

Pathetic Condition of Women in Margret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale"

Anusha. P

M.Phil Scholar

Department of English

Sree Narayana Guru College Coimbatore

Chavadi, Tamil Nadu, India

anusharakesh17@gmail.com

Dr R Kavitha

Assistant Professor

MA, M.Phil, Ph.D.

Department of English

Ratgunam College of Arts and Science

Chavadi, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

123kaviraj@gmail.com

Abstract

Margret Atwood is one of the highly talented Canadian writers. Her works are closely related to social and political issues. The Handmaid's Tale is one of the best works of Margret Atwood which placed her among twentieth-century leading feminist writers. Male dominance, identity crisis, gender discrimination, and patriarchal setup are most commonly seen in her works. Through The Handmaid's Tale, she portrayed the suffering of women under patriarchy. In every society considered women has no role except reproduction. Women faced both mental and physical harassment all over the world. women were compelled to sacrifice their life for others.

The main intention of this paper is to present the pathetic condition of women with the help of Margret Atwood's highly influential fiction *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Keywords: Male dominance, Identity crisis, Patriarchy, Gender discrimination .

Through the novel, 'The Handmaid's Tale' Margret Atwood tries to portray what are the changes that happened when the Republic of Gilead came into power. The Republic of Gilead gave importance to male dominance. Under the patriarchal society, women had to suffer a lot. As an individual a woman lost every right in her life. They have no role in society except to give birth to babies. Male never considered, women are also human beings, and they have their wishes and desire.

Gender discrimination is clearly shown in the novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. When Gilead came into power they restricted all power and rights of women. They forbid women to get an education and do any job other than doing household things and giving birth to the baby. They forbid women to hold property. But what was forbidden to women was permissible to men.

Gilead treats many women are hand-made. Hand maids are commonly female, slaves who have only the purpose to give birth to masters' babies. Many women are forcefully put into Rachel Leah's Re-education Centre otherwise called the Red Centre there Gilead's ideologies are thought to prepare women to become handmade. Gilead's ideology is that women should be subservient to men and her only duty is to give service to men and give birth to his babies. They considered women are reproductive machines. Women were prohibited to gain education, reading books and even prohibited to playing games too.

Men have all power in Gilead society. Men are the only ruler of society and also their own home. Male can achieve their education, they can read books, participate in games etc...He can take all decisions according to his wish.

When we talk about the ritual ceremony of having sex hand made it can only be done by a man. For example, if Offred is serviced to give birth to the commander's baby, then why should they never appoint a male Handmaid to give birth to a baby by having sex with the commander's wife. Here also we can see gender discrimination.

As a handmaid women lead a completely restricted life They didn't get any freedom in their life. They can not leave the house according to their wish. They can go out of the house only for shopping purposes. Handmaids have no right to close their rooms completely while their sleeping times. The secret police of Gilead watch every movement of the handmaids secretly. If any handmaids violate any rule they will get cruel and extreme punishment. Therefore it can be said that gender discrimination is clearly shown in the novel 'The Handmaid's Tale'. Margaret Atwood take a great effort to portray the pathetic conditions faced by women in a patriarchal society.

Offred is the protagonist of the novel Handmaid's Tale. She is the handmade of Commander Fred and his wife Sarena Joy. Before Gilead came into power she lead a happy life. Her mother is not only a single mother but also a feminist activist. Moira is one of her best friends. Offred She falls in love with Luke, a married man. Luke diverse his wife and marry Offred. After some months she gives birth to a beautiful daughter and they lead a happy life.

When Gilead came into power they abandoned all rights of women. Gilead introduced many restrictions on women. So Offered tried to escape with her husband and daughter. But before crossing the border they were caught by police and separated from one another. Later she send into a Rachel _Leha Reeducation otherwise called the red centre, where women are indoctrinated in Gilead ideology to prepare for becoming handmade. She lost her husband, daughter, mother and everything in their life. Her life turned into a horrible.

When she was assigned as a handmaid to Commander, where she leads a completely restricted life. She has no freedom in her life. She always spends her life in Commander's home. She only leaves the house for shopping purposes. Even she has no right to close her bedroom door too. She has always been watched by the secret police of Gilead.

