Critical Coalitions

Critical Coalitions:

Literary Aesthetics and Beyond

Edited by

Rimika Singhvi and Gunja Patni

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"The insightful and significant volume provides new perspectives and a broader context for understanding the depth of literature, theory and art, ranging from the traditional to the digital. Its novelty of approach and treatment will surely inspire readers."

Anita Singh

Fulbright Nehru Fellow, Professor & Head, Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India

"The collection offers a cutting-edge exploration of the interfaces between literary aesthetics and contemporary discourses on a variety of disciplines. Combining empirical and theoretical methods and blending creative and critical practices, the scholarly essays experiment with unconventional ways of reinterpreting the present-day realities of our culture, identity and social processes. The volume will be of great interest to students, researchers and academicians engaged with interdisciplinary studies in the critical humanities and related fields."

Radha Chakravarty

Writer, Critic, Translator and former Professor of Comparative Literature & Translation Studies, Dr B.R. Ambedkar University, Delhi, India

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments x

Foreword xi
A Walk-Through
Jonathan Locke Hart

Section I: Postcoloniality, Posthumanism, and Ecosophy: The Rhetoric of Resistance

Critiquing Posthuman Concerns in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* 2
Rohit Yadav and Roshan Lal Sharma

Invasion and the Posthuman Female Body: Liminality and Resistance in Science Fiction 18
Anusha Hegde

Understanding Connections: Ecowomanism in *The Bluest Eye* 31
Anshu Gagal and Barnali Saha

The Empire Hits Back: Chinua Achebe and the Fiction of Resistance 48
Alvin Joseph

Section II: Body Matters: Gendered Geographies and the Articulation of Agency

The Trajectory of Self Awakening: 'Jouissance' and Desire in Tagore's *Chandalika* 64
Rama Hirawat

Reclaiming Bodies and Beauty: Interrogating Eurocentric Ideals in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *The God of Small Things* 77
Lakshmi Anil

"*It was these people…*": The Erotic Body in Indian Popular Culture..... 86
Swarnika Ahuja

Is the body "The Only Truth?" Analysing the Poetics
of Body & Gender Across Transnational Spaces 100
Akshita Chotia

Section III: Myth, Contemporary Media and Cinema: Literary Adaptations

Transnational Feminism in Film *Antarmahal***:** Visibility and
Representation of Women During Colonial India 108
Ruchi Sharma

Redefining Education and Independence for
Young Rural Women in the Digital Age 126
Shefali Martins

Perpetuality of Annapurna: Virtuosity in Literature and Filmography.... 136
S. Preethi and M. Premavathy

OTT Platforms: Popularising the Reach of the Written Word..... 149
Suman Swati

Cultural Crossroads: Navigating Identity and Assimilation in the
Portuguese Immigrant Experience of *Girl Mans Up* 157
Prerna Vanjani

Section IV: Expert-Speak: Interviews

Geraldine Sinyuy 170

Sreemoyee Piu Kundu 177

Syed Haider 188

Section V: Musings: Creative Expression

Duality in Freedom 196
Sayyam Jain

Duality in Education 197
Sayyam Jain

I am Half 199
Akshita Singh

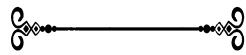
Medusa 200
Akshita Singh

Cracking Up 201
Aadrit Banerjee

Sleep 203
Aadrit Banerjee

Afterword 205
From the Desk of the Editors
Rimika Singhvi and Gunja Patni

Contributors 207



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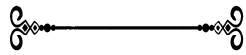
First and foremost, we would like to thank each of our mentors - personal and professional - who encouraged us to think both creatively and critically in our pursuit of discovering “coalitions” from within and outside literary studies. We are thankful also to each of the Contributors to this book whose well-researched and scholarly submissions have made this collective project possible. The concerted efforts of all have borne fruit in the form and shape of this co-edited volume which, we hope, will serve the purpose for which it was conceptualised in the first place.

We thank our families for inspiring us to keep the faith and to never give up until the goal is achieved. We are thankful to all our friends and colleagues as well for believing in our vision and extending full support, whenever needed. And, above all, we are thankful to the Almighty for being with us and guiding us through it all by imparting the wisdom and ability to take up and complete this academic task in the right earnest.

Rimika Singhvi
Gunja Patni



FOREWORD

A WALK-THROUGH

The editors, Rimika Singhvi and Gunja Patni, have brought together a wide-ranging collection, *Critical Coalitions: Literary Aesthetics and Beyond.* The book explores the relation between literary aesthetics, postcolonialism, posthumanism, the female body, gendered geographies, and myth in connection with literature, media and cinema.

