

**POWER POLITICS AND GENDER RELATIONS: A  
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MARGE PIERCY AND  
MARGARET ATWOOD'S SELECT NOVELS**

A Thesis

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in

**English**

By

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*Transforming Education Transforming India*

**LOVELY PROFESSIONAL UNIVERSITY**

**PUNJAB**

**2021**

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## **ABSTRACT**

A serious contemplation on the striking dissimilarity between all forms of gendered identities has invited mammoth discussion during the last few decades. From the Enlightenment to the psychoanalytic perspective, all endeavours are focused on locating the true essence for each type of identification. The categorisation is so apparent that our bodies and mental faculties are trained to perform certain activities based on these configurations.

Presently the inquiry emerges that if these arrangements are established so profoundly in our psyche, then what is the premise of this confirmed confidence? Therefore, the word power crosses our mind for the reason that whether animal or humanworld, power is the generative force for all the living organisms. A dormant substance cannot profess to have power while it can be used as an instrument to exercise control over others. The poststructuralists, from one perspective, oppose the Enlightenment belief in the centrality of experience, and then again, they exhibit distrust in the primary comprehension of coordinated correspondence between the signifier and the signified and insist that the regularised correspondence is the consequence of human mediation, and not a pre-given radiant appointed division.

New feminists derive intellectual inspiration from the existentialist Simone de Beauvoir, claiming that the locale is centred on women's otherness as Jacques Lacan focuses on the symbolic order and its internalisation, whilst Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction annihilates dualistic thinking, and Michel Foucault constantly addresses the issue of the naturalness of gender roles and according to him, masculinity and femininity are disciplines of the body that require proper attention. Foucault's theoretical suggestions demonstrate that the twentieth century's cultural investment of the female bodies is invested with sexuality or libido, and is woven around the idea of feminine and this investment is highlighted through the analysis of select novels by Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood.

In their novels, Women's bodies are tailored to conform to social ideals that are historically specific. This is not essential femininity with which women

are getting in touch, but an expression of power-knowledge relations. Foucault postulates that the bodies do not yield the promise of a utopia; a liberated ground for identity formation rather he discusses bodies as a source or site of resistance, thus the bodies can alternatively be colonised and decolonised by power relations. According to Foucault, we misunderstand the concept of power; it is not a restrictive, prohibitive, unidirectional relationship that manifests itself as the repression of subjects by authority rather he understands power as a generative force, restrictive freedom. Both Michel Foucault and Judith Butler argue that power relations are not only inconsistent but also continually generate new types of stereotypes and offer new possibilities for the potential development of new forms of imprisonment, resistance, and freedom.

The relationship between power and gender relations is even more important and the construction of gendered identities plays a significant part in the life of an individual. The varying degree of power is allocated and distributed to both sexes through the governance of gender politics. The prevailing issues of the construction of gendered identities and their interconnectedness with the socio-cultural norms are installed in the man-centric inheritance that shows itself through specific relations of mastery and subjection that are historically contingent. The poststructuralist critics shifted their focus from the exclusive female vulnerabilities and repressive hypothesis to that of power politics wherein all forms of sexualities or sexual identities function through a nexus of power relations.

The present study shall deal in detail with the structure of power relations and the construction of gendered identities and the main objective of this study is to discuss how we think about gender relations and how the alternate modes of thinking can widen our understanding of the underlying system of power politics that is accountable for the formation of clusters of knowledge that are not only historically contingent but also keep on changing as is perceptible in the change and the growth of consciousness of all forms of identities from the previous times to the present. Gender relations are not inherent to the structure of any society or state, nor can be conceived outside a system of knowledge. These relations survive and mutate through the epistemological patterns of a

community. The poststructuralist discourse is deconstructive in the sense that it seeks to distance us from the determined belief system and post sceptical questions through critical statements. This intellectual distancing is not entirely deconstructive rather it is a constructive move toward an absolute determinism, however, the constructive faith of the poststructuralist critics in the deconstructive practices never remains static.

Power is a neutral entity and it does not have a fixed character of its own. The knowledge to use power wisely is the prerequisite of a potentially free individuality. Writers like Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood are the constructors of social order and are endowed with a responsibility to redeem society from the insidious effect of negative powers that are prevalent in society. Both seem to assert that through cooperation and positive interaction we can bring about a complete transformation in our understanding of the term power which contributes towards the advancement of all forms of gendered identities.

Precisely, this thesis shall have the following objectives:

- To trace the historical roots and contributions of Margaret Atwood and Marge Piercy.
- To explore the issues of power politics and gender relations in the select works.
- To apply the theory of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler in the select novels of Margaret Atwood and Marge Piercy.
- To draw a comparative analysis of the select novels of Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood.

The outlined hypothesis is based on the understanding that power relations have an irresistible association with the formation of gendered identities and the instances of this nexus of power relations and construction of gendered identities are perceptible in the characters of the two novelists under study. Power is a neutral entity; an open-ended process of subjugation, resistance, and liberation. The opportunities are optimal and equal for both sexes. Essential understanding of an individual whether feminine or masculine is a myth and is framed by the dominant power structures.

The methodology of the current thesis follows an analytical and comparative approach. Primarily, the application of poststructuralist feminism theory has been used to draw an insightful understanding of the contribution of power and power politics in the field of the construction and deconstruction of the gendered identities, and it has duly been analysed how the repressive hypothesis of the negative utilisation of power can be countered through the resistance mechanism supported by the positive/neutral use of power. The theorisation of the poststructuralist critics, i.e., Michel Foucault and Judith Butler is appropriately applied to the analysis of the select novels. The final draft of the thesis conforms to the guidelines of the MLA handbook 8<sup>th</sup> edition.

An extensive literature survey has been conducted to accomplish a wider understanding of the topic '**Power Politics and Gender Relations: A Comparative Study of Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood's Select Novels**'. The repertoires of the renowned institutions of knowledge like Guru Nanak Dev University, Punjab University, Punjabi University, and Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla have been sorted to accumulate maximum information and knowledge in the field. E-resources have been helpful especially during the outrageous and malignant expansion of the Covid-19 pandemic. A huge amount of information and scholarly knowledge has been derived from extensive reading of the scholarly published papers and dissertations.

Indeed, there is a compelling need to critically investigate the functioning and contribution of power for a revisionist study of the stereotyped understanding regarding the female writers and their determinism in asking for a special space amidst the patriarchal order. The mastered knowledge and profound discussions of the two eminent poststructuralist critics, i.e., Michel Foucault and Judith Butler in connection to the fiction of the two contemporary female revolutionaries, i.e., Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood, are highly impactful. Hopefully, this thesis will help future researchers in widening their interest and knowledge in the field of power politics, women's studies, and the poststructuralist understanding of the term

gender and gendered identity. The denouncement of the belief in absolute knowledge maximises our scope for a better understanding of the world; opportunities are open-ended, and the individual performance irrespective of the gender difference decides the course of our life, and this optimism of extended opportunities inspires us to move ahead with confidence.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There have been numerous people including my well-wishers, my friends, my colleagues, and my institution who have walked alongside me during my journey in obtaining my Ph.D. They have guided me, placed opportunities in front of me, and showed me the doors that might be useful to open. It is only through their continuous support and encouragement; this thesis has seen through its completion. At the end of my thesis, it is a pleasant opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to all those who have made it a memorable experience for me.

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**(Shikha Sharma)**

## CONTENTS

Sr. No	Title	Page No
1.	Declaration	ii
2.	Certificate of the Advisor	iii
3.	Abstract	iv-viii
4.	Acknowledgment	ix
5.	Introduction	1-22
6.	<b>Chapter One:</b> Brief Candle	23-46
7.	<b>Chapter Two:</b> Subjectivity, Resistance and reedom: A Nexus of Power Relations	47-70
8.	<b>Chapter Three:</b> Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood: The Herculean Siblings of Second Wave Feminism	71-86
9.	<b>Chapter Four:</b> Futuristic Sisters: A Comparative Analysis of the Fiction of Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood	87-99
10.	<b>Chapter Five:</b> Bodies That Do Not Matter: An Analysis of <i>The Edible Woman</i> and <i>The Longings of Women</i>	100-147
11.	<b>Chapter Six:</b> Dialectics of Utopia/ Dystopia and the Heterotopias in <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> and <i>Woman on the Edge of Time</i>	148-209
12.	<b>Chapter Seven:</b> Undoing the Feminine/ Masculine Dualities: An Anlysis of <i>Vida</i> and <i>Surfacing</i>	210-261
13.	Conclusion	262-280
14.	Bibliography	281-323

## Introduction

Descartes's meditative insights on the relationship between body and social identity formed a basis for the upcoming generations of critics and scholars who have discoursed much on the topic of a composite notion of selfhood. With the upsurge of feminism, the two terms, i.e., body and soul came to be discussed under the terminology of gender and identity along with body forming the basis of issues centring around gender and identity. Judith Butler speculates that to gain precedence to the heteronormative pattern, the three exclusive terms, i.e., body, gender, and identity have been blended in a way that any discussion on this topic would sound mystical, asymmetrical, and irresolvable.

In a way, gender studies include the study of behavioural patterns of any given society. In 1984, the historian Jill Mathews performed elaborated research on the topic of gender and its construction and she opined that the recognition of behavioural patterns of any society can be traced through the analysis of gender relations. For understanding gender relations, it is pertinent to understand the relationships between the male and the female. For instance, the systematic study of the matriarchal and the patriarchal structures can help us not only in investigating the functioning of the nexus of power relations but also validates Foucault's postulation regarding the socio-cultural impact on the process of identification. Hence, sexuality is situated at the heart of gender relations, and the relationships between various identities prompt inspiration through the impact of body or sexuality.

Likewise, deep scrutiny of the dominance of the patriarchal relations of power can widen our understanding of the structures of knowledge that Foucault calls the power structures of society. All institutions ranging from hospitals, courts, asylums, prison-houses, etc., operate in accordance with the norms established by the dominant classes of society. Even our bodies, bodily behaviours, and our way of dressing all insinuate the impact of power structures. It is evident from the above discussion that power is the deciding factor for the process of identification and the formation of individuality.

It is pertinent to discuss the two terms, i.e., sex and gender in relation and contrast to each other simultaneously. The term sex attributes to the physiological differentiation between the male and the female. Our sex decides our destiny for the reason that our social grooming is organised according to our sex whether male, female or transgender. Any digression from our nominated sexual roles is condemned by society. Foucault in his *The History of Sexuality* detailed the problem of hysteria, which is generally associated with the female, homosexual, and transgendered sexuality, and these hysterically sexed bodies are apportioned to the fixed behavioural patterns. Masculine and feminine roles are fixed by the principal advocates of heteronormativity and any deviation from the two is taken to task by what Foucault calls the disciplinary practices. The term gender received acclaimed attention during the 1970s and the terms masculine and feminine are chief characteristics of gendered identity.

As the female body, the male body is also sexually bound to the obligations of masculinity. Moira Gatens argues that like the female body, the male body is also imbued with a set of characteristics assigned by the ideological framework of any given society. Therefore, the poststructuralist critics waged a war against the technologies of the gendered identities and call attention to the polemics of the patriarchal system of power politics. Now the question arises, what patriarchy is? The term patriarchy was proselytised by the clusters of feminists during the second half of the twentieth century and their motive was to expose the dictatorial functioning of the male-dominating structure of society. The patriarchal dominance has been critically notified by the feminist critics and especially the agitations against the patriarchy propelled after the culmination of the two World Wars.

The bodies are hijacked through the power of constructed logic and defiance of the set principles and are also condemned; however, this defiance is not absolute and can be countered through the resistance which further paves the way to freedom of the subject, yet again this freedom is looped within the matrix of individual discipline and restraint. Therefore, the idea of absolute freedom or its extreme that is slavery is a myth; a misconceived notion purported by the supporters of the dominant classes. Considerably, we have

entered the domain of psycho-politics; a term significantly utilised by the neoliberals. The issue of identification has much to do with our mind since it concerns the specific manner by which people characterise their idea of selfhood. We exist as intrinsically socialised individualities to the extent that the particular manner by which subjectivities are formed relies on our psycho-social and political relations.

The focal thought of the present study spins around the methods of women's activist speculation during the 1960s and concentrates on how the poststructuralist critics, particularly Michel Foucault and Judith Butler in this context, have commented on the possibility of neutrality of sex that has commonly been misjudged as the obliteration of natural or organic reality of the sex and both critics have been charged for the expansion of hermaphroditism. The major objective of the present study is to investigate the categorisation of relations of power: a binary configuration and to highlight the deficient approach of the domineering class toward the marginalised. Pertinently, the female experience remains the fundamental concern for the feminists and that is the reason why poststructuralist feminists conceive this one-sided approach as falling into another sort of determinism. Neither male nor female determinism is hailed by the stated critics rather they focus on the alternate possibilities of the identical demeanour for all types of gendered identities. The focus has shifted from the masculine or the feminine gendered identities to the relationship of convergence or facilitation for one another, in other terms, poststructuralist feminism has transformed its belief into the fluid form of identities; a notion that can help redeem all sexes from the grudge of non-inclusion.

The thesis entitled **'Power Politics and Gender Relations: A Comparative Study of the Select Novels of Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood'** proposes to explore how gender relations, based on the metaphysics of patriarchal psychology, illuminate our comprehension of power relations and also shed light on the significance of power in the public arena and legislative issues. It centres around sexual orientation issues during present times, where men will, in general, be progressively preservationist and

participate in more impactful and opportunistic activities than females. The two significant highlights of the setting are the sexual orientation of modern times and the guidelines that oversee how choices are made and how people convey and obey the contrived meanings. However, gender gaps merit an opportunity to comprehend how power controls the collective consciousness of any given society.

The relationship between power and gendered identification is even more important as the construction of gendered identities plays a significant part in the life of an individual. The varying degree of power is allocated and distributed to both sexes through the governance of gender politics. In the first place, what is generally significant about men, women, and governmental issues is the social development of sex, not the natural focal inclinations that separate both sexes. The issues centring on the discrimination between the sexes are significant in light of the fact that they associate with disparity. Men are almost certain than females to access and utilise their resources or opportunities. In this sense, sex is a social and political procedure considerably more than a natural certainty, and we look to follow it. However, society relates men toward the organisation and the female toward disorganised far-fetched utopian longings.

For a comprehensive understanding, the discussion is centred around the crucial socio-psychical pressures that enforce individuals to perform certain activities as gendered identities. In Piercy and Atwood's novels, society oppresses women with a defence on the fragile biological profile of the female, and women are characterised primarily based on their reproductive capacities and the state manipulates women's biological capacities.

The two writers under study hold the conviction that both males and females are equipped with an understanding to decide for their life, and are empowered to stand against all distortions since they are familiar with the positive and neutral side of power and are skilled to resist the power being exercised on them through the counterforce, i.e., resistance. Judith Butler has emphasised the issue of the political representation of females through the network of power politics. She comments on the role of the feminist critics

and writers during the early phase of the second wave feminism under her discourse on gender performativity. Both Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood proliferated as writers during second wave of feminism, however, they never compartmentalised their writing to the precincts of the second wave and are continually writing with the same fervour and have successfully matched their pace with the contemporary feminist discourse.

Indeed, it is a challenge to analyse the works of the two contemporary female writers who have not only witnessed the proliferation and ebb and flow of the second wave feminism but also have matched their pace with the contemporary issues of power politics wherein the meanings and the signification of the pre-conceived notions is challenged by the post-feminists and the poststructuralist critics. Unflinchingly, their fiction leaves no chance in discrediting the over-enthusiastic longings of the feminists to achieve an absolute space for the females in society, and through the portrayal of the functioning of power in the construction as well as the deconstruction of identities, both writers have exhibited their faith and interest in the postfeminist approach of decentralisation. Through an analysis of the select novels in the light of Foucauldian and Butler's discourse, we realise that power is essentially epistemological and motivates us to internalise the system of thoughts, and all knowledge including that of the construction of gendered identities is historically contingent.

Chapter 1 entitled 'Brief Candle' details the significance of power in an individual's life and exposes the myths and misinterpretations woven around word power that is described as a negative force whilst the poststructuralist critics succeeded in reinterpreting the term power as a neutral force that proffers alternate possibilities to all forms of identities since all relations are based on power. It entails a detailed commentary on the relationship between power, politics, and the process of subjection.

