



The Fractionalized Role Of Women In Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale.

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Abstract:

The present research paper is based on disunited women in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. The story deals with the oppression and male dominance over women, the story has been set on the republic of Gilead and its fundamentalist regime that treat women as a property of state in order to repopulate the devastated world. A group of fertile women were forcefully indulged in sexual activities with view to have child from their wombs, all the liberties from these women were snatched and they devoid them from all the basic human rights, but here Atwood imagines the feminine roles that support and enable the repression of other women. The novel surpasses with expression of disunity amongst the women living in Gilead. This research paper turns the focus of *The Handmaid's Tale* from the situations of patriarchal control and traditional misogyny to the matriarchal network showing the women's hatred of women. Men were always perceived as rulers over women but imagine the situation where a group of women is doing injustice to other group of women by creating a matriarchal control, such evidences are traced in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Women are seen playing different roles divided into different identities that are meant to represent different feminine ideals.

Keywords: Disunited, Oppression, Feminine roles, Patriarchal, Hatred, Misogyny.

INTRODUCTION:

Margret Atwood is an outspoken and prolific writer garnished with outstanding literary career and garnered with various scholarly achievements and numerous awards. She always concerned the environmental issues, political and humanitarian perspectives along with her feminist ideology. The writer's representations of gender explore the social myths defining femininity, exemplifying women's bodies in art, exploitation of women and their relations with each other and with men. *The Handmaid's Tale* is the ever finest and most popular literary work of Atwood's career. This futuristic dark dystopia is a speculative fiction according to Atwood, which attained a global success and take her to the celebrity list, for which she achieved The Governor General's Award in 1985, the first Arthur C. Clarke Award in 1987 and The Booker's Award in 1986, despite of this, the book has been adapted as Hulu's television series.

The story commences in the republic of Gilead, a totalitarian fundamental regime of United States of America that regulates and oppresses women from every aspect of humanity. Where the women were forcibly assigned to produce children for the high rank commanders, who are the ruling class in Gilead. The story has been weaved in both patriarchal and matriarchal aspects of society. The title echoes the powerless female agency and carries the suppression of women's reproductive rights. Women become the lowest ranking class thus, forbidden to own money and are deprived of education. The situational factor of the story is environmental pollution and radiation that becomes the reason of infertility of the state.

Offred being the central character and narrator of the story, she is one of the few remaining fertile women, so she was forced to become a handmaid and hence, trained for high class commanders with a motive to produce child for them. The women in Gilead were not having similar position, not every woman was a handmaid. They were divided according to social class and were ranked as highest to lowest. All of them follow a strict dress code assigned to them. The wives, the handmaid's, the Marthas, Econowives and widows, these were their assigned group names. Accordingly the commander's wives were having the most powerful and upper position in Gilead, they were called most prestigious women. In the story Serena Joy, the commander's wife appears in the narrative more than just a member in the hierarchy of women of Gilead. She was seen desperately unhappy in the society and reflected jealous towards handmaid's as she was very cruel towards them. This portrays the female ego resulting in unhuman behavior for other women.

The Aunts are the class of women who were assigned to re-educate the Handmaid's, Aunt Lydia is seen as the instructor, to indoctrinate them to accept the beliefs of the new Gileadean society, her instructions haunt Offred in her daily life because Aunt Lydia was trying to fix a new ideology in Handmaid's mind, for which they were not truly ready. Aunts were the most loyal followers of Gilead's regime. The role of Aunt Lydia in the story is misogynistic as she use to speak against the Wives by quoting them as 'defeated women' because they were unable to bear a child. It shows how the women are complicit in sustaining the patriarchal society. Here again the women is seems to be enemy of other women.

Moirra offred's best friend embodies female resourcefulness and independence, she is shown as an active defiant character who was against the acceptance of her fate as a Handmaid in Gilead. Her several trails to escape from the totalitarian society shows courage, although she was caught but at least she tried to defend her interest.

On the other hand, The Marthas, the infertile women hence they were given roles of housekeepers and were focused on domestic concerns associated with cleanliness and health. The Marthas have a way of getting information that the Handmaid's don't have. They were not much restricted to the way they communicate to each other, they also have a system of sharing information. Although, they don't support Handmaid's to get out of any oppression.