The volume is divided into three themes. The first, "Postcoloniality, Posthumanism and Ecosophy: The Rhetoric of Resistance," includes chapters on important topics and key works. The first chapter analyses the posthuman in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* in connection with totalitarianism, technology, surveillance, feminism and landscapes. The second chapter discusses invasion and the posthuman female body in terms of liminality and resistance in science fiction, analyzing Wanda from Stephenie Meyer's *The Host* (2009), Cinder from Marissa Meyer's *The Lunar Chronicles* (2012-2016), and Kira from Christopher Paolini's *To Sleep in a Sea of Stars* (2021). The next chapter examines eco-womanism in Toni Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye*, whose characters evoke empathy and solidarity with the marginal, which can also extend to nature. Chinua Achebe and resistance is the subject of the subsequent chapter, especially in regard to *Things Fall Apart*, which shows the power of fiction to embody narratives of decolonization.

The second theme, "Body Matters: Gendered Geographies and the Articulation of Agency," begins with a chapter on *Jouissance* and desire in Rabindranath Tagore's *Chandalika* exploring the work as a narrative of drama, dance and desire. Eurocentrism and colonialism from Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the topic of the subsequent chapter, which also takes up Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* to specifically address the context of power, race and beauty. The next chapter is on the erotic body in Indian popular culture as seen in films such as *Pakeezah* (1972) and *Mughal-E-Azam* (1960). This thematic section ends with a chapter that examines the poetics of body and gender across space that is across or beyond nations.

The third thematic section, "Myth, Contemporary Media and Cinema: Literary Adaptations," opens with a Bengali film *Anatarmahal* (2005) directed by Rituparno Ghosh, an adaptation of a short story 'Pratima' by Bengali author Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay. The second chapter in this thematic section redefines independence and education for rural women in a digital age, particularly how social media platforms and educational applications have improved their lives in rural Rajasthan. The focus of the subsequent chapter is on food literature and, more particularly, on how Indian literature and cinematography incorporate food. The next chapter looks at 'OTT' (Over-the-Top) platforms, which have a range of programs to be viewed, including adaptations of literary works. A reversal of colonial hierarchy is achieved through the analysis of metaphorical representations in the film. The last chapter in this section is an examination of the connections among the immigrant experience, assimilation and cultural identity in M-E Girards' novel, *Girl Mans Up* – especially in regard to the Portuguese immigrant experience in North America.

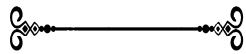
The fourth section is about literature and theory and interviews with Geraldine Sinyuy, Creative Writer & Teacher, Dept. of English, The University of Yaounde' I Cameroon; Sreemoyee Piu Kundu, Author, Columnist, Community Founder - Status Single & DEI Specialist, Delhi & Kolkata, India and Syed Haider, Lecturer in World Cinemas, School of Art, Media & American Studies, University of East Anglia, Norwich UK by Rimika Singhvi and Gunja Patni. This conversation will speak for itself as does the fifth section, "Musings". This collection of poems by aspiring poets – Sayyam Jain, Akshita Singh and Aadrit Banerjee – evokes and suggests beyond, bringing together contributors who express the richness of literature, theory and the arts, from earlier forms to the digital world of new media. The editors and contributors invite readers into this exploration and the invitation is well worth it. This collection warrants close reading.

Over to you, fellow reader!

Jonathan Locke Hart
Canadian Poet, Literary Scholar & Historian

SECTION I

POSTCOLONIALITY, POSTHUMANISM, AND ECOSOPHY: THE RHETORIC OF RESISTANCE



CRITIQUING POSTHUMAN CONCERNS IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

ROHIT YADAV & ROSHAN LAL SHARMA

Abstract

This chapter seeks to critique posthuman concerns in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) via examining how mindless advancement in the realm of technology and resultant expansion of technological landscape/locale adversely affect environment causing drastic depopulation. Besides, certain embedded issues in the novel concerning deteriorating fertility rates among people, the rise of religiously ritualised surrogacy, suspension of democracy, theocratic totalitarianism, commercialisation of surrogacy, and the horrific outcome of digitalisation will also be analyzed. Atwood seems understandably anxious and worryingly concerned with the technological transformation of the world and its impact on women and children who can be the first victims. *The Handmaid's Tale* is set in the fictional locale called Gilead wherein totalitarian elites occupy the state. The novel portrays two different states such as pre-apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic. The state has fully digitalised the society in pre-apocalyptic times and has evolved powerful strategies to control individuals. Post-apocalyptic condition seems to be an outcome of digitalised spaces in pre-apocalyptic times. Women are sexually exploited for bearing children in the name of repopulating the state. Making children available to couples who have lost capacity to have them has become a new business in Gilead. Totalitarian elites create technologically designed system to enslave women and control people. Thus, there are ample posthuman concerns in the novel that need to be critiqued in view of technological advancement that is mindless and lacks any meaningful purpose.

Keywords: Feminism; Landsacpes; Posthuman concerns; Surveillance; Technology; Totalitarianism.

Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) fictionally represents the state of Gilead occupied by totalitarian elite regime, which takes everything under control while exhibiting serious/abnormal concern for decreasing fertility rate. The authoritative regime also arranges fertile females to repopulate Gilead and suspends all working women from their jobs to forcefully keep them as handmaids. Women are re-named as handmaids, Marthas, and Offreds with colour-coded dresses signifying distinct roles and responsibilities. Totalitarian authorities teach Offreds perforce to project themselves as volunteers to repopulate the country. The narrative frequently shifts from present to past. In the later part of the novel, Atwood discloses that the regime provides babies to elites who lost capacity/potency to conceive them. The sudden shift in the narrative into the past lands us in a digitally designed space/landscape where there is a democratically governed political system. The identity of the female protagonist June is not acceptable under the totalitarian regime. Her daughter is thus kept at a different place. The novel exposes amazing and eye-opening scenarios which exist behind the veil of theocratic governance. The children are sold to elites of the society who have lost the biological capacity to produce them.

The term 'posthuman' is associated with science fiction (SF) and it signifies a "species that might evolve from human beings" (*Oxford Lexico Dictionary*). Posthumans evolve through genetic enhancements, prosthetic transplantations, surrogacy, artificial intelligence (AI), digitalisation, etc. Posthumans dwell in technologically occupied scenarios/locales and are victims of dystopian realities, cataclysmic situations such as the ones characterised by radical depopulation due to environmental degradation, and inequalities created after strategic design of landscapes which terrorise underprivileged identities into submission.

The notion of posthuman also points toward physical and cognitive enhancements through "genetic or bionic augmentation" (*Oxford Lexico Dictionary*). As a term 'posthuman' does not suggest absence of the human as it actually implies stretched/extended boundaries vis-à-vis his/her physical and cognitive abilities. The notion of the posthuman may also be perceived as a utopian subject, a desire of humans to be able to achieve perfect human society characterized by technological advancement. 'Posthuman' is also used as an umbrella term discussed in

different schools of thought such as posthumanism, transhumanism, and anti-humanism, meta-humanism, and new-materialism. All these schools redefine humans after the advent of technological advancements. The whole project of achieving perfect human society goes in the wrong hands and creates unmanageable chaos. *The Handmaid's Tale* is fictional representation of the novelist's apprehension how digitally designed landscapes help the totalitarian regime in establishing theocratic republic in Gilead, a fictional locale.

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) also talks about the technological surviellance and manipulation of the recorded history by an authoritative government. Jacques Derrida in the article on "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," argues that the totalitarian strategy we come across in the dystopias fictionally imagined by George Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Margaret Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale*, are "mal archive" and "archive evil." In resistance to the totalitarian annihilation of democratic society and personal memory, the protagonists of both the novels attempt to create archives of their own, in their capacity to describe the atrocious treatment of authorities, wherein they imagine a future history beyond the reach of the regime's control. In this context, then, "archive fever" might also signify an ethically informed passion for the "right archive" (91). Thus, there are numerous writers who fictionally portray terrible situation which is uninhabitable for humans.

Francis Fukuyama's book, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of Biotechnology Revolution* (2002) opens with description of Aldous Huxley's dystopian work *Brave New World*: "The aim of this book is to argue that Huxley was right, that the most significant threat posed by contemporary biotechnology is the possibility that it will alter human nature and thereby move us into a "posthuman" stage of history" (7). Fukuyama's worry is serious when he talks about comercialisation of technologies and evil intentions of technology-based/driven corporations which may push the whole world into a dangerous situation. Technological advancement becomes dangerous particularly when it creates inequality in the society and dicriminates on the basis of gender and class. Digitalisation and technological advancements empower people who tend to exploit those who are marginalized.

The emergence of posthuman in literature may be viewed in a pre-historic and mythological character namely Prometheus who brought fire for mankind. It is also quite difficult to mark clear emergence of posthuman because technology has been an inseparable part of human life.

Andy Miah observes that "posthumanism is not synonymous with the history of technology" as it "relies on the range of literatures and biopolitical spheres that have contributed to shaping concerns about the future of humanity" (76). Thus, many literary writers deal with the bleak side of technology and chaos in human life in their writings. Speculative fiction deals with threats due to possible future technologies to humans and their companion species in particular, and with apocalyptic ending.