Chapter 2 entitled 'Subjectivity, Resistance and Freedom: A Nexus of Power Relations' studies the contribution of the poststructuralist critics Michel Foucault and Judith Butler in the field of power politics and the determination of identities. Gender relations are not inherent to the structure

of any society or state, nor can be conceived outside a system of knowledge. The relation of the select writers with the poststructuralist notion of a free play of signification has been scrutinised through the application of the poststructuralist feminist theory to the select novels.

Chapter 3 entitled 'Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood: The Herculean Siblings of Second Wave Feminism' presents an overview of the wave culture beginning from the first wave, however, the focus is laid on the second wave since the two writers under study find the roots of their fiction in the contextual framework of the second wave feminism. The issues like post-war calamitous conditions, social disparity, and exploitation of the marginalised classes have duly been highlighted as the chief features of the twentieth century.

Chapter 4 entitled 'Futuristic Sisters-A Comparative Analysis of the Fiction of Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood' spotlights the similarity of thought between the two writers. Two female writers, i.e., Piercy and Atwood from two different nationalities, America and Canada respectively, share similar interests primarily for the reason that both are females and can relate their shared experience with that of female society. The foremost reason for their identicalness is situated in their ancestry that is rooted in second wave feminism, and above all the two are progressive and have not locked them within the inheritance of the twentieth century. The term futuristic refers to their logical, sensible, and scientific outlook toward life.

Chapter 5 entitled 'Bodies That Do Not Matter: An Analysis of *The Edible Woman* and *The Longings of Women*' is deliberately conspired to relate to Judith Butler's theorisation of body politics as discussed in almost all her books, and specially highlighted in *Bodies That Matter* (2011). The comparative analysis of the two select novels by Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood brings to light the significance of the body especially in the life of a female. According to Foucault and Butler, all conflicts are rooted in our sexuality but unlike Freud, these two critics hold the opinion that this sexual crisis is not deep-rooted within the psyche, rather it is rooted in our social cognisance and both males and females can overcome their bodily complexes



through social training and positive interaction. An acknowledgment of each other as part of the same social order can bridge the gap between the two. The female protagonists of the two writers toward the end of the narrative, after the interaction with their counterparts, feel redeemed from their complexes and rise above their shabby idiosyncrasies encompassing their social and personal life.

Chapter 6 entitled ‘Dialectics of Utopia, Dystopia, and the Heterotopias in *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Woman on the Edge of Time*’ evolves as a deep meditation on the three realms of abstract or theoretical existences, however, the heterotopias emerge as mediation between the two, i.e., utopia and dystopia, which according to Foucault, are illogical and insurmountable for the reasonable minds. Heterotopias like Connie’s Mattapoissett in Piercy’s novel *Woman on the Edge of Time*, is a space within a space; an alternate, but not an absolute space. A renewed reading of both the novels with a mediating heterotopic negotiation paves the way for a better understanding of the relationships not only between heterosexuals, but among all types of identities like bisexuals, transgender, and hermaphrodites, etc. Heterotopia is simultaneously a free and restrictive space for the explanation that neither does it promise an ideal world like utopia, nor it portrays a destitute land like a dystopia; heterotopia is a middle way. In this chapter, I have attempted to create a comparative as well as contrastive analysis of the two acclaimed works known for their distinctive features, i.e., utopia (*Woman on the Edge of Time*) and dystopia (*The Handmaid’s Tale*), and the mediation of heterotopias as a negotiating abstraction is indeed insightful.

Chapter 7 entitled ‘Undoing the Feminine/ Masculine Dualities: An Analysis of *Vida* and *Surfacing*’ as the title suggests deals with the debunking of the binaries concocted by the patriarchal society. The title refers to Judith Butler’s celebrated book *Undoing Gender* (2004). Both writers contest against the biological determination of sexuality and through the portrayal of neutral men and women, rather one may say new men and women, envision a genderless society wherein the difference of gender merely becomes a myth; an age-old, obsolete idea. The portrayal of the masculine female like Vida and

the anonymous narrator from *Surfacing*, and feminine men like the residents of Mattapoisett, is a reference toward the emergence of a genderless society. In both novels, the devastation of land and bio-resources is lamented and the exploitation of nature has been compared with the exploitation of the female body, and the extravagant indulgence of the males and the females in homosexual relations is an indication towards undoing the constructed gendered identities.

Power politics has evolved as a field of international relations and it objectifies the circulation of power and its impact on individual lives. In this thesis, the concept of power has been studied in relation to the construction and deconstruction of gendered identities. From the context of gender studies, power plays a crucial role in the establishment of norms for all types of gendered subjects. The introductory chapter provides an overview about the two writers who have a close association with the second wave of feminism and have not veered off from their zeal to bring to light the unfair practices of the dominating society and this thesis, in particular, will help in bridging the gap between theory and practice. Unequivocally, extensive research has already been conducted on Margaret Atwood's fiction and she is an acclaimed feminist writer of contemporary times. However, Marge Piercy is less explored than her contemporary but in no way, it can be asserted that she is less talented. Even though the select writers are radical feminists still no comprehensive research has been conducted on the comparative analysis of the fiction of these two writers. In this way, this postulation can end up being exceptionally useful for future researchers and they might have the option to broaden their investigation in the field of gender studies.

## Literature Review

A large group of critics and researchers from different nations have examined the topic of gender relations and power politics in relation to Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood's fiction and have introduced deep insights into their works. I have attempted to give information on some researchers who have interpreted the works of the stated writers in light of the poststructuralist theorisation. A few of them have been referred below:

**Abbott, Philip.** "Are Three Generations of Radicals Enough? Self-Critique in the Novels of Tess Slesinger, Mary McCarthy, and Marge Piercy." *The Review of Politics*, vol. 53, no. 4, 1991, pp. 602–626. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/1407308](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1407308). Accessed 15 Feb. 2021.

This research article explores the American feminist radicalism and Piercy's novel *Vida* (1979) is the focus of the analysis on account of the portrayal of radical female political activist Vida who is a member of anti-war group and takes part in radical activities against the state. The image of a new woman has been portrayed by Piercy in her novel *Vida* and the protagonists' perennial indulgence in bombing and anarchic activities and her cherished involvement in homosexual relations sets Piercy apart from other female writers of her generation.

**Abdelbaky, Ashraf.** "A Perfect World or an Oppressive World: A Critical Study of Utopia and Dystopia as Subgenres of Science Fiction". *IJELLH*, vol 4, no 3, 2016. [doi.org/10.24113/ijellh.v4i3.1201](https://doi.org/10.24113/ijellh.v4i3.1201)

The researcher has discussed the two concepts of utopia and dystopia in the light of the interpretations laid down by Plato and Thomas Moore and the highlight of the paper is how the two realms of abstract existence have become phenomenal for the science fiction genre.

**Adovasio, J M, et al.** *The Invisible Sex: Uncovering the True Role of Women in Prehistory*. Harper Collins, 2009.

This book derives inspiration from Simone De Beauvoir's understanding of the second sex. Various shades of womanhood in relation to the structured masculine hegemony have been discussed in detail. The writer has discoursed on various roles of women which have become inherent to her social and psychological profile. The spur of biological essentialism is the basis of all discussion.

**Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology*. Duke UP ,2006.**

This book is about the formation of new types of identifications and the writer has argued that queer has indeed become a threat for the supporters of heteronormativity and queer politics posit a direct challenge to the regularised understanding of the binary configuration of identification. The notions of the constructed logic are thwarted through a poststructuralist understanding of the flexible process of signification.

**Booker, M. Keith. "Woman on the Edge of a Genre: The Feminist Dystopias of Marge Piercy." *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1994, pp. 337–350. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/4240370](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4240370). Accessed 15 Feb. 2020.**

The researcher has provided deep insights to Marge Piercy's revolutionary tone in her novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* in which she posits a direct challenge to the masculine territories of dominance. In this novel a move is perceptible from the imaginative powers to the political commitments especially for the females. Her novel provides a combination of both utopian and dystopian existential realms. This article reveals the interrelationship between utopian and dystopian facets of life. Sexuality is at the core of discussion which is both repressive and liberating at the same time.

**Carol Riddell, et al. *The Second Wave*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1980. JSTOR, [jstor.org/stable/10.2307/community.28044452](http://jstor.org/stable/10.2307/community.28044452). Accessed 15 Feb. 2021.**

The researchers provide detailed analysis of the 1960s culture and the emphasis is laid on the reckoning issues of women empowerment that started after the culmination of the Second World war. This article provides a background to the current thesis and describes characteristic features of the

second wave feminism that germinated another form of feminism like maternal, material, and radical feminism.

**Evans, Sara M. "Sons, Daughters, and Patriarchy: Gender and the 1968 Generation." *The American Historical Review*, vol. 114, no. 2, 2009, pp. 331–347. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/30223782](http://www.jstor.org/stable/30223782). Accessed 11 March, 2021.**

The researcher has discussed the central role of gender during the last two decades of the twentieth century. The United States of America became the hub of political global strategies that reshaped the cognisance of masses towards sexual/gendered identity. The discussion is oriented around the culture of second wave feminism.

**Farahbakhsh,Alireza, and Banafsheh Zohari.**

**"Gender Performances in Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*". *Best: IJHAMS*, vol 4, no 2, 2016, pp.147-156,[www.academia.edu/23934911/GENDER\\_PERFORMANCES\\_IN\\_MARGARET\\_ATWOODS\\_THE\\_EDIBLE\\_WOMAN](http://www.academia.edu/23934911/GENDER_PERFORMANCES_IN_MARGARET_ATWOODS_THE_EDIBLE_WOMAN)**

The two researchers have discussed how the power of the sexual ideology governs the lives of the females and relegate them to the catacombs of abysmal disorder and silence. The body becomes the most vulnerable part of an individual's life since all contentions germinate from the idea of sexed bodies. Power and its effect on the body is the pivotal point of discussion. Judith Butler's concept of performance of gender is central to the argument.

**Gladstein, Mimi R. "Masculine Sexuality and the Objectification of Women: Steinbeck's Perspective." *The Steinbeck Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2004, pp. 109–123. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/41581952](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41581952). Accessed 24 Jan. 2021.**

The battle between sexes is the chief feature of this research article and the root cause of this struggle is rooted in sexuality. The females have been depicted as misogynistic however, the anxiety of the male writer can well be deciphered from the antagonistic portrayal of the females. Generally, the word misogyny is used to express a measured amount of hatred for the female race but Steinbeck's reversal of the argument is phenomenal.

**Goldblatt, Patricia F. "Reconstructing Margaret Atwood's Protagonists." *World Literature Today*, vol. 73, no. 2, 1999, pp. 275–282. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/40154691](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40154691). Accessed 16 Feb. 2021.**

The researcher has presented a renewed and radical portrayal of stock female protagonists of Margaret Atwood's fiction. There is a noticeable breakaway from the stereotypical depiction of characters, especially in the case of female characters. The indulgence of the female protagonists in out of the norm and anarchist activities have been highlighted to attract the interest of the readers.

**Gordon, Darcy D. *Female Identity in the Novels of Marge Piercy*. Dissertation, Florida Atlantic University, 1997. [fau.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/fau%3A12145](http://fau.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/fau%3A12145)**

The issue of identity crisis has been comprehensively discussed in the novels of Marge Piercy and the females have been presented as the victims of body politics. An analysis of sexed ideology is highlighted throughout the thesis. The researcher has focused on various issues like gerontology, Jew ancestry, Black feminism, and Black masculinities as integral features of Marge Piercy's fiction.

**Graves, Allison Mary. "Servant of Race": Gender and Sex Performativity and Utopian Possibilities in Feminist Science Fiction. Dissertation. Washington State University, 2015, [www.dissertations.wsu.edu/Thesis/Spring2015/A\\_Graves\\_052915.pdf](http://www.dissertations.wsu.edu/Thesis/Spring2015/A_Graves_052915.pdf)**

This doctoral thesis is markedly impactful for the current analysis on account of two significant issues, i.e., longings for a utopian realm and the idea of performance through which the dream of utopia can truly be realised. The researcher has focussed on the significance of Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity for a revisionist understanding of the construction and deconstruction of gendered identities. The longings for a utopian society through the intercession of science fiction have been highlighted.

**Grimbeek, Marinette. *Margaret Atwood's Environmentalism*. Dissertation, Karlstad UP, 2017.**

Marinette Grimbreek has studied in detail the relationship between Margaret Atwood's fiction and that of environmental studies. Through the analysis of the evil impact of imperialism and worldwide warfare, the conditions have deteriorated for the internal as well as the external nature. The looting of natural resources and plundering of natural wealth have been correlated with the turbulence in the lives of people, especially the women race and the marginalised communities.

**Hierro, Graciela, and Ivan Marquez. "Gender and Power." *Hypatia*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1994, pp.173–183. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/3810443](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810443). Accessed 23 Jan. 2021.**

The two researchers in this article endeavour to excavate the root cause of the struggle between the two sexes and their analysis revolve around the institutionalisation of the term patriarchy. To begin with, power was centralised in the hands of few men and ultimately it was grasped by all men, and hereafter, it led to an anomaly that power is the natural attribute of the males. Thus, this article focuses on the institution of patriarchy and its blind adherence to the norms set in the past.

**Hogeland, Lisa Maria. "Sexuality in the Consciousness-Raising Novel of the 1970s." *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1995, pp. 601–632. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/4617204](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4617204). Accessed 25 May. 2020.**

Lisa Hogeland, in her research article, emphasises the prevalence of sexuality as a contentious discourse in the lives of the two genders and her analysis is rooted in the soil of second wave feminism. In her article she deals with the merging of small radical communities into the mainstream wave culture. The impact of cinema, theatre, and media has been highlighted by the researcher in consciousness-raising program of the female section. The enthralling dominance of the male society is exhibited through the exploitation of the females at both mental and physical levels.

**Houda, Bouhadjar. "A Reading of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* in Light of Genette's Paratextuality". *International***

*Journal of Academic Research and Reflection*, vol 5, no 5, 2017. [www.idpublications.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Full-Paper-A-READING-OF-MARGARET-ATWOOD%E2%80%99S-THE-HANDMAID%E2%80%99S-TALE-IN-LIGHT.pdf](http://www.idpublications.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Full-Paper-A-READING-OF-MARGARET-ATWOOD%E2%80%99S-THE-HANDMAID%E2%80%99S-TALE-IN-LIGHT.pdf)

The researcher has discussed Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* in relation to Genette's theory of paratextuality and the analysis of the selection of title to narrate the experiences of a particular class has been elaborately outlined. Through the technique of paratextuality, the researcher has focused on the significance of the title, character's name, and all-pervasive; symbolism in the novel.

**Janicka, Iwona. "Queering Girard—De-Freuding Butler: A Theoretical Encounter between Judith Butler's Gender Performativity and René Girard's Mimetic Theory." *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture*, vol. 22, 2015, pp. 43–64. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.14321/contagion.22.1.0043](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.14321/contagion.22.1.0043). Accessed 24 Jan. 2021.**

The researcher, through a discussion on the relationship between mimesis and feminism, tries to explore the applicability of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity in both positive as well as negative aspects. The mimesis is also a performance and is similar to gender performance. All discourses on femininity and masculinity are grounded in performance or mimetic performance.

**Krasny, Elke. "Hysteria Activism: Feminist Collectives for the Twenty-First Century." *Performing Hysteria: Images and Imaginations of Hysteria*, edited by Johanna Braun, Leuven University Press, 2020, pp. 125-146. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv18dvt2d.10](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv18dvt2d.10). Accessed 24 Jan. 2021.**

This chapter excavates the birth of hysteria that is understood as a common malady for the female and the researcher glances back to the emergence of Freudian analysis of libido which directly relates to the psyche of the individual. Freud's analysis attempted to establish an essentialist understanding regarding hysteria; an inherent female



problem. The writer argues that the twentieth century has witnessed the expansion of the hysteric cases that are generally ascribed to females.