Matriarchy in Gilead:

The continuous destruction of female solidarity has been traced in *The Handmaid's Tale* created by Margaret Atwood. The patriarchal society of Gilead isolates women and controlled them in domestic periphery. Republic of Gilead deals with inequality of men, some men dealt with second class citizens, on the other hand women are positioned as third class citizens. Women are subject to social injustice and oppression. New form of misogyny has been evolved in the story where it's not like usual hatred of men's towards women, but women's hatred of women. Gilead establishes matriarchal network on the account of regulating enforced domestic labour, which is divided in different classes.

Two social systems are traced in *The Handmaid's Tale* in which dysfunctional matriarchy is enforced: The Handmaid's training system and the domestic structure of Gilead, resulting in public and private enforcement of the matriarchy.

The Aunts assigned for Gilead plays crucial role to domesticate the Handmaid's in order to making them believe in their fate and accepting the new life as Handmaid, they doctriate them in the matriarchy of Gilead. Aunts are in full collusion with the male leaders of Gilead hence, they rank among the powerful female agents. The females in Gilead have lost their humanity, they are only potential because of their productive ovaries. Aunts used to brainwash, humiliate and torture the Handmaid's. They were forced to watch pornographic content having many sexually degrading and violent acts against women. In Gilead these female agents sees women as merely bodies for men to use and abuse, objectification of women being the primary source of oppression. The irony is that women are appointed to humiliate women. Patriarchy has mould feminist premise into a weapon that women uses to oppress each other.

On the other hand, when the handmaid's were posted to households after training under the jurisdiction of wives, handmaid's were highly disliked by wives as they reminds them of their reproductive failures. The Handmaid's are asked to feel for the wives as defeated women, who are failed to conceive, that underlines hostility weaved by matriarchy.

For the Marthas, Offred was not less than any other necessary household task, Rita was older in age and she criticizes Offred for no personal reason, another Martha was Cora, who views offred's presence as a ray of hope for having a baby to take care of and happiness for the household. Both of the marthas were having different opinion for the person they use to gossip upon, shows duality of opinions.

Patriarchy weaving matriarchy :

There is no doubt that in *The Handmaid's Tale* the governance of men and the the dominance of male values has been seen in the society of Gilead resulting in vanishment of women's freedom of sexual expression and alliance; excludes them from any kind of liberties and women are reduced to status of slavery and being a mere means for reproduction for repopulating the devastated and infertile world. Somehow this patriarchal system gave birth to matriarchal structure ruled by superior women in accordance of the male rulers of Gilead, but taking into concern the role of women, the real threat is created in Gilead comes not from male but from female control.

Women seems to support and enforce the patriarchal powers, instead of being one, they are fractionalized to control other women. A Question arised, what if all women were united in *The Handmaid's Tale*? obviously they will not have to be treated as mere bodies to fulfill the desires of men, They will not be dehumanized, violated and oppressed. Disunity became their major drawback in the story. The Patriarchal Power structure relies on women to regulate one another and enforce social standards. The higher authorized women were in disguise of devils that continues to haunt other lower class women.

Conclusion:

Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* has asked us to sympathize the women especially, the handmaid's and to consider Gilead tyrannical and oppressive on the account of gender biasness and social injustice. Both the Patriarchal and Matriarchal structures present in the Gilead society are revealing the cruelty of both men and women towards a particular class of women. In Gilead women's identities are broken up to reflect different patriarchal values and moreover they were dehumanized because of their fertile wombs, the story argues legally controlling the reproductive freedom of women which is ethically and morally wrong. Handmaid's were made the property of commanders, hence called by their commander's name which is again a subject of humiliation. For every mishappening to these women, who is responsible? according to me, it's the women, who is the enemy of other women. Its all because of the underlying impact of the disunity among the women. Who will protect a women, if other women doesn't.

To safeguard the moral values of women, it is necessary for all the women to get united for one another in order to challenge the injustice. The success of patriarchy depends upon female self control and female collaboration, furthermore, the women of Gilead were instructed to be loyal to men, before their loyalty to women, this caused the failure of female solidarity and a failed feminist revolution.

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