Such kinds of situations have been represented by various novelists such as Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley in *The Last Man* (1826), which unfolds the story of a man living in a future world depopulated by devastating plague. Likewise, the damaged environment of Philip K. Dick's novel, *Blade Runner* (1981) plays crucial role in shaping the idea of post-apocalyptic scenario. The total destruction of the environment and eradication of non-human species alarmingly convey potential dangers of technological advancements and climate change. Environmental degradation and eradication of varied species is a pertinent concern of a novel which contributes in shaping the idea of post-apocalyptic situation. Furthermore, Aldus Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) is a story about the people who believe that state of happiness can be attained through use of drugs. Technological advancement is the most powerful thing that can help human beings enhance happiness. Huxley depicts how technology controls people in terms of emotional expression, psychological well-being, birth, and future. George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) talks about the technological surviellance and manipulation of the recorded history by an authoritative government.

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a postapocalyptic fiction wherein an entirely digitalised society is superseded by an authoritative regime. The totlaitaritain government occupies the entire state of Gilead by way of banning internet, freezing bank accounts of citizens, erecting roadblocks, suspending democarcy, and deploying theocritic republic. Authoritative regime in Gilead succeeds in the mission of making people slave through the web of technogical advancments. The citizens of Gilead become entirely dependent on internet and digital landscape. The providers of the technology make it convinent for themselves to make people slave of themselves.

The anthropocentric imperatives of western humanist thought are centred around the man who is priviledged and above all the marginal human figures. The idea of human is attributed to the priviledged people who dehumanise the underpriviledged ones. How do technologically

priviledged people design the world to rule the marginal identities? Technological advancements are the crucial agents of support. "In fact, the critique of the human, and the questioning of binaries, are entangled, because the humanist conception of the human was constructed against its opposing others – the ideal man against the naturalized, sexualized, and racialized "others"" (Nicenboima et.al 04). Atwood portrays how marginal identities, especially women, become victims in the technologically mediated society.

The Handmaid's Tale portrays an imaginary ending of a democratic and technologically controlled state named Gilead. Posthumanism as a critical method aims at re-negotiating human conduct from their self-assigned position of centrality concerned with gender, class, race, etc. Dystopian visions are often set in a disturbing and totalitarian future. For instance, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) are examples of dystopian fiction set in post-apocalyptic landscapes. Atwood fictionally portrays a totalitarian society wherein women are kept as surrogates. Likewise, she also deals with the issues of hypercapitalism and strategies to control people. As the protagonist of the novel works in a company where she transforms physical books into computer-based data, she reveals, "I worked transferring books to computer discs, to cut down on storage space and replacement costs, they said. We called the library a discotheque, which was a joke of ours. After the books were transferred, they were supposed to go to the shredder, but sometimes I took them home with me. I liked the feel of them" (Atwood 182). Thus, the politics of digitalisation of books helps the totalitarian regime in providing limited access to knowledge or restricting access to knowledge.

Atwood in the introduction of *The Handmaid's Tale* writes as to how the "population is shrinking due to toxic environment, and the ability to have viable babies is at premium. (In today's real world, studies in China are now showing a sharp fertility decline in Chinese men)" (X). Thus, technologically designed landscapes bring dreadful consequences. Industrial developments, biotechnological advancements and hypercapitalism have been the main cause of environment pollution and commercialisation of childbearing and human trafficking. Authoritative Republic of Gilead takes gradual control over people and establishes totalitarianism. It is not an overnight process; it took many years to hold control over people. People in power facilitate technological gadgets and tools. The technological luxury surrenders everything that they have such as information, and money to digital world.

Further, the authoritarian regime in Gilead supersedes democracy via technocolonisation. Atwood's fictional representation of the Republic of Gilead is a consequence of digital society. June, the protagonist of the novel, works for a corporation that converts physical books into ebooks and discs. In the pre-apocalyptic condition/flashback story of the novel, there are no restrictions on reading, writing, and access to knowledge. In post-apocalyptic portrayal however, dematerialisation of books restricts access to knowledge. The idea of digitalisation is not bad; it rather becomes an extension to explore knowledge and enhance means of learning. Nevertheless, it becomes problematic when the collapse of a system is strategically predestined to evoke chaos and catastrophe with a view to maintaining authority over citizens.

As stated above, *The Handmaid's Tale* is set in a fictional place called Gilead wherein the totalitarian elites of the regime have everything under their control. Gilead authorities project handmaids as volunteers in the public image who are part of the mission to repopulate the world. For this purpose, they suspend all the working women from their jobs and capture them to keep as handmaids. The handmaids do not have will/ choice of their own but are supposed to follow instructions of Gilead authorities. The foundation of the theocratic government is based on puritan principles: "The Republic of Gilead is built on the foundation of the 17th-century Puritan roots that have always lain beneath the modern-day America we thought we knew" (Kalorkoti). Handmaids are forcefully trained to accept themselves as volunteers to repopulate Gilead.