**Lloyd, Moya. "The Ethics and Politics of Vulnerable Bodies." *Butler and Ethics*, edited by Moya Lloyd, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2015, pp. 167–192. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt16r0hkp.11](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt16r0hkp.11). Accessed 16 Feb. 2021.**

Moya Lloyd discusses that Judith Butler introduced a new form of understanding regarding the politics of body which we understand in Foucault's terms as biopolitics. Lloyd writes about Butler who "...couched this call in terms of the need for a new bodily ontology' ... or its rethinking..." (169). For Butler, our bodies are bound with the normative patterns of social order and subjection is central to the active engagement of the individual with the social order.

**Palumbo, Alice Mary. *The Recasting of the Female Gothic in the Novels of Margaret Atwood*. Dissertation. University of Toronto, 1996, [tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/12922/1/NQ41571.pdf](https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/12922/1/NQ41571.pdf)**

This doctoral thesis explains the issue of female inhabitation to the assigned status of a mystified or a supernatural entity as is characterised through the female gothic protagonists of Margaret Atwood. The researcher has outlined how the confessional practices are incorporated in the female psyche to keep her aloof from the idea of freedom. The idea of female gothic, especially in the context of veiled women in *The Handmaid's Tale*, is quite relevant to the current analysis. This research also provides insights to the anonymous narrator's secret undertakings to redeem herself and the Canadian landscape from the malicious impact of colonising forces.

**Phelan, Shane. "Foucault and Feminism." *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 34, no. 2, 1990, pp. 421–440. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/2111456](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2111456). Accessed 23 Jan. 2021.**

This article discusses the impact and contribution of Foucault in the field of feminism however, Foucault has been criticised as a nihilist by the orthodox feminists who refute his concept of restrictive freedom and relational individuality. Shane Phelan argues that Foucault revolutionised feminism by

positing a direct challenge to the fixed form of identification. Foucault, for his interest in queer analysis, has been charged for expansion of hermaphroditism, however, his interest in queer analysis is triggered for his distrust in the essentialness of identification.

**Rebecca M. Jordan-Young. "Masculine and Feminine Sexuality." *Brain Storm: The Flaws in the Science of Sex Differences*. Harvard UP, 2010, pp. 109–143. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvjf9w21.9](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvjf9w21.9). Accessed 24 Jan. 2021.**

This chapter explores the technologies of gendered identities. The writer closely introspects the flawed adherence to the norms of gender disparity and the construction of gendered identities have been associated with the socio-cultural impact. The patriarchal schemata to rationalise the logic of male hegemony has been exposed. Through the characterised logic of the poststructuralist critics, the writer has endeavoured to forfeit the patriarchal claim of the supremacy of male logic.

**Rosenzweig, Rosie. "Marge Piercy's Jewish Feminism: A Paradigm Shift." *Studies in American Jewish Literature (1981-)*, vol. 17, 1998, pp. 82–87. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/41201361](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41201361). Accessed 23 Jan. 2021.**

Marge Piercy's Jewish inheritance and feeling of otherness have been compared with the identity crisis of her female characters. The anxiety of Jewish otherness haunts the entire writing corpus of Marge Piercy and this otherness and sense of non-belongingness have been passed over to her characters. This research article explores the shift in the nature of feminist culture which can be analysed through the study of Jewish female culture.

**Sargent, Lyman Tower, and Lucy Sargisson. "Sex in Utopia: Utopian and Dystopian Sexual Relations." *Utopian Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2014, pp. 299–320. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/utopianstudies.25.2.0299](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/utopianstudies.25.2.0299). Accessed 23 Jan. 2021.**

The writers have discussed different modes of sexual behaviour, sexual experience, and explain how these behavioural patterns affect the collective cognisance of any given society. The relationship among sex, gender, and sexuality has been explored by the writers and the discussion is veered around

the idea of utopian yearnings of the inhabitants. The analysis centres around the writing patterns of Marge Piercy, Robert Rimmer, and Alex Comfort.

**Shirkhani, Mohammad Amin. "A Postmodern Study of Feminine Language of Woman on the Edge of Time by Marge Piercy". *IJELLH*, vol 5, no 4, 2017. [www.ijellh.com/OJS/index.php/OJS/article/view/1938](http://www.ijellh.com/OJS/index.php/OJS/article/view/1938)**

Helen Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine* has been applied to the analysis of Piercy's novel *Woman on the Edge of Time*. The exploration of the use of feminine language to achieve independence has been explored. The realm of language has also been superseded by the male logic of precedence over the female. The researcher has emphasised that through the prejudiced use of language and the textual approach of the male about the female section, the patriarchal society has cemented its vehemence in the conceptual discourse however, the females and the suppressed classes can retaliate against the suppressive practices through the use of their personalised language. The queer, feminine registers have evolved as a challenge to the male logic.

**Šnircová, Soňa. "Queering Gender in Contemporary Female *Bildung* Narrative". *Journal of Language and Cultural Education*, vol 3, no 3, 2015, doi: 10.1515/jolace-2015-0027**

This research paper is oriented around the discussion on the renewed interest in highlighting the maturation of the female protagonist that may be achieved through the bildungsroman analysis of the female protagonists. Generally, the female writing is conceived to be less significant than the male discourse and the female bildungsroman analysis paves the way toward the growth of the female consciousness. As the proponents of the female bildungsroman, Margaret Atwood and Marge Piercy have employed this technique as a challenge to the male bildungsroman, and in addition, through Butler's queer heterotopic vision of gendered identity, a new kind of understanding about gendered identity is solicited.

**Snitow, Ann Barr. "The Front Line: Notes on Sex in Novels by Women, 1969-1979." *Signs*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1980, pp. 702-718. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/3173837](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173837). Accessed 15 Feb. 2021.**

Ann Barr Snitow dwells on the renewed interest of the female writers like Marge Piercy in writing about the females' bodily desires which has always been considered to be only a prerogative of the male members or writers only. The description of same-sex desires and extramarital affairs, and increased interest in queer sexuality are few radical and progressive trends in the fiction of female writers.

**Terrefe, Selamawit D. "The Pornotrope of Decolonial Feminism." *Critical Philosophy of Race*, vol. 8, no. 1-2, 2020, pp. 134–164. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/critphilrace.8.1-2.0134](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/critphilrace.8.1-2.0134). Accessed 24 Jan. 2021.**

This article is based on Spiller's concept of "pornotroping". The researcher deeply explores the theme of sexuality especially in the context of Black men and women. The libidinal dynamics captivate the interest of the readers, especially women who feel that their bodies are exploited as the instruments of pleasure. The argument is woven around the struggle between black and anti-black sexism. This article can well be associated with the theme of the black sexuality in the fiction of Marge Piercy. The discussion on Black feminism highlights the global prevalence of gender disparity.

**Tolan, Fiona. *Connecting Theory and Fiction: Margaret Atwood's Novels and Second Wave Feminism*. Dissertation, Durham University, 2004. [etheses.dur.ac.uk/2972/](http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/2972/)**

The impact of second wave feminism on the fiction of Margaret Atwood is the chief highlight of the analysis. The wave culture has influenced the fiction of Margaret Atwood and her political activism is noteworthy. Rooted in the soil of second wave feminism, her protagonists stand as the resilient female figures apt at making a journey from alienation to affirmation and emerge as the exponents of a new female culture. Ecofeminism, social feminism, radical feminism, and maternal feminism are the outstanding themes of this thesis. This thesis provides background information about the second wave feminism and its impact is perceptible in the experiences of the female protagonists of the two writers.

**---. *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction*. Rodopi, 2007.**

The complex relationship between feminist politics and Margaret Atwood's fiction has been explored by the author. Atwood's inconvenience with the labelling term feminist has been characteristically discussed in relation to her fervour for the political manifestation of female issues. Issues like body politics, science fiction, mimesis, hysteria, identity crisis, patriotism have been emphasised as integral parts of the author's composition.

**Yan, Y. "Madness and Women: A Feminist Interpretation of Madwoman in Woman on the Edge of Time". *Higher Education of Social Science*, vol 10, no 6, 2016. [cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/8640](http://cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/8640)**

The relationship between the malady of hysteria and the female has been explored through an analysis of Marge Piercy's novel *Woman on the Edge of Time*. The researcher explores how the imaginary flights of the protagonist Connie Ramos to Mattapoisett have been associated with the frantic moorings of a perturbed female mind. This article is quite significant to the current analysis for the reason that through the inculcation of Michel Foucault's concept of hysteria, as has been outlined in his book, *The History of Sexuality*, I have attempted to explore challenges posited by Foucault to the patriarchal society's stratagem to suppress the female mental faculties by ordaining them with a common hysteric temperament, and this temperament is revealed through the psychology of second wave feminism that is manifested through the portrayal of Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood's female characters.

**Yanikoglu, Seda Peksen. *Psychological Bisexuality and Otherness in the Novels of Angel Carter, Virginia Woolf, Marge Piercy and Ursula Le Guin: A Study from the Perspective of Ecriture Feminine*. Dissertation, Middle East Technical University, 2008. [citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.634.2503&rep=rep1&type=pdf](http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.634.2503&rep=rep1&type=pdf)**

The study is based on the analysis of *écriture féminine* in the context of the select novels by Angel Carter, Virginia Woolf, Ursula Le Guin, and Marge Piercy. The analysis is based on the theorisation presented by Helen Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray. The significance of female writing has been highlighted in the thesis. The emphasis is laid on exposing the conspiracy of the

west to suppress the female voice. The researcher has endeavoured to explain how through the acquisition of knowledge, the female society can empower itself and struggle against all forms of oppression.

**Webb, T. *Making the Journey: The Female Bildungsroman and Quest Motifs inselected Margaret Atwood's Texts*. Dissertation, Pietermaritzburg, 2015, [researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10413/14113/Webb Tray Elizabeth 2015.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1](http://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10413/14113/Webb_Tray_Elizabeth_2015.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1)**

The research is focused on the loss of identity and prevalence of chaos in the inner and outer nature of Margaret Atwood's female characters. Breaking away from the routine analysis of the male bildungsroman, the researcher has indulged in the exploration of the maturation process of the female protagonist. The quest motif is central to the narration of Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood's writings. The struggle for identity forms the basis of analysis.

**Wolmark, Jenny. "The Postmodern Romances of Feminist Science Fiction." *Cybersexualities: A Reader in Feminist Theory, Cyborgs and Cyberspace*, edited by Jenny Wolmark, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1999, pp. 230–238. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvxcrxdq.18](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvxcrxdq.18). Accessed 15 Feb. 2021.**

The researcher has discoursed on the relationship between body and machines and the use of the terms like cyborg and cyberspace are associated with Piercy's novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* in which Mattapoissett has been depicted as a heterotopic space with alternatedimensions and possibilities for survival. The sights of feeding males, incubators, and other devices of genetic engineering are significantly utilised to envisage transforming socio-cultural norms and spaces.

**Zarrinjooee, Bahman. "Women's oppressed and Disguised Life in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*." *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2017, pp. 66-71. doi: 10.7575/aiac.all.v.8n.1. Accessed 29 March 2020,**

The images of oppressed women and men within the Gilead regime have been presented in this research article. The researcher, through the portrayal of the dark side of life in the Gilead, has commented upon the

enslaved life of both males and females. The element of love is missing in the Puritan society and both sexes are tortured in the name of religion and righteousness of character.

**Power Politics and Gender Relations: A Comparative Study of Marge  
Piercy and Margaret Atwood's Select Novels**

**Writers under Study**

Marge Piercy (1936 – Present)



Margaret Atwood (1939- Present)





## **Chapter 1**

### **Brief Candle**

The identities we have as female or male for the duration of our lives are not fixed or supreme yet varying and shifting. The poststructuralists strongly affirm that western understanding of gender relations is not all-inclusive, but specific and socially explicit. Therefore, it is important to rethink the idea of gender relations for its systematic underpinnings in connection to the discourse on the examinations of female biology as a beginning field of grant. From the vignettes of the present examination, the male-controlled society is conceptualised as a determinant of masculinity with the masculine possessing a more prominent ability to act as a provider and the female as some negligible and imperceptible idea. Caught in the plural masculinities, the female's position additionally shifts to the undermined level.

What has become more horrific is a consideration for a man-centric society based on a framework crediting female subjection to the confined access and control of methods for both creation and generation in the private and open circles. Judith Butler attests that it is inappropriate to think about identity without its connection to sexuality. Does the pertinent question arise whether identity is a standardised perfection or an expression of experience? The identity of an individual is controlled by his/her sexuality and sex is the chief denominator for all aspects of identity construction, moreover, sexuality or sexual identity is subject not exclusively to the sexual and racial contrasts but additionally to the ethnic and social ones. And if the relationship of contrast between sexuality and gendered identity is so transparent then the distinction must be comprehended as something clear, existing, and present in history, and also the difference must be treated as a theoretical foundation.

In his *A History of Sexuality* (1978), Michel Foucault underlines that gender identity is not a pre-given fundamental substance but a result of the interaction. The distinction ought to be viewed as an essential characteristic for both recognisable and non-recognisable because the difference is not something that should be understood as a solitary opinion or characteristic; rather the difference is relational and must be comprehended as having a complementary relationship with its opposite. The steady moving of concentration away from the female issues of identity repeats the need for understanding various sexual categories. Women activists, philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, and psychoanalysts have discoursed much on the issue of gendered identities. What they all share for all intents and purposes is a predicament emerging from a basic inquiry in the contemporary issue of identification: what is the number of sexes? The most widely recognised answer is an impression of an organic hypothesis which decides the real identification based on natural proof.

As of now toward the start of the twentieth century organic or biological sex was viewed as a constitutive and relative piece of socio-sexual orientation. However, Butler maintains the contrast between sex and gendered identity by characterising sex as a matter of social development. Most women's activist hypothesis is indulged in the discussion on whether there are one, two, or three genders. Since further reflection upon the subject will contain the double angle as a regularising sexual orientation framework in Western culture, the presence of an alternate order of sexes is solicited. Various terms can be entitled to nominate a gendered identity: without a doubt male, without a doubt female, bisexual, transsexual male turning into a female, and transsexual female turning into a male, and a number of classifications rise considerably: straight male, straight female, gay woman, gay man, indiscriminate female, swinger man, transvestite man, transvestite woman, etc.

Studies have demonstrated that overemphasising the differentiation within the sexual orientations strengthens generalisations just as it enhances the depiction of the masculine and the feminine profiles, in this way keeping up the faith in the sub-par social status of the female. Generalisations are profoundly imbued in childhood and the identity of an individual is shaped according to the prevalent discourse of society that is known as the symbolic field of knowledge. Psychoanalysis, through the investigation of sexual orientation generalisations progress towards a sociological separation of the individual, as indicated through the entry of an individual to a naturalised and specific sexual identity conceived at the time of birth. When male and female classifications start to speak to the outright and integral ideas, the genders become subject to perplexity. The poststructuralists ought to make an effort not to align the male and the female as totally identifiable and associated categories rather call attention to the awry spaces of difference and relation between the sexes at the same time.

Power is the generator of legislative issues and subsequently, whatever shapes dominance is important to the investigation of gender relations. As we illustrate, sexual orientation influences how power is started up, strengthened, or understood. Sex is not just an arranging instrument; it is explicitly an arranging component that spots individuals on various rungs of the social progressive system. As such, sexuality defines manners that involve power and impact.

Foucault contends that power “is only intelligible when it is set against and among particular cultural practices” (Dreyfus and Paul 188). Foucault's thoughts of knowledge and power rise through his idea of the archaic exploration where he thinks about how knowledge is composed and what sort of avocations are considered worthy to help that information. Foucault argues that knowledge emanates from power and thus power and knowledge are “not external to one another” (114) and power relations constitute the knowledge and form the collective

ideology of a given society or state as “...knowledge is thoroughly enmeshed in the petty malice of the clash of the dominations ...everything is potentially enmeshed in the networks of power...” (114).

Foucault has featured the resistance in characterising what power really is, and how it is to be found. However, he firmly forwards the idea that “Power is not restricted to political institutions. Power plays a “directly productive role;” “it comes from below;” it is multidirectional, operating from the top down and also from the bottom top” (185), neither it is constructed nor construed around a particular entity or regime. Power never predominates or practices through a single body or area. Power is not the safeguard of the decision-making class. It is “not something which the State or a dominant class has or possesses and which others don't have” (Darier 17) and even the most subjugated class possesses situational control over the events of life. Power “is more than simply preventing or forcing others to do something they would not do on their own” and is “mostly relational” (17). In a way, power “...is a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised” (Foucault, “Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings” 156).

