woman under the stereotypical formation of patriarchal dogma guided by totalitarian hierarchical male centrism in different locations of the world. The suffering of the female protagonists in both novels is not because of the females but because of the complex structuration of social standard coloured with the norms, values and morals of hegemonical phallocentrism which entirely denies to place females in equal position privileging males in the superior position of that social hierarchy and females as the margin or the "other". The proliferation of female characters such as Sophie and Offred respectively in both novels and their entire experience under that construction along with their abuse, suffering, sexual harrassment, exploitation both physical and mental exterminates the egalitarian world view to be paid in relation to males and females. Since females are all the time given derogative signations that questions their autonomous identity, this sets the delinquent nature of ideologically constructed patriarchal ideology.

Throughout these novels, we can experience that though both female protagonists are conscious about their value and identity they have deserved under that constrain and they try to rebel against the exploitation and marking regarding the role of females in that society, we don't see their accomplishment into this matter. For example, Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale* is conscious about the situation of women in Gileadean patrimonial strata of society where females are considered as just the means to fulfill the hunger of sex of males. Wherever males want they are to be ready in order to satisfy their desire. Females are in that society also treated as commodities which don't have feelings,

emotions, sentiments and passions of their own. Again the situation of Sophie in *Sophie's Choice* in relation to patriarchally constructed society of different locations such as Poland, Auschwitz, and America sets her standpoint as submissive which determines her identity in relation to male figures- primarily her father, her husband and Nathan Landau in American location. This provides the glimpse that women do have no identity in isolation unlike males in phallogentric social construction. Despite her continuous attempt to get her sole and whole autonomous identity in the different locations of the world, she ultimately fails to receive that and in dismay, ultimately commits suicide.

Atwood and Styron in their novels have presented the female protagonists as aware and conscious about their situations in patriarchal social structure. Despite their awareness and consciousness about the pathetic and heart-rending condition they are facing in sexist ideological strata of the patriarchal autonomy, their attempt to grasp the individual and emancipatory identity is fruitless. Since the complex structuration of patriarchy at that time was so strong, Offred's denial leads her "missing" from that society and Sophie's attempt to submerge in the teleology leads her in her death in the absence of Nathan Landau.

All in all, fictionalizing the female characters in the manner of realism to depict the positional notation of women in the contextual patriarchal society, Atwood and Styron in their respective novels have attempted to depict the real situation of women which is the situation of submission, subordination, subjugation and exploitation under the banner of civilization shaped with ideological phallogentrism. Portrayal of the female characters in both novels as aware of their identity and existence and their struggle to place themselves in the respected position along the lines of equality sets the positive

light for the emancipation of females from the authoritarian and totalitarian bourgeois practice of patriarchy.

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