Atwood also portrays issues concerning dystopian landscapes and hollow religious fundamentalism, which is devoid of humanitarian concerns. It also reflects the Kafkaesque situation of the people of Gilead who seem helpless. The rise of military surveillance and alienation expands the gap among the citizens of Gilead. Atwood's posthuman dystopia is about rethinking human freedom, proliferation of the power centres and interdiction of democracy. Atwood preferably calls *The Handmaid's Tale* a speculative fiction wherein she portrays contemporary social reality and potential consequences of technological advancements. Katherine Snyder calls speculative fiction as "potential social realism". She writes thus:

> Dystopian speculative fiction takes what already exists and makes an imaginative leap into the future, following current socio-cultural, political or scientific developments to their potentially devastating conclusions…. These cautionary tales of the future work by evoking an uncanny sense of

> the simultaneous familiarity and strangeness of these brave new worlds. (470)

Speculative fiction is built on the devastating consequences of current technological advancements. Atwood portrays the harmful effects of industrial expansion, corporation-controlled states, and digital infrastructure which only work for the elites of Gilead. Alongside, Atwood depicts anthropocentric activities that lead Gilead into a dystopian condition. The authoritarian regime holds control over women and other marginal identities. Thus, critical posthumanism questions opportunities offered by technological landscape which transmutes non-human species while exercising human prerogative as superior species. Atwood portrays commanders as socio-economically privileged people whereas Offreds, Marthas, drivers, and children as underprivileged ones who are dehumanised.

In *The Handmaid's Tale,* the president's murder, suspension of the constitution, censored newspapers, breakdown of mobile networks, roadblocks, and army surveillance become central in snatching the freedom of dehumanized characters. Meanwhile, authorities appeal to people on television to "keep calm" as everything is "under control" (Atwood 183). The narrator feels stunned and leaves the reader with several unanswered questions. Atwood depicts as to how people survive during riots and chaotic situations when everything goes under the control of the coercive authoritative regime, which assures people that the holdup of democracy is temporary but contrarily it continues for a long while. The protagonist aptly reveals: "They said it would be temporary. There wasn't even any rioting in the streets. People stayed home at night, watching television, looking for some direction. There wasn't even an enemy you could put your finger on" (183). Thus, Atwood's posthuman locale does not celebrate the posthuman condition; it rather disapproves the deceptive nature of technological advancements. The novelist depicts issues concerned with alienation, military surveillance, pollution, drastic depletion in population rate, decreasing fertility rates among people due to pollution, subjugation of women, sexploitation, and totalitarianism.

Francis Fukuyama emphasises the inevitable commercialisation of human entities and expounds on the future of enhanced humans. He talks about political and economic dimension of developments: "Human nature shapes and constrains the possible kinds of political regimes, so a technology powerful enough to reshape what we are will have possibly malign consequences for liberal democracy and the nature of politics itself" (Fukuyama 7). Fukuyama's terrifying speculations can be placed in

political history wherein a corrupt political system aspired to overtake democratic principles to be able to meet totalitarian ventures. Popular media defends the Republic of Gilead's oppressive authorities to control people.

The novel has a tense atmosphere, and it becomes evident when Atwood writes: "Newspapers were censored and some were closed down, for security reasons they said. The roadblocks began to appear, and identity passed. Everyone approved of that since it was obvious you couldn't be too careful" (Atwood 183). Thus, corrupt journalists turn into agents of authority and strengthen totalitarian ventures for their personal gains. Atwood talks about people's seized bank accounts, blocked internet services, and suspended phone call facilities. Atwood fictionally portrays a dystopian society wherein people surrender before an oppressive regime when they are denied access to basic facilities. That is why the protagonist asserts, "I've got thousands in my account. I just got the statement two days ago. Try it again. It's not valid, he repeated obstinately. See that red light? Means it's not valid" (185). June tried over and again but could not access her account. "It was my number all right, but there was the red light again…. I did phone from the office, but all I got was a recording. The lines were overloaded, the recording said. Could I please phone back? I phoned back several times, but no luck. Even that wasn't too unusual" (185). Atwood depicts a pre-apocalyptic society wherein every transaction takes place in an online mode. After the suspension of basic facilities, the totalitarian regime exercised military power over the people. The situation becomes worse when people are dismissed from their jobs and many companies are shut down.

However, in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the synchronized control over one's memory and collective history is the fundamental agenda of a totalitarian regime "'who controls the past,' ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future: who controls the present controls the past'" (37). Big Brother, the protagonist of the novel controls his members' minds by way of the "lunatic dislocation in the mind" (260) known as "doublethink" (37). Similarly, in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the Republic of Gilead attempts to brainwash the handmaids by way of "reality control" (37), and for that purpose authoritarian regime brings religion at the forefront, as Atwood claims: "GOD IS A NATIONAL RESOURCE" (Atwood 225). The regime projects God as a surveillance tool to control people.