Through Foucault's work on the *raison d'Etat*, he draws a connection between power and the corporal functioning of the body. He contends that the body reflects the impacts of authority. The body is suffused with the relations of power. “There is an administration of knowledge, a politics of knowledge, relations of power which pass via knowledge and which, if one tries to transcribe them, lead one to consider forms of domination designated by such notions as field, region and territory” (69).

This study also plans to look at certain angles how language intercede these ideological messages and methods for diffusing the strains and imbalances the equilibrium connoted through its (language) nexus and furthermore compels individuals to conform to the dominant norms. In spite of the fact that language acts as the means for oppression,

it can likewise be the course to an elective cognisance that rejects inconsistent power relations as an unaltered state of individuals.

Social communication is a play of powers, we may in general expect that there is a lack of bias in verbal connection and no power relations induce an impact in language, a view cultivated by most socialisation forms. However, an examination of the language will demonstrate power relations as being made, acknowledged, or researched within the linguistic realm. We address the world through our language; it classifies and modifies works that generally would be rudimentary. In this description of the world and vehement dependence on our language, we assign essentialness to products and people; however, we characterize ourselves in connection to them. It is in this connection to others that we develop social relations, and if this importance is dispersed generally enough it pervades a social cognisance to the common reality and, hence we concede to the classified framework of the dominant ideology.

Foucault condemns the idea that power relations always tend to be negative. He guarantees that the deliberateness of the state is for the most part planned for guaranteeing the unity of the social body that germinates the strategies of the power struggle. This can be considered as one reason why Foucault affirmed that the shiftiness of power could likewise be appreciated. Foucault asserts that “...where there is power there is always resistance, but this resistance cannot be seen outside of power” (Rutherford 296).

Foucault contends that power in present-day times is bearable just on the condition that it covers a considerable piece of itself. “Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms” (Foucault, “The History of Sexuality” 86). Power is hard to characterise, however, it can be comprehended as mind-boggling strategically manoeuvred connections between various groups. Foucault accepted that power is purposeful, social, and multidirectional and restriction to power can be comprehended as a major aspect of a similar power

dynamic that makes the resistance, thus power cannot be characterised as purely negative, and there are numerous types of power relations.

This investigation contends that women's activists presently have missed on developing a palatable record of power. Existing women's activist records of power will, in general, have an uneven accentuation either on power as mastery or power as a method for strengthening. Women's activists have discoursed much on power to an extent that it might appear as though nothing more is reserved to be addressed on the theme. Nonetheless, the women activists' evaluation of sexual orientation requires a systematic investigation of the nature of power relations. The contending women's activist debates over topics like erotic entertainment, parenthood, marriage, homosexuality, lewd behaviour, and imbalance need a deliberate and strategic discursive analysis.

The poststructuralist critics shifted their focus from the exclusive female vulnerabilities and repressive hypothesis to that of power politics wherein all forms of sexualities or sexual identities function through a nexus of power relations. Foucault brings in the views of para-Marxist scholar Marcus on the idea of repression and quotes:

...because power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress, if it worked only through the mode of censorship, exclusion, blockage and repression, in the manner of a great Superego, exercising itself only in a negative way. If, on the contrary, power is strong this is because, as we are beginning to realise, it produces effects at the level of desire- and also at the level of knowledge (Foucault, "Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings" 59).

However, the disparaging and considerate disposition of the male, that is, principally established in the blended sentiment of fondness and mastery is the most troublesome riddle in the power relations. Both males and females as a couple experience social inequity at all levels of social existence. These social convictions direct the relative manliness

or womanliness of a large group of practices, attributes, and tasks of a given society. Gender and sex differentiation are employed by scholars and analysts as an attempt to abstain from the construction of essential social roles comprising of manliness and femininity. The essentialists see contrasts in how females and males situate themselves, feel, and act as naturally fixed and unchanging beings. The issue of biological essentialism is crucial for both genders because the idea of essentialism is, fundamentally, weakening, and fixes the extent of the subject to a set of characteristics. For instance, transgender couples frequently think that it is baffling to adjust and fit into the hetero standards of society.

The lasting accomplishment of books, for example, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* (Gray 1992) uncovers the intrigue of sexual essentialism. The two terms sex and gender are interpreted in a way that they stand as classified renditions of some essentialism. These distinctions gradually are accepted as real because societal pressure urges people to tacitly accept the protocols outlined by the general agreement which leads to the enactment of forced actions. From here starts Judith Butler's positivism in which she opens the door for accomplishing freedom and equity for the female through her concept of performance. Butler argues that all individuals normally are equipped with similar mental capacities thus all sexes, through participation or performance can topple and challenge the hetero-centric discourse.

Notably, it has been seen that no social norms can fittingly be grasped without perceiving that these have essentially been framed by, and may even have begun through the sexual collusion between the male and the female. The male showcases the quality and has the mental fortitude to battle with other men to control and delimit female freedom. The word freedom has different undertones and its utilisation changes from culture to culture. Freedom for women is as dangerous as the forbidden apple for Eve. The feminists opine that heterosexuality is the underlying driver of all conflicts between the two genders and it renders solidarity to the idea of a man-centric society. The cultural standards that

depend on the phallogocentric discourse leave a permanent impact on the psyche of the female and etch her feeling in the benignity of male-controlled society, and mentally program the former by guaranteeing her that she is a conceived need.

Keeping in mind the holistic development of mind and body, and more importantly, to gain bodily pleasure, the male strives to strengthen his dominance through the physical power of the phallus. That is the reason the concept of heterosexuality is ordained even by the religious institutions and both sexes have been warned to abstain from any illegal conjugal association with the same sex. Women's activist literary analysis fundamentally reacts to how the female is exhibited in writing through the personal perspective of the male authors. The two sets of ideologies known as phallocentrism and the subsequent women's activist analysis gynocriticism have spurred the attention of academicians and researchers alike.

The women's activists argue to comprehend a woman's position on the planet one must comprehend the stratagem of male-controlled society. Margaret Atwood responded against the purported confidence of feminists during the 1980s and argued that the idea of total redemption of female servitude is idealistic but not real. Kate Millet in, *Sexual Politics*, keeps up that sexual and governmental issues are procedures whereby the autonomous class endeavours to sustain and broaden its impact over the alternate sex. She exhibits a Foucauldian and Marxian interest in highlighting the relevance of the historical analysis as she recommends that the cultural and social settings of a piece of writing ought to be analysed from a neutral viewpoint. Even the idea of Helen Cixous' term the *écriture féminine* from her *The Laugh of Medusa* (1975) is undecided since it characterises, the female rhetoric as originating from her corporeality, along these lines it reinforces the generalisation of the female territory as being natural and male-dominated.



The next view encompassing female autobiographical writing is to challenge and dislocate the sketched line between the personal and the social life of an individual. This transference of interest in the literary taste portrayed through the depiction of homosexual relations, criminal acts, and disobedience to normative heterosexuality reveal the subdued and repressed occasions of the marginalised classes that have been interpreted as obnoxious by the patriarchal standards of writing. Both Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood as the chief exponents of the female Bildungsroman writing have portrayed their female characters from adolescence to maturity as progressive individuals struggling to overcome their fear of alienation and societal disapproval. Their authorial entrepreneurship has disqualified age-old orthodoxy and lent a voice to the unprivileged, and reveal the deviations disguised underneath the man-centric legends. The thesis is divided into three sections; each portion managing in a far-reaching way implying the effect of power relations in social life. Through a comparative analysis of Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood's select books, a synchronised method is utilised to feature the effect of power relations informing the destinies of both the male and the female characters.

The textual analysis of the first chapter is committed to the two books *The Longings of Women* and *The Edible Woman* by Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood respectively. Productively, the two words *women* and *woman* (my italics) as constituent pieces of the title are extremely noteworthy for the ethereal implications to the topic of identity crisis for the female. The principal thoughts of the two books are developed around dialectics of body politics and delineate the predicament of the female trapped in the masculine anticipation of the female body.

Piercy's three female front liners from her *The Longings of Women* try to transcend their peripheral existence as fleshed souls; Mary, a matured woman, has given up her job as a spouse after her husband conned her for wedding another young woman and now imagines satisfying her job as a mother by quietly fulfilling her craving

for motherhood through serving Leila affectionately. Leila, an educationist, shares a similar destiny with Mary and is likewise deluded by her husband for another youthful model. Leila and Mary's condition is nearly the equivalent except for social stature. Leila gets motivation from Mary as she ponders over her capacity for resilience even with the challenges of life. She understands that if Mary despite being a devastated woman is fit for driving her life without the help of her husband and children, she as well, as an upper-working class lady, can do likewise. Hence, she chooses to separate from Nick and lead her life the way she desires. Gradually Leila develops an art of self-love. To begin with, she is an orthodox woman and thinks that Nick's engagement with another woman is immoral however with time she understands that she also has the freedom to discover bliss through an extramarital relationship. She no more regards a love for her buoy as pernicious and immoral. Becky the third woman in the trio is a special case; an adversary who has confidence in inferring pleasure both physical and material at any expense. Frequenting by a feeling of instability she hires lover Bob's assistance to manslaughter her husband. She has been portrayed as a ruthless character however a close examination of the book presents her as a tragic woman who has seen and encountered the most exceedingly terrible social and personal side of life.

On the other side, Atwood's book *The Edible Woman* is profoundly established in body matters. Similar to *The Longings of Women* by Piercy, Atwood's novel portrays the story of three women: Marian, Clara, and Ainsley. Marian is a writer's mouthpiece and her companion Ainsley acts in a complete differentiation to her. Ainsley is an entrepreneurial woman like Becky from Piercy's novel *The Longings of Women*. She targets satisfying her hearts' needs through the male body with no aim to get hitched. For her, the male body will fill in as a medium to satisfy her craving for physical pleasure and also for securing the status of a mother whereas her roommate Marian stays disappointed

with her love life and meditates deeply over her body and is marred by the body complex. She immovably retains the conviction that a female can win a man just through her body so she attempts to satisfy Peter, through substantial charms yet somewhere down in her heart, she feels the purposelessness of satisfying others and a hankering for self-delight creates a vacuum in her life. To fill in the vacuum, she gets anorexic. She denies sustaining her body as compensation to come out of the body complex. Finally, she appears to get redeemed from her body complex through an intimate connection with Duncan with whom she experiences an infinite sense of freedom.

The third in the trio, Clara, is the exemplification of epitomized motherhood. She is incapacitated in both body and brain. Her regularly distending belly with the stuffed womb is emblematic of a subjugated body. Her condition is practically identical to Mary from Piercy's book with just an exemption that she is certainly not a vagrant and is leading a secured domestic life. The subsequent chapter is an indication of the transgression from biological femininity to an anti-essentialist understanding of the body. In this chapter, we find how the two novelists delineate their female and the male protagonists confronting the complexes issuing from their bodies through the employment of certain techniques, especially, the use of science fiction methods and speculations for an inconspicuous and futuristic land of immense possibilities.

The following chapter deals with the analysis of two novels, i.e., *Woman on the Edge of Time* by Marge Piercy and *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. There is a perceptible endeavour to dispose of the body matters and discover additional opportunities for a unified existence. However, there is more contrast than the comparison in these two books; Marge Piercy's novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* seems to promise a superficial land of infinite possibilities and freedom to the female, whilst Atwood's protagonist Offred dangles between the choices of an unforeseen place of freedom, i.e., her past life on the one

hand and the secured, captivated domestic life of Gilead on the other. The two types of social orders, i.e., utopia in *Woman on the Edge of Time* and dystopian setting in *The Handmaid's Tale* manifest varied experiences for female society and envision a social order based on the principles of equity and freedom.

The textual analysis of the last chapter is oriented around the spectacle of the struggle against patriarchy. A comparative study of *Vida* and *Surfacing* narrates the experiences of the female as recalcitrant and resilient figures who struggle to discover the real purpose of their life. Perturbed by the encompassing and stifling burden of masculine dominance, both protagonists embark upon a journey to wave off the autonomy of patriarchy through indulgence in various activities that are forbidden in the male-centric regime.

The subject of the destruction of bio-assets and ecological debasement is akin to the story plan of *Vida* and *Surfacing*. The post-war world witnessed several changes in the field of economics, cultural studies, politics, and social sciences. Ecofeminism as a dissident and scholarly development monitors basic associations between control of nature and the degradation of female status in society and developed during the 1980s and 1990s as origination from the counter atomic and ecological feminist concerns. The ecofeminist movement cradles between second wave feminism and the green movement promoting and issuing new meaning to womanhood and thus tying a knot between nature and women's sanctity. Both Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood issue significant admonition not just concerning the calamitous outcomes of the man-centric free enterprise on the planet, but additionally in their investigation of the task of the populace in realising political change. The two authors investigate the contemporary worldwide significance of power relations concerning conventional western philosophies.

The industrialist male-centric point of view deciphers distinction as progressive and consistency as an essential component for

establishing harmony between the two sexes. Feminist environmentalism starts with seeing similitude and associations between structures and cases of human abuse, including the persecution of women, and the corruption of nature. Atwood and Piercy's books likewise fall under the period when the impact of ecofeminism was intensely noticeable. A focal position establishing ecofeminism is the conviction that we harbour as a relational society and the types of persecution and control are looped and firmly connected.

The anonymous female protagonist of the novel *Surfacing* revisits the abandoned island, Northern Quebec, where she grew up, to find out the whereabouts of her missing father. The protagonist understands the distance between her real and counterfeit profile just when she reaches in direct contact with nature. Her relationship with nature revives her cognisance concerning the subjection of women. Since the novel acquaints the reader with issues concerning woman's rights and environmentalism, it revolves around an abstract case of biological women's liberation. The investigation examines the novel in light of the relationship between women's liberation and the ecological crisis. Greta Gaard in her acclaimed work *Ecofeminism* 1993 vindicates:

Ecofeminists must challenge such dualistic constructions and, in doing so, attempt to establish a different system of values in which the normative category of "other" (animal, people of color, "Third World" people, the lower classes, etc.) is reevaluated. By recognising that the exploitation that occurs as a result of establishing power over one group is unlikely to be confined to that group only, ecofeminists are committed to a reexamination and rejection of all forms of domination (Gaard 80).

In *Surfacing*, all the endeavours for self-investigation revolve around the clash of internal/external nature and society, and the struggle for identification proffer deep scrutiny of the inner self for the protagonist. Furthermore, the production of *Surfacing* coincides with the rise of the

women's activist and biological developments and mirrors the concerns of the period. On the other hand, *Vida* by Marge Piercy additionally finds the subject of ecofeminism fundamental to the storyline. A multi-named protagonist, Davida Whippletree, furtively known as Vida Asch, spends her entire life struggling to find her true identity. She continues changing her names to conceal her real identity and feels stifled by the end of the novel and senses an extreme need to articulate her complete name so uproariously that its reverberation resounds through all-male society.

Marge Piercy's novel *Vida* shares homogenous filiations with Atwood's book *Surfacing*. The subject of ecofeminist liberation runs corresponding to the account of two books. Vida grieves over the obliteration of bio-assets and ecological crisis brought upon by the extension of warfare and innovation. She considers the exclusive classes answerable for the lopsided mindfulness and deliberately joins the Network; an underground group that is formed to destroy and evacuate the organisations that spread disdain and brutality and expand wars. Piercy contends that women should buckle up to subvert the social order that depends on the male-centric ideology and also should endeavour to acquire political power to create balance in the distribution of power.

This study inspects the connection between the emblematic appearances of sex roles and the ecological conditions. Since power figures so conspicuously in the manner genders connect, it is fascinating to perceive how force is anticipated in human consciousness. Peggy Reeves Sanday in his book titled *Female Power and Male Dominance* (1981) outlines the imagined role of both the sexes:

Creative agents depicted as feminine are usually associated with the water or the earth ... often the male is described as coming from the sky and the female from the earth. Culture-hero and ancestor creative agents are portrayed in more human terms ... Thus, the female in creation stories is associated with nature and natural processes, the male with the sky and magical processes

... and anything that is naturally derived from such symbols (such as plants from the earth, babies from the body, ships on the water), he proclaimed, is associated with the feminine (Sanday 58).