Every month at the right time of her ovulation period must-have ritual sex with Commander. During that time Commander's wife Serena holds the hands of Offred, which helps him to do sex with Offred. This is what happened to every handmaid in Gilead. Every handmaid faced the same situation. The sexual interest of women has no role in Gilead. Commanders are never considered the sexual interest of handmaids. A sexual relationship should be done according to the wish of both men and women. Here every handmaid is forced to do sex with their Commanders.

Offered faced sexual abuse from a doctor too. Offered visited a doctor frequently to checkup for deceses and other complications. During one visit to the doctor, he offered her to have sex with him. The doctor told her that, her Commander is infertile so she can get pregnant by having sex with the doctor. The doctor forced her to do sex with him. But Offred was not ready for that. She tries to escape from a doctor. It clearly shows women are only sexual objects in the eyes of every man. They never considered there is a mind and feeling inside every woman. But most men are not aware of that, they never understand the feelings of women. Most n want to fulfil their own life, desire, feelings etc.... They never bothered about the feelings of women. In many situations, men considered women as are only an object without any feelings or emotions.

Identity crises can also be clearly shown in the novel. It is portrayed through the protagonist itself. Offred is not the real name of the protagonist. We never learn her real name throughout the novel. Every handmaid's name started with 'Of' and it's followed by the name of a particular Commander. Therefore our protagonist's Commander's name is Fred. That's

why the protagonist is called Offred. Offred's friend Ofglen can also be an example of this. Every handmaid's situation is like this. Handmaids lost everything in their life. It is very cruel to lose their name. They had to face restrictions on living in their name. Handmaids can't live their names. They were forced to adopt other names. They lost their own identity. Identity crises can be considered one of the important parts of the novel.

When talking about the character Serena Joy, Commander's wife also leads a miserable life. Before Gilead, she was a singer. She was famous on TV for her emotional Christian music. She very much enjoyed her music career. But she also had to obey the law so she was forced to say goodbye to the music world. Like Offred, she is also the representative of many other women in society.

Fertility can be considered one of the important themes of the novel. Gilead society faced a dangerous situation of low reproductive rate. Because of that, they worried about their future. This condition made many women's lives a miserable situation. To overcome these low reproductive rates and maintain their future settlement, Gilead forcefully made women handmaids. For that, they build a Red Centre which thought Gilead's ideology.

The protagonist was appointed as a handmaid in Commander Fred and his wife Serena Joy's house. Several months are passed but Offred didn't get pregnant. Then Serena Joy realised that her husband is infertile. Therefore Serena suggested that Offred has sex with Serena's driver Nick secretly and passes the child off as commanders. If Offred does like that Serena promises to bring a picture of Offred's daughter. Then Offred is surprised Serena knows where Offred's daughter is. Offred loves her daughter very much and she misses her badly. Gilead's police separated her daughter from her. Offred had a strong desire to see her daughter's picture. So she decided to sleep with Nick that night. As a handmaid, she was forced to sleep with many.

Handmaids are prohibited from playing games, reading books, etc... Commander secretly allowed Offred to play games with him. He gave her an old magazines to read. Once commander secretly take her t to a club called Jezebel, where the Commander mingled with a prostitutes. But when these all things are caught by Commander's wife, she decided to panish Offred. For that Serena called for police to panish Offred. Because Offred does against the law. It's unfair because Commander is responsible for all this disobedience of the law. Offred and Commander did the same disobedience, but its consequence was faced by Offred itself.

Through the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* , Margret Atwood showed pathetic condition of women under male dominated society. Gender discrimination can be considered as the most crucial forever. Inequality is the by product of gender discrimination. In every society only women has to sacrifice their life and lost their dreams and aspirations.

Work Cited

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. Great Britain: O.W Toad, 1986, print.

Yamamoto, Tae. "How Can a Feminist Read The Handmaid's Tale? A Study of Offred's Narrative." *Margaret Atwood: The Open Eye*. Ed. John Moss and Tobi Zozakewich. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2009. 195-205.

Wagner-Lawlor, Jennifer. "From Irony to Affiliation in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*." *Critique*. 45.1 (2003), 83-96.