In addition, Offreds mentioning of the greeting "Under His Eye", can be viewed as a form of surveillance. The subsequent control over people evokes shared memory through massive institutionalised teachings under the mask of religion to restore authoritative control in the state (297). The regime strategically tries to project God as a surveillance power which furthers the cause of establishing totalitarianism. As Rosi Braidotti claims, "the concept of the human has exploded under the double pressure of contemporary scientific advances and global economic concerns" (1). What she emphasises is that the placement of anthropocentric humanism at the centre among all other species becomes pertinent in dystopian possibilities. The economic concern of the regime becomes the fundamental reason to capture women with a view to commercialising their children secretly.

The architectural design of landscapes helps the regime perpetuate fear among people. They hang those people on a wall who disobey Gilead authorities. They set examples for other people not to resist authoritarianism. Describing a wall on which people are hanged, Atwood writes: "[T]he hooks have been set into the brickwork of the wall, for this purpose" (Atwood 42). The dreadful design of the walls is meant to scare people. Further, the narrator states that "there are three new bodies on the wall. One is a priest, still wearing the black cassock" (53). This reflects that a totalitarian regime uses religion for its benefit and slays its guide, which can be symbolically understood as the murder of religion's true spirit. Initially, religion becomes a powerful tool to gain support from a large population and then it becomes easier to impose control over it.

The Puritan extremist Commanders of Gilead exercised power to limit the freedom of women by dismissing them from jobs and reducing them to child-bearers. Offreds, also known as handmaids, feel imprisoned and hunger for sensual/ human touch. They are dehumanised. For instance, the novelist writes: "I hunger to touch something, other than cloth or wood. I hunger to commit the act of touch". It indicates that the sexuality of Offreds is being controlled by the commanders. The oppressive political system of Gilead isolates Offreds from other people as one of them asserts, "the Marthas are not supposed to fraternize with us" (18). Thus, the Republic of Gilead scraps the freedom of its citizens and isolates them to be able to destroy possibilities of resistance.

Moreover, *The Handmaid's Tale* can also be viewed as an eye-opening tale for people that excessive exercise of military power, nuclear weapons, destroying media and political opposition, and advanced technologies can

become threat for any democratic nation. The authoritative regime in the novel tries to destroy all the possible means of resistance. They put electronic alarm systems to keep handmaids under control, even if somebody dares to run away is given brutal punishment for violating rules. Nobody can muster the courage to go towards the gates to escape as Atwood writes: "no one goes through those gates willingly. The precautions are for those trying to get out, through to make it even as far as the wall, from the inside, past the electronic alarm system, would be next to impossible" (41). Thus, handmaids are kept as slaves just to produce children for Commanders' families.

Atwood critiques totalitarianism and strategic control over people. Offreds are denied the right to privacy. As the narrator claims, "It's also a story I'm telling, in my head, as I go along. Tell, rather than write, because I have nothing to write with and writing is in any case forbidden" (49). For Offreds, equality, justice, and freedom become secondary when they attempt to survive physically. The prison-like situation and alienation widen the communication gap and create an emotional gulf among people. Therefore, they doubt everybody, as they seem to be spying on one another. The narrator asserts that "perhaps he was merely being friendly. Perhaps he saw the look on my face and mistook it for something else…. Perhaps it was a test, to see what I would do. Perhaps he is an eye" (27). Thus, the Republic of Gilead creates person-like for citizens by way of alienating.

Furthermore, Atwood deliberately employs military and individual surveillance bodies with a view to critiquing the authoritarian regime's biopolitical agenda to control people. It creates a horrifying situation when people become surveillance agents. As a result, women are treated as objects to produce children. Atwood sounds shocking when she depicts commercialisation of children legalised by the authoritative regime. Aunts, in the novel, take ballet classes of children born from the handmaids. Lydia, one of the Aunts says, "think of yourself as seeds…let's pretend we're trees….I stand on the corner, pretending I am a tree" (Atwood 28). Thus, after the depletion of the population rate due to the toxic environment the regime considers women as childbearing objects. It also objectifies women as nature, which re-flourishes the world. But then, the way they are suspended from their workplaces kept as handmaids and forced to have sex with Commanders become serious concerns.

Atwood horrifies the readers when she narrates that "besides the main gateway there are six more bodies hanging by the necks, their hands tied in

front of them, their heads in white bags tipped sideways onto their shoulders…each has placard hung around his neck to show why he has been executed…they are meant to scare" (41-42). The fear mechanism delineated by Atwood shares some similarities with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) wherein Mr. Kurtz hangs human skulls in order to evoke fear among the natives to be able to maintain his dominance. Atwood's tale can be taken as a response to emerging totalitarianism and an awakening alarm for people. Jamie Dopp agrees, "a dystopian tale takes place in a world in which it is 'too late' to act, a world in which there is no longer a possibility of resistance…. The idea is to shock the reader with the horror of what might follow if action is not taken now" (49). *The Handmaid's Tale* reflects the extreme condition of caged life.