Foucault states that endeavours to destroy mind/body dualism are pointless. Hence feminists must channelise their enterprise toward expansion of normalcy and increase participation in the power grid exercises. According to Foucault, power is never localised at a fixed point for eternity rather it keeps on assuming various shapes following the demand of the context. Power is expressed in the form of relations of dominance and the dominant cannot escape resistance:

...there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised; resistance to power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real, nor is it inexorably frustrated through being the compatriot of power. It exists all the more by being in the same place as power; hence, like power resistance is multiple and can be integrated in global strategies (Foucault, "Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977" 142).

Following Foucault's theorisation, Judith Butler also in one of the most celebrated books *Bodies that Matter* challenges the notion of subjection and naturalisation of the body by targeting the monopoly of so-called heterosexuality or heteronormativity and she supports the cause of homosexuality to deconstruct the claim of universal male hegemony as is also advocated by the deconstructionists like Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigaray. Conceivably the frequently cited piece of the Foucauldian heritage is the examination of power relations that is usually discussed under the social relations corresponding to our insight into the world. These two components are associated with what Foucault in his analysis delineated as the most crucial intrigue: subjectivity, for example, the

manner in which we identify with ourselves and how we interact with others around us and project ourselves to others.

Methods of subjectivity are dominated by a twofold connection, i.e., the subject's communication with itself and with others. As a disciplinary power, power relations choose the potential activities of subjects. Foucault affirms that the disciplinary force is hard to control, circumscribe, seize, or share. However, power can be said to exist when substantially applied and manifested through actions. Arguably no one can be blamed for practicing power for it cannot be practiced over completely latent bodies, rather power acquires signification only when it meets resistance.

As Foucault researcher Judith Butler puts it, power appends the subject to its own identity. The identity is a creation of the acceptance of the subject as a part of the social hierarchy. The power imprints a potential impact on the subject in such a way that the latter surrenders the idea of a free and unified existence. Freedom and resistance as significant components of power challenge the fixed denomination of power, which Foucault calls the shifting of power relations. Foucault has been charged by the democrats on the basis of his argument of neutrality of power, which according to his critics, issues dominance to the elite class that envelops and confines the freedom of the subject. Regardless of the criticism exacted on Foucault's ideas, his statements firmly command the academia through his masterstroke that ensures the power to resist against the dominating class.

Foucault attempts to comprehend these methods of power relations that declare and underestimate subjects as distressed, psychically challenged, burdensome or insane. Notably, the empowered class does not initiate such minimization, however, they draw advantage from it, working of power originates from beneath, flowing among people without much restraint originating from several instances and social events, and finally merges to form specific structures and



organisations. Purposefully, in this way, bodies become a zone of experimentation and oppression.

Foucault highlights the apparatuses for interpreting how the anxiety to attain power dominates the powerful, and how power further expands its horizon. How subjects are established as copies of the real. Power relations reveal a potential field of activity for the subject who receives recognition as a coherent self only through the channel of power. Evidently, Foucault redefined power not as a negligible or detestable concept rather he presented the bright side of it; a side that is relational, not deconstructive. Undoubtedly, jargon is set to understanding different social wonders.

Power is a double-mouthed organ, as defined by Foucault, it is an omnipresent force that determines the social consciousness of the society and works through a dual activity, i.e., control and resistance. Foucault succeeds in justifying that power is essentially built upon the superstructure. i.e., freedom (material significance of the body in Marxian understanding) and that is the reason no society can deny the presence of power relations.

The poststructuralist feminists hypothesise that we must have the option to offer methods for seeing how we come to distinguish or, all the more critically, neglect to relate to given identities or attributes of personality. And more importantly, how can we achieve self-recognition through the interplay of identity politics? Judith Butler recommends that summoning a performative, insecure, and the divided record of the subject can assist us with responding to the multifaceted nature and vacillating self-acknowledgment, and along these lines can assist us with re-evaluating the significance of a positively shaped life.

As the defenders of all-inclusive concordance and democratic society, both the writers stay vigilant about the role of both genders in articulating a splendid future for human beings on the earth. An aggregate undertaking is required for the arrangement and administration of a romanticised society. The term administration is

extremely significant because a fair individual responsibility for the development of a perfect society is fundamental and to achieve this goal, self-restraint is essential.

The fantasy of a genderless society can be acknowledged just if the calculated comprehension is recharged and every human self plays out his/her obligation and promise to bring about a positive change in their lives. The individual instances delineating the struggle of the female characters and the accommodating support of various male characters resuscitates trust in a positive convergence of both sexes and opens up vistas of new opportunities for the construction of a superior society.

Undoubtedly, sexual intimacy is an articulation of bodily affection, but sex is just not a type of physical love. The individuals of Mattapoisett physically interact with one another through touch and pat quite often and without inhibition, but what distinguishes this touch is asexual proximity. Sex in Mattapoisett is more than a physical attraction; it is a kind of bond. For residents of Mattapoisett, sexual matters are sensitive and they discourage gender differences. In Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* sex acts as a weapon for the man-centric culture to vanquish and demoralise the female. Undoubtedly, male members are prioritised over the females who act as passive recipients and behave as mannequins. The sexual delight is by and large denied to Atwood's handmaids and truth be told, any attentive yearning for the sexual pleasure is denounced as profane while Piercy's Mattapoisett is a counter test to Atwood's Gilead and is administered by the standards of a genderless society and advances a wide range of sexual relations including homosexual and transgender as well.

Both Piercy and Atwood deal with certain issues like fixation on material exploitation and power-chasing desires that to a great extent are instigated by the impoverished self-perception and self-regard, and contortions that persist into an entire scope of political practices, from abhorring and tormenting individuals to destroying the natural resources

for meagre benefits. The sexual theme in *The Handmaid's Tale* appears to suggest that all tyrannical and dominant sectors endeavour to suppress and restrain sexual freedom. In the male-centric culture, sexual relations are governed by power structures. Numerous men feel a need to enjoy freedom in choosing sexual pleasure however they find it hard to let their female partners relish the unequivocal sexual freedom.

The acquisition of political freedom has remained a cherished dream of feminists for decades. By political freedom one may only not expect deliverance of equal rights to all sexes but it additionally includes the active participation of all sexes for the proclamation of their political rights. As the focal point of the contention between males and females, the body is both formed and redesigned by the distinctive powers centring on it. In *The Edible Woman*, Atwood manifests the delirium of a woman who feels detached due to the excessive control of male-centric society and encounters the psychic upheaval primarily caused by an identity crisis. She experiences an earnest need to remain perfectly fit to stay worthy to her beau and fasts as often as possible to the degree that she discovers her body nothing more than a tool to win male recognition. Marian experiences anorexia and is clairvoyantly perturbed. She now and again flees from colleagues even her fiancé to shun his manly look. To liberate her from the anxiety of essential biological sexuality, Marian builds up an illicit relationship with Duncan and her demonstration of trickiness can be deciphered as a challenge to the authoritative control of her fiancé.

On the other hand, the three significant female characters in Piercy's *The Longings of Women* try to find the real essence of their existence outside their bodies. Each of the three stays uncertain about the motivation behind their life and endures the burden of physicality very intensely. Lovelessness haunts the shadowy female figures and each of them realises that their life is determined through the prospects of their sexuality.

This thesis is an attempt to foreground the idea that the theorisation of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler regarding the construction and deconstruction of gendered identities can help analyse the fiction of contemporary writers like Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood in a renewed manner, especially for the reason that the select writers do not seem to adhere to the orthodox feminist perspective and believe in revolutionising the field of gender studies. Marge Piercy's anecdotal portrayal of possible far-fetched lands proffer equal and distributive opportunities to both the sexes and nowhere in her novels, we find glimpses of interest in absolute female monarchism. In her novel, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, she transports the readers through her mouthpiece, Connie Ramos, to Mattapoissett; the heterotopic land of immense possibilities and freedom.

However, Foucault's proposition of the heterotopic mediation between the two extreme domains of existences, i.e. utopia and dystopia, redeems the novels from the entitlement of perfect utopias or dystopias as for Foucault, neither utopia, nor dystopia is realistic or plausible, thereafter, the mediating heterotopias can replace absolute spatial existence and in this way, all select novels from both the writers symbolise heterotopias of varied nature, i.e. heterotopias of crisis, of deviation, of time, of rituals, of illusion and so on. These heterotopias are spaces of survival and proffer possibilities to practice what Butler calls performativity. The rituals like that of male breastfeeding the babies and the conversion of the male into female and vice versa are instances of gender revamping.

The material utilisation of the bodies is of prime concern as we happen to see in *The Handmaid's Tale*, wherein Offred plans to extract sexual pleasure from a secret relationship with Nick and she is well aware that sexual pleasure is denied to both sexes in Gilead. Moira, an acquaintance of Offred, is transported to jezebel, a whorehouse, as a punishment for her disobedient demeanour toward Gilead norms and this punishment, can be discussed under Foucault's analysis of the

disciplinary power that binds us with each other and society. However, if there is oppression, there is always a scope for resistance and freedom. Moira, subsequent to being transferred to Jezebel, makes use of her renewed freedom and feels relieved to use her body as she desires. Judith Butler, in her notion of gender performativity, illustrated that freedom can be achieved through resistance and performance is the tool to employ resistance that ultimately leads to temporal or contextual freedom. Freedom is always contextual or temporal and never absolute.

Foucault's use of the term Panopticon is additionally pertinent to the investigation of the Gilead surveillance system; a third eye, that is always there but never visible. The residents of Gilead men or women, the upper rank or the lower rank, captains, or drivers all stay subordinate to the arrangement of reconnaissance. In Piercy's novel *The Longings of Women*, the mental asylum, Rockover, and other institutions ensuring disciplinary control can be analysed under Foucault's countenance of the repressive hypothesis, and even normal women like Connie, who is also black-skinned, is treated with special concern that she reasons out is of prime concern for the authorities.

In his *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault discussed in detail the confession system that was introduced and applied with utmost vehemence during the twentieth century specifically to train and tame the females and the marginalised classes. Likewise, Connie is compelled to surrender before the institutional regularising practices that demand the complete surrender of the inmates and the detainees are released only on the condition if they implicitly and unquestionably approve the tortures as healing measures or reformatory practices and the same happens in *The Handmaid's Tale* where the handmaids after passing out a successful fertile life, are assigned a respectable place in the society whereas all infertile and disobedient *bodies* (my italics) are exported to the colonies inhabited by the infertile dejected wombs or nomads.

Foucault and Butler's entire feminist political discourse is centred around the idea of body politics. In Margaret Atwood's novel

*The Edible Woman*, the bodies, especially that of women, are revealed as the central point of conflict. To stay fit and appealing, Marian turns anorexic and on the other hand, her friend Clara becomes oblivious about her body. The comparison between the approaches of two women toward their bodies is suggestive of the varied ways females think about their bodies. Either, the females surrender to the idea of taming their bodies like Clara does in the novel, or like Marian, they practice anorexia to remain acceptable and attractive in the eyes of their counterparts. Clara, in general, acts as a symbol of atonement as she has relinquished her body for her family and gets fulfilment from the possibility that she is a ripe belly and a dedicated spouse. Here we are reminded of Judith Butler's indictment on the negative aspect of performativity that she outlined in her book *Bodies That Matter* (2011) wherein she revises her idea of gender performativity as delineated in her previous book *Gender Trouble and Subversion of Identity*. She revises her previous argument and states that performativity can likewise be negative as occurs on account of Clara who has surrendered her sense of freedom and dismissed her distinction.

Likewise, in *The Longing of Women*, the theme of lesbianism is chiefly employed by the writer to demonstrate the idea of freed sexuality especially for the female, and Piercy through her female characters directly challenges the relevance of heterosexuality as purported by western metaphysics. Becky's anti-feminine disposition is revealed through her negative performativity (as in Butler's terms) that comprises of the arranged homicide of her husband that is executed to obtain social and financial security. Leila and Mary's consciousnesses are stirred as both interact with each other. Mary develops a homosexual relationship with another vagrant woman like her and accomplishes interminable heartfelt euphoria that was denied to her as a wife. In Piercy's novel *Vida*, the blatant portrayal of homosexuality is indeed awe-inspiring and fits in the homosexual theorising of both the poststructuralist critics, i.e., Foucault and Butler.

For Piercy, one approach to accomplish autonomy is conceivable through sexual freedom. Vida and her network members' extravagant indulgence in homosexual relations reveal the struggle of both sexes to achieve freedom from each other. The anti-war struggle of her community corresponds to Foucault's theory of *biopouvoir* that is stated in his *Lectures at College deFrance* (1975-76). Biopower and biopolitics are two political terms that are generally used simultaneously and even are considered synonymous with respect to their application to the power of the ideology of society over larger groups or communities.

The increment of technology, nuclear power, and warfare is the outcome of global politics which aims at safeguarding and expansion of the institutions of power. Vida and her Red Wagon Group stand against the amassing of nuclear energy and grandstand their disapproval through tranquil campaigns. Likewise, the anonymous narrator from *Surfacing* condemns the American practices and critically evaluates the American and specifically her father's rational arguments favouring imperialism, as narcissistic and debilitating, and this narcissistic interest is not restricted to the gendered identities rather it expands to the arena of global politics that is based on the international relations of power. The writers have exposed the struggle for identification and by paralleling the individual struggle with the struggles of nations, they have exhibited immense capability for the transference of interest from the local to the global politics.

This chapter entitled 'Brief Candle' briefly addresses significant terms like power, resistance, and gender performativity and also establishes a connection between the poststructuralist theory and the fiction of select writers. As an antecedent to the introduction section, it also capacitates and underlines the general nature and contribution of power politics in an individual's life. This chapter also provides a foundation for the detailed analysis and develops a relationship between the two writers and the poststructuralist theory. In this exploration, I have attempted to highlight that poststructuralist feminist scholars have

indeed prepared a basis for widening the consciousness of all forms of identities. Gender relations are distinct and this distinctiveness must be acknowledged as logical and progressive. The affirmation of one's awry spaces paves the way for further ramifications and through acceptance of the difference between one another, all forms of identities including, male, female, transgender, bisexuals, and homosexuals can affirm that they are distinct yet related to each other and the moment every individual avows that one is a part of the wider consciousness, then accountability toward each other becomes strong and the myth of absolute existence or faith in one entity or norm is thwarted.



## Chapter 2

### **Subjectivity, Resistance and Freedom: A Nexus of Power Relations**

The concept of gender is woven around and indulged in a persistent dialogue with larger discourses like psychoanalysis, postmodernism, and post-structuralism, however, language, as the etymological body, has not succeeded in devastating the effects of the substantial body. Essentially, an examination of the power relations addresses both visible and infinitesimal issues, for example, issues identified with the development of subjectivity and representation of both sexes in society. Regardless of whether the male and the female body exist as a notion, an abstraction, a print reality, or a schematised configuration; it is never free from the effects of power. Jacques Derrida exposed the relativist theory by aligning his deconstructionist ideas wherein he seems to revere the poststructuralist criticism because it “precludes the possibility of a pure, neutral and universal viewpoint, and at the same time demonstrates that any simple abandonment of universality merely becomes another universalism” (Plain 216).

All struggles between the two genders are centralised in the idea of obtaining power over the other and the binary division of gender is dependent upon the concept of difference. According to the poststructuralist thinkers, the difference is unequivocally an essential component for understanding the relationship between the two however, the idea of difference is not absolute, original and, non-controversial; the difference is temporary, shifty, and is indefinite:

Such a concept of difference would be directly revolutionary for sexual politics precisely because ‘man’ has always been thought of in terms of what Derrida refers to as an ‘onto-theological humanism’. ‘Man’ is the being who recognises what is other than, or different from, himself in order that he

may be the point from which difference is represented, mastered and contained (217-8).

Notably, Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood's novels deal with the idea that the difference is not partial or deconstructive rather the difference for both writers is relational and this mature understanding of the writers coincide with the poststructuralist notion of the acceptance of the distinction between biological status and the socio-cultural or contextual forms of identities, however, the acknowledgment of difference paves the way for understanding the contribution of power in the construction of gender relations. The instances dealing with the functioning of power have been explored through an analysis of the interaction between the two sexes wherein both sexes struggle to gobble the dominance of each other. In her book, *The Edible Woman*, Atwood tries to explore the female fetish through the representation of the politics of eating. In her novels, eating is utilised as an illustration of the power and is employed in very unobtrusive methods for outlining the connection between the two sexes. Marian's turning toward anorexia divest her from all powers of the mind as well as body, whilst her fiancé Peter's savoury tongue symbolises his dominance over her. However, the equilibrium is believed to be made by Atwood in the last scene in which Marian gobbles up the self-imagined cake to the last morsel and releases her from the complex of eating.

On the other hand, *The Longings of Women* by Marge Piercy is a touching, tragic, and eventually invigorating book. Her three exceptional female portrayals are highly symbolic and realistic at the same time. Piercy uncovers a profound, frequently mysterious, characteristic image of the female life. In the case of Leila Landsman, that characteristic image does not concede to the traditional image of the ever-suffering and victimised female rather the transcendence of the female is facilitated through interaction with her male accomplice who substitutes her husband Nick and provides her solace. Nick

obtrusively condemns the involvement of Leila's mother with another woman and accuses her of the adulterous and lascivious demeanour that can possibly spoil the lives of the younger generation. Here we come across Michel Foucault and Butler's queer hypothesis wherein the patriarchal dominance is thwarted through the expansion of homonormativity as opposed to heteronormativity.

On the other hand, a struggle for financial independence and social security leads Becky, another profound female character from the novel, to murder her husband with the help of her young buoy and Mary, the third in the trio, after remaining dejected through her husband and kids for a long time, develops a close-knit relationship with another vagrant woman and achieves a newer kind of independence during her old age. *The Longings of Women* is all about the man-woman relationship and the novel strongly exhibits the impact of power over the lives of both sexes. Leila Landsman and her husband Nick have spent almost half of their life together but still, Leila finds her alien in this knot of marriage. She realises that she does not belong to Nick and it almost took one-half of her life to come to this affirmation. Nick's husbandry dominance and extramarital affairs weaken their relationship however Piercy through the portrayal of Leila's buoy brings to light that all men are not alike and it is only after coming close to him Leila realises her true worth.

In her another novel *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Piercy evaluates and scrutinises the estimations of the twentieth-century American society. Connie Ramos is a Chicana woman who struggles against the dominance of not only man-controlled society but also of the representative institutions of power like Rockover, the mental asylum, and reformatories that function as a repressive mechanism to tame and silence women and the marginalised.

In his *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault discussed in detail the repressive practices of the ordered dominance and exposes that the old time's punishment was much brutal than in the present times where it

is drilled through in a stately way like that of confession practices in Church. Connie Ramos's imposed admittance to the mental asylum and the constrained abortion of her niece Dolly reveals the repressive side of the idea of sexuality. Through her sporadic wanderings to the future land, i.e., Mattapoissett, Connie interacts with the other side of her sense of identification. Luciente, the future travelguide to Connie, is a hermaphrodite who at first seems unnatural to Connie yet later she builds up a solid preference for such a heterotopic culture in which no gender disparity is found. Male copulate with males as well as females and likewise, the female indulge in sexual relations without any sense of shame. Males feed the child and the duties of child-rearing are non-partially divided between both sexes.

Mattapoissett is a liberated heterotopic space where the identification is a perennially transforming subject and is not absolute or fixed. Connie feels awestruck to experience such a bizarre manifestation of social order that is non-hierarchical and non-categorised. In a way, Piercy challenges the argument of the adherents of heterosexuality and indicates a potential extent of opportunity for both the sexes that is realised through a dream-like state by Connie. M. Foucault and Judith Butler's discourse on queer relations is highly impactful for such an analysis.

Judith Butler's book *Gender Trouble and the Subversion of Identity* (1999) is hailed as one of the most prominent and detailed analyses of queer sentimentality. Influenced by Simone de Beauvoir and Monique Wittig, Butler based her concept of gender performativity on developing new insights into the arena of female consciousness that is said to have originated from socio-cultural practices and rituals. Materialistic feminism challenged the prevalent implications which support the idea that universal heterosexuality determines the status of women in society and homosexuality must be excluded from this universal normative structure of sexual identity. Butler forwarded the Foucauldian assertion that power limits and

regulates the functioning of subjects and is also constructive in the sense that it creates subjectivity. Both Foucault and Butler stress that subject is very well aware of the process of subjection and readily accepts it if the context demands subversion. “Challenging the idea that gender behaviour follows naturally and inevitably from sexual essence, Butler suggests that gender is a series of repeated and stylised acts that create the illusion of a bodily ground” (308).

Judith Butler’s work is seminal in the sense that it reconstructs the master’s, i.e., Foucault’s matrix of power relations. Foucault’s theorisation of the disciplinary power and the consequent construction of subjectivity highly influenced Judith Butler’s account of gender relations. Butler’s queer theory emerged from Foucault’s depiction of accounts of homosexuality in his book *The History of Sexuality*. Homosexuality which was abhorred by Western scholars gradually emerged as a species and became an interesting subject of global discourse.

The Foucauldian critic Sedgwick states in his introductory lines “an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition...” (Sedgwick 1). From the above discussion, it is evident that power is focal, imperceptible, and relational. It is an abstract force acting upon individuals and shaping their contextual behaviour. By relational it does not simply mean that power undermines one subject over the other; rather it is a capacity through which the actions or performance (in Butler’s terms) can be altered according to the requirement of the context. Power is shifty in nature which means that it relates, modifies, and even extinguishes at a certain point. Foucault in his “The Subject of Power” (1982) an article published in *Critical Inquiry* states:

Which is to say, of course, that something called Power, with or without a capital letter, which is assumed to exist

universally in a concentrated or diffused form, does not exist. Power exists only when it is put into action, even if, of course, it is integrated into a disparate field of possibilities brought to bear upon permanent structures. (788).

According to Foucault, power is not a tool for exploitation as has been settled upon by conservative feminist scholars who seemed interested in depicting only one side of the power relations. Contrary to this approach, Foucault postulated that power can never be exercised in the absence of the other:

...a power relation can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which are indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that “the other” (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up... (789).

Margaret Atwood’s novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* is an appropriate work for analysis of the contribution of power in the process of identification. Popularly known as a dystopian novel, Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* delineates that power is utilized through a sense of dread, brutality, and it is supported by the nexus of power relations. Various observations can be deduced through the functioning of power as expressed in the fascination for autonomy and the expression of radical resistance. Offred and all women characters in *The Handmaid’s Tale* employ their sexuality as a weapon to achieve an acknowledged status in society thus it is suggested that the underlined or subjugated class can materially utilise their bodies to achieve precedence over others.

The fortified faith in the universal epistemology of male dominance in the facade of guarding the rights and bodies of the females endows Gilead with absolute power to rule. Gilead is a pyramid-like structure that legitimises the distribution of power

according to the sex, class, age, and social status of the residents. Foucault's analysis of the term panopticon from his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995) is relevant to the study of the Gilead regime. A Panopticon is a tower structure in the centre of the prison cells that are utilised to keep a strict vigil on the activities of the inmates. Panopticon shows the proclivity of the dictator networks and foundations to smother its occupants and it is designed in a way that the prisoners never come to know that they are being noticed under the inflexible reconnaissance of the third eye. All the occupants of the Gilead whether male or female, youthful or matured, and fertile or impotent are seen by a third eye that is imperceptible yet its effect can be detected all over. This third eye is instituted in all societies and it governs the ideology of any given society. The portrayal of Rockover; the mental asylum in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, and Jezebel; a brothel in *The Handmaid's Tale* is an extension of this third eye.

Generally, *The Handmaid's Tale* is examined as a sorry tale of the female community trapped inside a totalitarian system at a point in history however, if examined from another perspective then one may find that the offered possibilities are open-ended; to which Butler assigns the logic of gender performativity. Moira, an excommunicated handmaid turns hostile and is transferred to the brothel to languish over non-compliance of the teachings of the Gilead system regardless, Moira converts this evacuation as an opportunity through which she could achieve sexual freedom that was not available in the vicinity of Gilead homestays. It is evident that power can assert its force only when the subject situated as the object, is free to be controlled. An unanimated or an enslaved entity cannot participate in the game of exercising the power because "...slavery is not a power relationship ... and there is no face-to-face confrontation of power and freedom, which are mutually exclusive (freedom disappears everywhere power is exercised)" (790).

Freedom is prerequisite or conditional for exercising the power and in the absence of resistance, no power can be exercised, in that case, power without freedom is violence, not action. “The crucial problem of power is not that of voluntary servitude (how could we seek to be slaves?). At the very heart of the power relationship and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrant of will and the intransigence of freedom” (790). Therefore, the poststructuralists discredit the idea of essential freedom for the subject. Foucault and Butler feel more at ease while speaking of relations of struggle; an ever-growing struggle for the acquisition of not complete freedom from the other, but a revered/equal position amidst the order of the things. The poststructuralist talk concurred with the presumption that our symbolic discourse is not governed by some innate rationale; rather it is dictated by the interplay of the power relations.

Margaret Atwood’s nationalistic novel *Surfacing* draws our attention to the longings of the powerful to suppress the marginal or weak. The anonymous narrator brings to light the devastation of Canadian idyllic beauty brought about by the imperialistic practices of the American elite class. The narrator loathes the sight of the steaming boats carrying American tourists who for the narrator represent the flying vultures searching for their prey. The remnants of food cans, plastic bags, and the deposition of the toxic chemicals in water aggravate her restlessness. The female body has been compared to the innocent and uncorrupted land of Canada, and both thrive under constant fear of dislocation and aberration. The idea of power to tame, control, and misuse natural resources for material gains is central to Atwood’s narration. The extinction of species and the descending social worth of the female is put in comparison to expose the postcolonial intentions to dominate the colonised through power. Female like the Canadian colonised land is represented as a colony for the male that needs to be subjugated to maintain the equilibrium in the order of things. The narrator’s tearing off the videotapes documented



by David, Anna's husband, is symbolic of the resistance of the female who, according to Foucault, has the equal power like the male to retaliate and this particular scene appears to legitimise Foucauldian attestation that where there is power, there would be opposition trailed by the freedom to perform (Butler's performativity).

The narrator's father, as revealed through a flashback, is the epitome of reason and intellect. According to him, knowledge is insurmountable and everything can be justified and gauged through the lens of reason, and he legitimises the activities of the American colonialism that, according to him, are progressive and reasonably designed and presumably this is the explanation that the narrator's mother on time and occasion used to fly away to some unknown place to guard her against his overpowering powerful logic. The narrator believes that her father's overpowering nature and greedy demeanour might have urged him to spy for the Americans and help them in obtaining power over the neighbouring country.

The phallogentric, colonialist, and repressive attitude towards nature and women are the chief characteristic of *Surfacing*. As indicated by Foucault, power exists in relations and capacitates as the critical point in the relations of dominance, resistance, and liberation. In the last scene, the narrator from *Surfacing* rises above her complexes and recognises her as a part of the game of survival that is played in the bout of power politics. Her relationship with her boyfriend Joe and friends David and Anna is woven around the abstract knot of power. The narrator and her boyfriend are engaged in the relationship of sexuality and both use the power of their bodies to optimise their level of pleasure whilst the relationship between Anna and David is also based on the power of the institution of marriage and in order to keep the current moving, both ignore mutual frailties, especially Anna who is dominated by the over-emphasising presence of her husband who treats her as his property whereas Anna is contended to feel that David is legitimately bound with her and she

has the social security of being a wife to a real man. Hence the legitimate or what Foucault calls the disciplinary force is recognisably utilitarian here.

Relations of power are hierarchal, organised, and asymmetrical. The origin and growth of relations of power are asymmetrical and shifty and this is the justification for the assertion that power paves the way for liberation. David and Joe insist on taking Anna's nude pictures while shooting a documentary and David instructs Anna to pose few sexually enticing scenes and propels her to remain close to the dead heron so the scene could excite the sexual interest of the spectators. Atwood's depiction of the dead heron and an alive female body is exceptionally emblematic of the power of the patriarchal society over nature as well as the female body.

The appalling site of executing a blameless winged animal harmonises with the abuse of the female body that is treated simply as a corpse. Like heron's dead body, Anna's body is controlled, touched, tempered, and bullied befitting the requirements of David's documentary. On the other hand, Vida Asch, the prominent female character from Marge Piercy's eponymous novel is a member of the Weatherman group, also known as the Network that was devoted to anti-war propaganda during the 1960s and therefore power is situated at the basis of the network. Vida, as an active radical member takes part in anti-war bombings and remains underground throughout to hide her real identification. Gradually the group deviates from its real mission and conflicts occur in the form of heterosexual and homosexual preferences.

The pertinent issue that is raised by Marge Piercy is to exhibit how a woman can survive while living as a fugitive or a vagabond. The anti-female or astutely masculine portrayal of Vida is highly impactful in this context. The problems at the core of the book are the devastation caused by the two world wars and obstacles in the endeavours toward the propagation of world peace and harmony. With

the increase in the armaments manufacturing and export of weapons, nuclear atomic energy is a real threat to both global peace and the ecological balance of the earth. This threat has been highlighted through a focus on the imbalance between human beings and her/his surroundings. The indifferent, impassive, and narcissistic human intentions are the result of the treacherous workings of unnatural activities.

Foucault's idea of biopower from his book *The History of Sexuality* is utilitarian here as biopower is a vital philosophical structure of the authoritarian class to enslave the bodies as well as to hijack the collective consciousness of any given society and the reflections of the impact of biopower are found in the form of biopolitics as is exhibited in Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* in which bodies come under the direct control of the totalitarian class. Therefore, the functioning of biopower is chiefly exhibited by the two writers. In *Vida*, the decisions of the ruling class to accumulate nuclear power are challenged by the group members, and to counter their decision the network members conceive various strategies like anti-war bombings.

Marge Piercy has compared the functioning of power from geopolitical space to the personal lives of individuals. Alternatively, the struggle of the anti-war proselytisers is compared with the struggle of genders to overcome dominance over each other. The vehement opposition of homosexual affairs and radical indulgence in anarchist activities is channelled around the relations of power. Foucault's concept of power relations can merely not be interpreted as an extension of Lyotard and Deleuze's account of desire and investment of the libidinal energy in the construction of subjective identities through the enforcement of power, rather his analysis is an advancement in which he creates theoretical generalisations exploring the historical roots and genealogy of power relations. Foucault's notion of power is multifaceted and dynamic rather than an absolute

monarchic form of dominance. From his *Madness and Civilization* to *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault has anticipated a long-held and penetrating discussion on various forms of power and their constituent effects on the masses.

In reality, Foucault's allies dread that his dismissal of standards subverts the opportunities for woman's rights as a liberating political development. His dismissal of standards is joined with an adherence that knowledge and power are not only reciprocal and complementary but also are constantly created inside a grid of power relations and this blatant progressivism drives numerous to blame Foucault of agnosticism. They additionally stress that Foucault's record of subjectivity embarks upon a never achieving idea of total freedom from socio-cultural denominations. Foucault's anarchic dismissal of a unified existence coupled with an affirmation of created realities through the nexus of power relations thwarts their understanding of the subject as essentially free.

Foucault is likewise accused of being a reductionist since his hypothesis of power relations precludes the scope from securing supreme freedom to the subject and according to his critics, this disavowal of opportunity can prompt the psychical and moral degradation of the self. Foucault's critics additionally guarantee that his speculation of power relations and explicitly the idea of ubiquity of power decrease the fundamental contrast between the dominators and the overwhelmed. However, it is pertinent for structuralism to base the discussion on the idea of the asymmetrical pattern of gendered power relations as the very notion of binary division is blatantly challenged by the Foucauldian analysis of power relations. Still, there is another gathering of researchers who recognise the pertinence of the Foucauldian discourse in featuring the similitude between the politics of identification and gender relations. According to his supporters, Foucault's concept of power is useful in understanding the functioning

of the power over the bodies, institutions, and socio-cultural and other shaping practices of human life.