Furthermore, Atwood depicts the adverse impacts of environmental pollution on the health of human and non-human species. Non-biodegradable plastic creates ever-existing waste. The novelist describes human beings as victims of their activities. For instance, she writes:

> I take the chicken, wrapped in butcher's paper and trussed with string. Not many things are plastic anymore. I remember those endless white plastic shopping bags, from the supermarket; I hated to waste them and would stuff them under the sink. Luke used to complain about it. Periodically he would take all the bags and throw them out. (Atwood 37).

After the advent of consumer culture, plastic carry bags are used by many people. Excessive use of plastic and non-biodegradable material cause pollution. Atwood's narrative critiques patriarchy and religious fundamentalism wherein nature, women and children are victims. She also speculates what might happen in extreme conditions when democracy is banned in any state and military rule is imposed. In the dystopian fictional landscapes of Atwood all means of resistance and opposition are destroyed in a subtle manner.

The Republic of Gilead is post-apocalyptic in its conception and is devoid of democratic freedom wherein justice and rationality do not exist. Atwood imagines the highest level of corruption when she writes: "Doctors lived here once, lawyers, university professors. There are no lawyers anymore, and the university is closed… The street is almost like a museum, or a street in a model town constructed to show the way people used to live. As in those pictures, those museums, those model towns, there are no children" (33). Atwood strategically builds on the issues concerning how people's fantasies become reality. Surrogacy, cloning, surveillance technology, and nuclear weapons are the realities of the

present world. The popular belief is that these advancements stretch the boundaries of development to be able to make life more progressive. These advancements are critical when they widen the gap between the oppressor and the oppressed, technology provider and receiver.

Atwood's dystopian fictional landscape demonstrates individuals as alienated beings living in hopeless conditions. The novelist scares readers when she portrays individuals as surveillance bodies. People seem to be spying on one another. For instance, "The truth is that she is my spy, as I am hers" (29). The protagonist asserts that she too spies on her colleague and vice versa. The narrator's assortment indicates that everybody has turned into an agent of the authoritative regime. Moreover, the idea of individual isolation gets strengthened when the narrator reveals that "during walks, she has never said anything that was not strictly orthodox, but then, and neither have I. She may be a real believer; a handmaid is more than a name. I can't take the risk. The war is going well, I hear, she says" (29). Thus, Atwood portrays brainwashed individuals according to the needs of the authoritative regime, which helps to control people.

The oppressed condition of individuals in the totalitarian regime becomes a matter of serious concern when they do not want to take risks to resist the atrocities. Later on, the writer confirms how totalitarian regime punishes women who disobey by declaring them as traitors: "Last week they shot a woman, right about here. She was Martha. She was fumbling in her robe, for her pass, and they thought she was hunting for a bomb…There have been such incidents" (30). Atwood depicts the highest level of oppression when she talks about the fear mechanism established by the Republic of Gilead. Incredible though it sounds, but the people of Gilead even fear hearing anything. Atwood negotiates between contemporary totalitarian endeavours and future possibilities.

The authoritative regime flourishes at the cost of turning people into surveillance bodies, and women as objects to produce children for the elites of the regime. It is quite clear that the regime perpetuates at the cost of destroying the environment and dehumanising the marginalised ones. The posthuman design of Gilead is quite considerable because the division and status of the people are given on the basis of colour-coded dresses. Atwood powerfully depicts shrinking human space and an overpowering oppressive regime. Extreme situations of control can be seen when Offreds are punished for reading, writing and talking to other people.

The regime glorifies when some handmaids get pregnant. In fact, getting pregnant becomes a matter of magical happening. The narrator says: "One of them is vastly pregnant; her belly under her loose garment swells triumphantly…our fingers itch to touch her. She is a magic presence to us, an object of envy and desire, we covet her…children are wanted now, but not by everyone" (36). Women in Gilead are conditioned in a way wherein getting pregnant is glorified and considered as magic. Christian fundamentalist regime limits sexual relations only for producing children. Commanders have the rights reserved to have sexual intercourse with Offreds. Moreover, rape is religiously ritualised, only Commanders are the authorised people to have access to handmaids. The image of a pregnant woman becomes idealised and is compared to "huge fruit" (37).

The Republic of Gilead suspends the existing identities of its citizens and gives new color-coded identities. As the narrator confesses: "My name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it is forbidden….I think of this name as buried. This name has an aura around it…" (94). The protagonist of the novel thinks of escaping from the Republic of Gilead. But then, it requires resistance against the totalitarian regime. The oppressive regime isolates people in a dynamic way to control them by banning every possible means of resistance. The novelist shows her worries concerning the treatment of the brainwashed military, act of suspending democracy, and corruption in the guise of religion.