The noticeable change in the Foucauldian examination is condemned by the critics in light of the fact that in his later works like *Technologies of the Self* and *The Care of the Self*, he veered from his radicalism towards a progressively humanistic and abstract methodology however this view is imperfect and confused. Most likely Foucault's later works express a fluctuated record of his standard manner of thinking however during this period of composing, Foucault conceded that his viewpoint developed to the point that he restated his concept of freedom and connected his prior cases with the recharged sort of understanding of subjectivity. It does not imply that Foucault held onto the Enlightenment faith as has been detailed by numerous researchers rather he introduced a re-established thought of subjectivity that is permeated with specific practices and furthermore evidences itself through socio-cultural interaction.

The structuralist critics charge Foucault on the ground that he proselytised androcentrism for he focussed less on the issue of gendered sexuality which is deeply imbued in the feminist discourse. Nonetheless, Foucault presents the sexed body as a multi-layered phenomenon. Not only he ever precluded the material significance of the human body but also disclaims the idea of a free-floating unified body since the material body is regularised by disciplinary power. The material and social significance of all human bodies are determined by these disciplinary networks and interpretative systems. Additionally, as encapsulated beings, we exist in close correspondence to an assortment of social practices that render relevance to the idea of the material signification of the bodies. Bodies are not ruthless and thus are governed and function through a disciplinary framework.

Extensively Foucault's creative career can be investigated through three phases. The primary stage is named the archaeological stage where he laid a lot of weight on the idea of power. During this

previous stage, Foucault created three standard books *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *The Order of Things* (1966), and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). The middle phase of his career is known as the genealogical period wherein he concentrated on the idea of knowledge and clarified it as an accomplice to power. The two significant books composed during this stage are *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality Vol 1* (1976). The third and last stage is famously known as the ethical period of his vocation. He composed *The Care of the Self* (1984) and *Technologies of the Self* (1988) during the last phase of his career. During the last period of his writing career, Foucault encountered a sort of straightforwardness and relativity in his methodology concerning the idea of subjectivity.

As a poststructuralist critic, Foucault eschews away from any arrogant claims issued by the Enlightenment ideals proclaiming the idea of immanent reality and a unified existence of the self. The Enlightenment belief embraces the conviction of scientific and rational understanding of human nature paving a way for the discovery of the eternal reality of life. The Enlightenment project is forfeited by the poststructuralist thinkers on the grounds that the conception of the ideal human subject is misinterpreted and is prejudiced since the idea of rationality does not include the weaker, poor, and especially the non-heterosexual communities.

In his book, *Madness and Civilization* Foucault takes a gander at the historical understanding about the hysterics especially women who were treated as essentially distraught and mentally unsound. This is the main reason that the poststructuralist thinkers especially Foucault and Butler exhibit vehement denial in acceptance of universal idealism/normativity. Foucauldian nexus of power-knowledge refutes the claims of a standardised idea of the objective reality. According to Foucault, truth is conditional and contextual and is never absolute or determined to a specific signification. He observes that in truth "...there is an overlapping series in which some strategies

are gradually found to be unpromising, to lead to sterile debates, or to inaugurate infinite tasks which become boring. At the same time, new twists are introduced, whose tortured complexities seem to promise new ways to organize the recalcitrant subject matter” (Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow 73).

The faith in dissociation between truth and power is refuted by Foucault who conceives an integral relationship between the former and the latter. According to Foucault, no truth can be exercised without power and power sustains truth. In his genealogies, he tried to establish an inherent relationship between the two modalities, i.e., truth and power that otherwise seem implausible to even consider. He writes:

...it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge (Foucault, “Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison” 28).

The issues like gender, sex, and related political indictments conjure further examinations in the matter of identity construction or one can rather assume the sexual politics summon quintessential issues to the human rights in correspondence to equality of status in the social life. Sexuality is an incredibly mind-boggling term that incorporates a wide assortment of social and natural procedures and patterns; solely genes are not accountable for a particular kind of behaviour.

The book *Gender Trouble and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) by Judith Butler manoeuvred to subvert all endeavours to use a talk of truth to delegitimise marginal sexual/gendered practices. *Gender trouble* hoisted itself as a curious case of the American powerful insight that is deeply imbued in French ethics. Butler in her book *Gender Trouble* detailed a comprehensive account of the French theorists Foucault, Lacan, the materialistic feminist Witting, and

several others. Butler opines that gender is a performance or to put it another way, gender act is performed in cognisance with certain practices and rituals that our body has been ethically trained to perform, and an intrinsic quintessential effect is programmed with the help of a supported arrangement of acts, manoeuvred through the specific gestures of the body. The performance is so accurate that these gestures tend to appear natural.

Interestingly, as indicated by Butler, gender is a consistently developing idea, and it advances and contours its shape as per the given arrangement of standards and practices of the particular social order contextually. Her arraignment of gender performance runs analogous to Simone de Beauvoir's declaration of becoming a woman or a gendered type with only an exception that latter focused chiefly on the social, political, and cultural seclusion of only the female whilst the former emphasised on the interactional politics of all forms of gendered identities wherein the male as the representative of heterosexuality is indoctrinated to consider himself as the master of all discourses. Jean Paul Sartre's tendency toward Cartesian morals of the duality of presence renders ambivalence to Butler's origination that body survives through encounters; a living body is subject to liveability, an element that is rarely static or unflinching. Butler seems to affirm like Beauvoir that "...gender is a way of "doing" the body" (Salih 32). Judith Butler postulates that the Cartesian mind/body duality is frictional in the sense that it mind-boggles our understanding of gender and sex by positioning them as distinct from each other. We ultimately act according to our gendered roles:

...we can only know sex through gender, and although we "become our genders, there is no place outside which precedes its becoming. Sex, as Butler will claim in *Gender Trouble*, is always gender: the body does not antedate or "cause" gender, but it is an effect of genders which can only be taken up within



existing cultural norms, laws, and taboos which constrain that taking up or “choice” (32-33).

The challenge of gendered identities is unequivocally politically motivated and profoundly significant during present times. There is always a lurking danger of lapsing into the background or insignificance for the marginal groups. Nonetheless, Butler’s term “postmodern relations of power” (33) provides a ray of hope sabotaging the regularising practices and essential hierarchies of the gender identities. However, Butler also revises that “Gender may be “chosen” only from within the parameters of culturally available terms which always preexist the subject” (34). And “Gender becomes the corporal locus of cultural meanings both received and innovated” (35).

The poststructuralists challenge the humanistic methodology and propose that the body is never arranged and fastened to a specific status; it fuses deliberateness, and in a vital way devises new methods of conduct and spotlights on the satisfaction of its wants from one perspective and tries to consent to the standards of society from the other. In this manner the body is a site of radical change; a seething magma that can eject anytime. Thus, the body becomes contextual; a culturally imprinted phenomenon. “...the body is a being comported beyond itself, referring to the world and thereby revealing its own ontological status as a referential reality” (37).

Judith Butler's canonical book *Undoing Gender* (2004) centres around the contention that how one can sabotage the essentialism and regulating status credited to the gendered identity. However, her prior book *Gender Trouble* focused on the idea of becoming a gendered self, in a converse mode, her book *Undoing Gender* is about undoing the already constructed categories. Butler carries forward Foucault’s notion of the historical and cultural determination of identity when she composes:

To understand gender as a historical category, however, is to accept that gender, understood as one way of culturally configuring a body, is open to a continual remaking, and that an “anatomy” and “sex” are not without cultural framing (as the intersex movement has clearly shown). The very distribution of femininity to female bodies as if it were a natural or necessary property takes place within a normative framework in which the assignment of femininity to femaleness is one mechanism for the production of gender itself (Butler, “Undoing Gender” 9-10).

Conversations on the gender disparities have extended from the theoretical boundaries of politics of the marginalised to the global geopolitics of the world. Therefore, it is perceptible that sexual discourse is not exclusively dominated by the feminist philosophers however it must be admitted that women continue to suffer as they have always been for their marginal place in the social and political sphere of life. Judith Butler’s performance theory received an impetus from J.L. Austin’s speech act theory. Her idea of performativity scrutinises deeply the theories of philosophers like Hegel and Sigmund Freud. The central thought in her book is that sexual orientation, as opposed to determining one’s identity, alludes to the sort of rehearsing or performing the role one is engaged with.

Precisely, Butler intends to convey that sexual orientation involves doing, not being. The presumption of a core, enriched and pre-given central subjectivity is refuted by Judith Butler as for her gender is nothing more than a socio-cultural performance. From the beginning till the end the subject is confounded to certain roles and has to abide by the norms and perform the ascribed role and if it is not performed in line with the societal norm then the subject faces defilement.

Judith Butler inclines more toward the principle of post-structuralism particularly in her solid endorsement of Michel

Foucault's hypothesis of the pervasiveness of power. As indicated by Butler, we must remember that the functioning of the entire social order is channelled through the abstract notion of power. She condemns Foucauldian critics who charged the master for being a nihilist and rectifies the misinterpretation encircling the Foucauldian theory of power and explains that Foucault's notion of power is aligned with freedom of resistance that helps to control the dominance of the unruly power.

Taking forward master's zeal (Foucault) from the books *Technologies of the Self* and *Care for the Self*, Butler in 1997 composed her *The Psychic Life of Power* wherein she pondered over the contribution of psychoanalysis school of philosophy in the construction of subjectivity and detailed how the subjective identities can be formed even in the absence of deterministic politics of gender concerning the formation of gender stereotypes. In her book *The Excitable Speech* (1997) she revealed the onslaught of violence and brutality on the marginalised groups of society, particularly that of prejudice and physical tortures on the female segment. Her central contention rotates around the inversion of social standardising practices and the disruption of uneven social reality.

Butler chiefly contends against the norms of recognition articulated in accordance with the preferential terms for the patriarchal society. Within a heterosexual system, the notion of accurate intelligibility is redesigned, governed, and guaranteed only through and by male standards. According to Butler, being acknowledged "as a legitimate subject" incorporated with the "normative framework" (Lloyd 33) is the significant need of the subject. Issues like gender and sexuality entwine in Butler's musings so that the whole corpus of her books is by all accounts attempting to overwhelm the nervousness of being the underlined class. The gendered identity is never completely distinct from the standardising record of sexuality. The issues like old-

age; disability, racism, and minimisation of the less powerful dominate her critique on power relations.

A close scrutiny of Judith Butler's selected works is essential in understanding her analysis of the dominant power relations and construction of gendered identities. Taking forward the idea of gender performativity in her next book *Bodies That Matter* (2011), she endeavoured to clarify various discrepancies that occurred in the interpretation of her first book *Gender Trouble*. Her *Bodies That Matter* keenly focuses on Jacques Derrida's critique of deconstruction and she states "... "performance" is not a singular "act" or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of production" (Butler, "Bodies That Matter" 60). While in the *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997) she comments on the power of performativity and states:

If a performative provisionally succeeds (and I will suggest that "success" is always and only provisional), then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes prior actions, and accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices (51).

Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997) highlights the concept of interpellation which is a process involving the construction of all types of subjectivity, i.e., male, female, transgender, homosexual, etc. For Butler through interpellations subjects are addressed for their status of being subjects, as social performers. Their performances are bound with standardised practices and historical temporality. The interpellation highlights the social identity of the subject and the subject is restricted by its fundamental dependence on the norm. Butler's strong attestation grounds that subjective identity is developed in accordance with the standards, through self-reflection, i.e.,

interpellation. In any case, this doesn't suggest that there is no possibility for a significant transformation in the customary role of the subject. The performative activity can deliver conditions for a converse discourse and this degree happens outside the strength of binary configuration of social order. As indicated by Butler, this inversion of the dominant order can happen through gender performativity paving a way for the new forms of gender signification.

The combined wit of the two poststructuralists Michel Foucault and Judith Butler unquestionably structure a solid hypothetical system to ponder over the works of the contemporary writers like Marge Percy and Margaret Atwood who, unequivocally, are known as the radical feminists and disclaim absolute estimation of the structural understanding of the binary configuration. Their books are packed with occurrences dealing with the play of power politics and showcase how power regardless of the difference between sexual and social identity interrogates and shapes the lives of people. The performance of an individual determines the fate of the performer, our actions shape our lives, however, these actions are never arbitrary like Vida's participation in the anti-war group is undoubtedly her choice, but she is confounded by the cultural norms of her network and must abide by their rules. In *Surfacing*, the anonymous narrator's wanderings in the wild landscape of Canada can be analysed as her struggle to explore the true idea of freedom but the deteriorating biological state of the Canadian landscape is out of her control. The narrator's denial of David's patriarchal demeanour by tearing off his tapes is contrasted with Anna's silent submission to her husband's bullying nature and this contrast is highly symbolic in terms of the freedom to choose and also to be accountable for one's own state of affairs. For Vida, sexual freedom is very important and her love affairs with lesbian friend Eva, and male friend Joel at the same time, provide her solace that in Lacanian terms is known as *jouissance* which for materialist feminists and poststructuralist critics is the signification of

body as a pleasure deriving entity. Vida rebuffs her step-sister Natalie for discriminating against the blacks, marginalised, and lesbians. She posits a direct challenge to the institution of heteronormalcy. Piercy's protagonist Connie Ramos from *Woman on the Edge of Time*, transmigrates to a heterotopic space of freedom, i.e., Mattapoisett, and all the distinctions that were abode to her psyche are diminished after her interaction with the wide panorama of homonormalcy in Mattapoisett. She envisions such a heterotopic space as the future home for the upcoming generations. Connie's niece Dolly is also exploited sexually by her beau who wants to trade on her body and forces her to abort the child.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault exposed how sexuality has always been conceived as something obnoxious and the school of psychoanalysis originated from the theory of libidinal or sexual force. The confession practices, the idea of profanity, and chastity are administered by the religious institutions to suppress the libidinal edifices and subdue sexuality. In Mattapoisett, no reference to religion is found, no churches have been instituted, and no one is forced to confess and fundamentally, the concept of sin is missing. The issues like gerontology, homelessness, extramarital and homosexual affairs have abundantly been discussed in Piercy's novel *The Longings of Women* in which all the three profound female characters suffer the portending threat of dejection. Nick and Leila's relationship has survived more than twenty years for the reason that their relationship is legalised by the institution of power, i.e., marriage. Both feel encapsulated and bound to each other while Nick develops extra-marital relationships to express his dominance and Leila foresees the same fate for her, however, she feels redeemed from the guilt of slandering her married life. Mary, the cleaning lady at Leila's household, also conceives a homosexual relationship with another middle-aged woman similar to her standing, and Becky Burgess also utilises the corporal significance of her body in alluring a young boy

to kill her husband. Thus, power is at the core of all relations; power is an abstract force that may assume various shapes and vigorously affects the lives of people, however, resistance to power opens up the alternate possibilities for survival and freedom.

Specifically, my argument is oriented toward the assumption of how the depiction of relations of power deconstructs our understanding of the construction of symmetrical gendered identities. The process of identification is engineered through the nexus of power relations. The Enlightenment project and its implications of idealism claiming the centrality of the self is challenged through the depiction of new men and women in the fiction of the two writers that are analysed in the light of the critical insights of the poststructuralist critics Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. The compelling scenes of pregnant male bodies with protruding bellies and meandering feminine gait inspire the readers' interest in a new order of things wherein power is equally distributed and biological differences do not seem to upsurge gender disparity. Such a transgression is indeed threatening for the male hegemonic practices. "This transgression is contained within its fusion of body and technology, a fusion which allows the prime subjectivity of selfhood to co-exist in the same body with the threat of otherness" (Plain 325). Donna Haraway wittingly outlines the fabricated image of the self as she states:

...we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation (Haraway 150).

The radical revolutionaries Piercy and Atwood view power as restricted in bodies but open to resistance. Both denounce the engendering of the western ideas based on the humanistic understanding that privileges the male over the female and their

centrality of thought is woven around the discursive analysis of power relations and their endeavour receive impetus from the stated critics, i.e., Michel Foucault and Judith Butler who not only contested against the inherent rationale of gendered identity but also popularised the idea that identity is performed through a strategic ontological understanding of the social order. For both critics, sexuality is a political strategy that has for long been dominated and utilised by the patriarchy to subdue the female society.