Atwood also brings us to a point where science and religion are exposed as agents of totalitarianism. The totalitarian regime of Gilead treats handmaids as wombs to produce children. The narrator narrates: "They didn't care what they did to your feet and hands, even if it was permanent. Remember, said Aunt Lydia. For our purposes your feet and your hands are not essential" (102). Thus, the Republic of Gilead does not provide comfortable space for the well-being of handmaids whereas the authorities consider women as wombs to produce babies. Moreover, they project handmaids as volunteers who join the holy mission to repopulate the state. The authoritative regime continuously works towards effective control over individuals. The foucauldian idea of the panopticon is associable when surveillance continues to confine people within a restrictive state, which he calls "self-surveillance". Foucault argues that the idea of self-surveillance or being watched, makes one disciplined. After a point, it turns into a mechanism of control. Althusser calls the politics of control a "repressive state apparatus", which is the communal execution of power (Foucault 187). Thus, the novel depicts a way to confine women's liberty and create abnormality.

Atwood also employs issues related to religiously ritualised surrogacy, which is forced actually. Ruling-class women have lost the capacity to produce children, the authoritarian regime therefore arranges for females to produce children for elite families. Atwood writes in the introduction of the novel thus: "Under totalitarian-or indeed in any sharply hierarchal society--the ruling class monopolizes valuable things, so the elite of the regime arrange to have fertile females assigned to them as Handmaids" (X). The act of giving birth and producing babies becomes a business in Gilead. The regime employs various strategies to hold control over people. For that matter, it does whatever is required to maintain its dominance. Anthropocentric activities of individuals can be put into context when nuclear war is a conscious decision of the ruling class, which results in environmental degradation. Rosi Braidotti aptly argues: "A nuclear war would have been a conscious decision on the part of the powers that be. Climate change is an unintended consequence of human actions as a species" (Braidotti 111). Thus, a long struggle to establish democracy culminates in an apocalyptic situation. The ruling government utilises every possible measure to maintain control over citizens. Technological strategies employed to be able to win control over common masses and dehumanisation is an anti-humanist idea that critical posthumanism calls into question. Anthropocentric fear to protect humanist ventures is the pertinent concern of posthuman discourse.

In conclusion, we may say that deteriorating fertility rates among people, the rise of religiously ritualised surrogacy, commercialisation of surrogacy suspension of democracy, theocratic totalitarianism in the form of patriarchy, and the use of nuclear power and digital landscapes to control individuals are core worries of Atwood in this novel. The rise of military surveillance and alienation expanded the gap among Gilead's individuals. *The Handmaid's Tale* critiques the issue concerned with rethinking human freedom, the proliferation of power centres and the interdiction of democracy. Commanders are socio-economically privileged people whereas Offreds, Marthas, drivers, and children are terrorised into submission. Atwood's posthuman landscape/locale thus terribly disapproves of the deceptive nature of technological advancements, which strengthen totalitarian strategies.

In addition, Atwood's depiction interrogates the depletion of nature and women along with overpowering Puritan fundamentalism with the help of technological advancements. These advancements are critical when they widen the gap between the exploiter and the exploited, the empowered and the disempowered. *The Handmaid's Tale* seems well-

informed about the consequences commercialisation of surrogacy and the polluted environment. Thus, a long struggle to achieve a democratic system meets an apocalyptic ending when the ruling government tends to utilise technological means to control and alienate individuals.

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INVASION AND THE POSTHUMAN FEMALE BODY: LIMINALITY AND RESISTANCE IN SCIENCE FICTION

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Abstract

Conquering and colonizing are acts of asserting power and dominance over another, weaker entity. Invasion of this entity is motivated by specific ideologies and attempts to realize these tenets through the very being of the colonized entity- be it land or persons. The chapter looks at the phenomena of invasion in the context of the posthuman female body, which becomes a liminal space of multiple identities. Thematic analysis of the select fiction is done based on two broad themes: (a)the action of invasion through xenobiological and technological apparatus, and (b) different gendered valuations embodied in the posthuman women through the literal and metaphorical colonization of their bodies. Three characters are analyzed under these themes: Wanda from Stephenie Meyer's *The Host* (2009), Cinder from Marissa Meyer's *The Lunar Chronicles* (2012-2016), and Kira from Christopher Paolini's *To Sleep in a Sea of Stars* (2021). The liminality of the integrated bodies of these women provides them a scope to subvert the dominant anthropocentric and patriarchal ideologues who create and/or control them in the narrative. The different manners in which these women resist as well as submit to the power centers around them, as well as the journey of creating their own identity through their relationship with the posthuman reality is explored.

Keywords: Body; Female; Invasion; Liminality; Posthuman.

Introduction

The body is a site of power play; conquering a specific body entails the dominance of a specific power over the body and everything it symbolizes.