In this chapter, I have strived to highlight the concatenated structure of three terms, i.e., subjectivity, resistance, and freedom. These three domains of power are reliant upon one another and are accountable for the formation and reformation of gendered identities. Foucault's ultimate contribution in the field of gender relations revolves around his redefinition of the term power which remains in a causal relationship with both the subject and object of power. I have tried to analyse the select novels under study from the perspective of Foucault and Butler's concept of power and the rich wellspring of Foucauldian investigation of power is situated in his three books: *The Order of Things* (1966), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), and *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (1976). Notably, Foucault received stringent criticism for his passive and indifferent approach to gender issues, however, a close examination of his works on power exhibits that Foucault, through his examination of the social and cultural nature of sexuality, widened the scope of liberation for the marginal classes. In this analysis, I have analysed the impact of power on the female protagonists of the two writers and my argument receives impetus from Foucault and Butler's discourse on gender relations and power politics.



### Chapter 3

#### **Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood: The Herculean Siblings of Second Wave Feminism**

The history of Feminism has been described as occurring in waves after the phrase ‘waves’ was coined retroactively by Martha Lear in 1968 in a write-up for the *New York Times Magazine*. The term indicates the ebb and flow of the working movement for the reform of a woman’s social and legal rights within society. Feminism was fairly introduced to the Western world of letters in the Eighteenth Century and came to prominence with the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft. The first wave of feminism is suggested to have begun by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and had evolved from an increase in urban migration and socio-cultural politics, and is marked as an age of women liberation activism, led by Mary Wollstonecraft with an emphasis on granting the voting right to women. A socio-political union based on women’s issues was founded in the United Kingdom in 1903 to support the cause of demanding women’s suffrage, equal opportunities at the workplace, and equal judicial rights. The end of the first wave signified the granting of the right to property and the right to vote for women in 1918, and subsequently, all women were granted the right to vote in 1928.

Second wave feminism uniquely runs between the 1960s to the late 1980s. Before the finish of the Second World War, there happened a wide rebel against a male-ruled society that had forcibly been blamed for terminating women out of their employments for substitution of men in place of women workers. This occurred after the war and particularly when most of the males came back from the war and claimed the positions that were offered to women in their nonappearance. Thereafter, once again women were restricted to the narrow walls of domesticity after termination from their services. This prompted the ascent of fretfulness and persecution to the women’s race. Women, no more, tolerated to consign themselves to the mercy of passive life and were fed up with the unpaid errands performing the role of

a mother and a spouse. Second-wave feminism originated from The United Nations of America and afterward stretched to the other western nations. While the first wave focused on the suffragette right for the female, the second wave concentrated more on socio-cultural issues including sexual assaults, regenerative rights, patriarchal dominance, and sultry working conditions for women. Women started grouping and created their mainstream society, and the development spread through media and popular culture. Second wave was activated after the publication and distribution of Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) in the libraries and bookshelves of various reading clubs. *The Feminine Mystique* became a popular text in no time and it portrayed the images of a modern, revolutionised woman in the new colours. Simone de Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex* (1949) influenced and motivated Friedan to write this book.

National Organization for Women (NOW) was formed in 1966 and Friedan was selected as the primary president for the same. The establishing proclamation of NOW stated the expulsion of all hindrances and provision of equal social and economic status for women in society. Friedan motivated other women's activists who carried forward the zeal of the second wave. In 1969, women's activist and writer Kate Millet published her celebrated book *Sexual Politics* which exposed the atrocities including sexual exploitation of the female by the male-centric society that further prompted gender persecution. She expressed that segregation started with gender inequality and afterward it led to the mass level oppression of women in society.

In general, the second wave can be portrayed by a common sentiment of solidarity and a battling spirit for the acquisition of equal status for women like the male. It likewise observed the issuance of new forms of feminism. Radical feminism emerged as a clarion call for a complete denial of patriarchal dominance and the denouncement of traditional norms of femininity. The other prominent revolutionary fervour that emerged post Second World War was social feminism which occurred as a consequence of the expansion of Marxian ideology. Social feminism focused on the material factors responsible for the construction of gender stereotypes. It contrasted

with the radical women's liberation for the reason that it disagreed with the assumption that gender is the elite reason for all discrimination. Eco-feminism also emerged as a link between environmental degradation and of female corporal self. It highlighted the maltreatment of nature and looting of natural resources by the elite class and linked it with the exploitation of hierarchical femininity.

The third wave was established on the standards of second wave and carried forward the enthusiasm of the forerunner. It hit the United States of America in the late 1990s and proceeded until the ascent of the fourth wave of feminism that is supposed to have culminated by 2010. The major interests of the third-wave feminists have remained independent and multi-dimensional progress of the female section of society. Few prominent themes of the third wave writers are gender, vegetarianism, disarmament, worldwide peace and harmony, and of course postmodern feminism. It was in 2012 that the fourth wave of feminism started gaining momentum and the emphasis of the fourth wave writers has remained on media, technology, and empowerment of the female society. Cyber-feminism is the chief characteristic of this wave.

However, Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood's early pieces of writing are rooted in the soil of second wave feminism. There occurred several feminist movements in Canada during second wave feminism, i.e., from the 1960s to the mid-1990s including campaigns in support of peace and disarmament, equality in education and employment, birth control, and an end to violence against women. Voice of Women (VOW) campaigned for nuclear disarmament and peace and ends with the creation of the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF). Piercy's *Vida* and Atwood's *Surfacing* retrieved inspiration from these campaigns. It was the period in which lesbians and minority sections started demanding their right to speech and gained mainstream attention. Expansion of the nuclear program during the two wars, i.e., the Cold War and Vietnam War instigated thousands of people to support VOW. The radicals took cudgels against the dominance of male society. In the Student Union for Peace Action (1964), a new women camp condemned war, imperialism, and patriarchy.

The current study centres around the novels of Margaret Atwood and Marge Piercy, thinking about them corresponding to the set of experiences and improvement akin to second wave feminism. The title phrase 'Herculean Siblings' underlines the connection between Roman legendary figure Hercules's unbending strength and Margaret Atwood and Marge Piercy's persevering struggle to unlearn the cliché comprehension of the term gendered identity whilst the adjoining term 'siblings' refers to the two like-minded, neighbouring feminist writers who seem to be devoted to the task of upliftment of sisterhood amidst tumult fabricated by the male-dominating society.

This chapter reveals the impact of second wave feminism on the fiction of Margaret Atwood and Marge Piercy, and also endeavours to show the presence of a powerful connection between their fiction and the contemporary feminist hypotheses in concurrence with power politics. And this powerful connection can be traced back to Hercules's solidarity who despite various hardships and ordeals, and with his unyielding bravery and decided self-control, tirelessly guarded the weaker sections of society. Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood both are conceived as intriguing authors for such an assessment determining the association between hypothesis and fiction for the two reasons. Firstly, the two authors share a similar interest with regard to the role of gender politics in contemporary society, and secondly, both display a distinct fascination for the field of power politics and its effect on the life of people.

Piercy and Atwood's fiction hails them both as socially and theoretically mindful authors who stay aware, and are dynamic concerning the plight of women in society. A result of this mindfulness is a strain between the abstract scholar who might read Piercy and Atwood's books as far as a pervasive hypothesis, for example, women liberation, and comment on the political parts of their books. This contention is impossible to neglect in the contemporary author and is to a great extent a poststructuralist or meta-fictional situation. It implies that the content does never remain static or fixed

on a singular meaning rather it builds a unique relationship with the prevalent discourse.

The second wave is perceived as a fountainhead of varied kinds of experiences in the field of female consciousness-raising campaigns. This wave consolidates a panorama of diversified yet related discourses concerning female issues specifically that of sexual oppression and political participation. Explicitly, an attempt has been made to critically analyse the fiction of the two writers corresponding to the socio-political scenario of the time. I have attempted to distinguish the moments in Atwood and Piercy's composition when substitute discourses including American colonialism, Canadian patriotism, radicalism, and the ecological issues clash and dislodge our understanding in the hierarchal formation of stereotypical order. Piercy and Atwood's inclinations and legislative issues draw a remarkable line of communication for women's liberation, which in my opinion, is advantageous for testing widening, and differentiating its core interest.

The issue of sexuality dominated during the proliferation of second wave feminism. In order to highlight the prevalent disparity between the two sexes, the second wave feminists focused on topics such as arduous tasks of mothering, housewifery, lesbianism, and domestic violence against women. The distinction between sex and gender did not matter much for the writers and critics alike. Gayle Rubin exposed the weak efforts of the feminists who seemed to compromise with the "sex-gender system" (304) which, according to him, are:

...the process by which 'raw biological sex' is transformed into a system of inequality. According to such a view it was impossible to separate out biological sex, gendered inequality and sexual behaviour; rather it was important to see them all as implicated in a larger political economy (Plain 304).

Gayle Rubin writes in a celebrated article "The Traffic in Women" "...sex/gender system is the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (159). The issuance of hermaphrodite

male and lesbian female haunted the literary and political field during the 1980s. Betty Freidan protested against an initiative by NOW (National Organization for Women) in which it was mandated to stand for the acquisition of political rights for lesbian couples. Betty Freidan was apprehensive of the female idea of resilience against patriarchy which, according to her, was based on trivial means of compromised sexual resistance whereas the radical lesbian community welcomed and duly supported the NOW manifesto guidelines raising a voice for protecting the lesbian rights:

...Radicalesbians defined lesbians as a kind of *avant-garde* for feminism as a 'fundamental challenge to the basis of the female role'... Women loving women is figured in the manifesto as a way to redefine what it means to be a woman, to throw off men's control and to redirect energy back into the movement (Plain 305).

Post-1960s feminists challenged male chauvinism and started participating in protests against the patriarchal setup. Some eminent Canadian works of this period include Mary Claire's *A Season in the Life of Emmanuel* (1966), Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* (1969), *Surfacing* (1972), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), Marge Piercy's *Going Down Fast* (1969), *Dance The Eagle To Sleep* (1970), *Small Changes* (1973), *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), *The High Cost of Living* (1978), *Vida* (1980), Joy Kogava's *Obasan* (1981), Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* (1973), Bonnie Sherr Klein's *Not a Love Story: A Film About Pornography* (1981), and Terre Nash's Oscar-winning story *If You Have This Planet* (1982).

A Canadian poet, fiction writer, literary critic, essayist, inventor, teacher and, environmental activist, Margaret Atwood, is a living legend of the contemporary writing world. Atwood has been conferred numerous awards and honours including the Man Booker Prize, Arthur C. Clarke Award, Governor General's Award, and the National Book Critics and PEN Centre USA Lifetime Achievement Award. In the current discussion, I will endeavour to focus on how Margaret Atwood's novels have deeply been influenced by feminism, and how far her writing establishes itself amidst the

context of the modern feminist perspective, and how her novels can anticipate further discussions in the field of feminist discourse aligned with power politics. Her novels reverberate with the issues concerning Canadian nationalism, liberalism, and most importantly, environmentalism. Margaret Atwood's allegiance with second wave feminism is overwhelmingly interesting and awe-inspiring.

No other writer has ever shown such proximity to his/her era's contemporary issues as she has. Despite Atwood's repeated denial and disregard of association with the gender politics of the feminist camp, her fiction seems to speak for her inner calling. Margaret Atwood's novels bridge the gap between theory and practice, and that is the reason she has become a canonical writer in the field of not only poetry but also fiction. Her novels present the argument that feminism is not a monolithic theory that is secluded from other sciences of life. Feminism is integrated into all other disciplines and Atwood is just adding new insights to the prevalent thought process. Margaret Atwood finished writing *The Edible Woman* earlier in 1965 but it came out in 1969 just at the time when second wave feminism received an impetus and started blossoming.

In *The Edible Woman*, Atwood deeply meditates on the female body and seems to indulge in body politics. She incarnates her female protagonist as a target of body issues. Whereas to subside the ever-growing impact of the sexed bodies, she portrayed an antagonist in the person of Ainsley to counter and somehow balance the increasing tension caused by the leading female protagonists' body occupation. Atwood clarifies by saying that the feminist label can be associated with those writers who blatantly write about specific issues and intentionally indulge in the issues related to feminist activism.

Second wave feminism may be referred to as a theory/trajectory of thought which added new insights to prevalent discourse and its impact can be vividly seen in the major writers falling in that specific period. Second wave of feminism is the highly theorised feminism of the 1960s and 70s. Feminism is not a static, compartmentalised theory or discourse; rather it is

an ever-changing, flexible, capricious, and constantly overlapping discourse that may be found breathing in any other discourse.

Marge Piercy, an American literary legend, received the Arthur C. Clark Award in 1993. Her novels are embedded in the conflict of identity crisis that is fundamental to her Jewish ancestry. She created various novels intending to overhaul the customary plotline. Through her sensible and idealistic fiction Piercy reports the confrontation to dispose of the material, racist, and sexual disparity through a manifestation of a troubled postmodern American society. Owing to her anxiety and dissatisfaction with the image of a de-motivated female, she turned out to be increasingly mindful of her commitment toward the exemplary portrayal of women in literature and society. Marge Piercy offers us a detailed account of women's experience which is sufficient for an abstract investigation of the identity crisis in the life of a female. Piercy has represented females as dynamic operators of social practices in her four books: *Small Changes* (1973), *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), *Vida* (1979), and *Braided Lives* (1982). Her female characters need to experience gigantic torment and they face persecution and endure suffering encounters as directed by the male-centric society.

Marge Piercy legitimately defies the characteristics that society has esteemed intrinsic for the construction of women's identity, and she holds the faith that cognisant selfhood is a progressing procedure wherein exceptional subjective needs and social limitations strive in constraining and characterising one's personality. Since Piercy structures her novels around the consciousness of the female characters, she unavoidably devotes herself completely to a political field that has experienced transformation consistently.

In her books, especially, *Braided Lives*, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, and *The Longings of Women*, Piercy caricatures her female protagonists in such a way that they represent the entire female race. The situation of desperate, maturing, and forlorn females is depicted sensibly. The patriarchal society has compartmentalised and dichotomised the female within the confines of her physicality and enslaved her consciousness. Piercy believes



that in order to counter the male dominance the female needs to break away from the narrow walls of domesticity and create new awareness and that may be possible through ascension beyond the confines of body and mind.

This experiment is operational only if women investigate their sexuality, comprehend and transgress their traditional roles and look forward to multiple connections, and accomplish new information through personal intelligential awareness. During the 1970s, the feminist thought was thrilled and energised by the knowledge that the layout of gender relations could uncover the hidden layers of a culture or a society. In this manner, females pondered over the distinction between themselves and the opposite sex and realised that by associating with the male, they can truly come to terms with their authentic existence. Feminism as a theory is a segment of a more extensive post-structuralism venture: an experimenting cauldron in which speculations regarding the construction of subjective identities, social procedures, and organisations are tested to theorise upon the prevalent discourses and to distinguish zones and techniques for radical transformation.

McNay states:

History is not the continuous development and working of an ideal schema, rather it is based on a constant struggle between different power blocks which attempt to impose their own system of domination. These different systems of domination are always in the process of being displayed, overthrown, and superseded (14).

Writers like Marge Piercy and Adrienne Rich emphasised the depiction of homosexuality in their works. In her essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (1980), Adrienne Rich endeavoured to redeem the stigma of intense sexual desire in lesbian affairs, and with this view, she focused on the deep association of the same sex in which the sexual desire is only peripheral not central. According to Gill Plain “Rich describes lesbianism as an experience defined primarily in relation to gender, not sexuality. Sex itself is less important than relations between women, broadly conceived” (Plain 306). In contrast to their generally domineering demeanour, men in Piercy’s

metaphorical space seem to cherish and venerate their feminine characteristics and endeavour to topple the hierarchal patriarchal setting.

The new men speaking to Piercy's anecdotal world show up as non-sexualised, sneaky, adaptable, and anxious to absorb the feminine world likewise, the females remain as flexible as their male counterparts. The balance of power is maintained by the mutual efforts of the two genders as is evidenced through the portrayal of Mattapoissett and instances of homosexual relations in Piercy's novels. The central contention of Piercy's writing is situated at the convergence of the development of gendered identity and the impedance of society. The radical idea of new American male society is manifested through the portrayal of feminine men and mothering males who believe in making connections at an equal level and are vulnerable in dealing with others. The projection of chivalrous, invincible men is missing in Piercy and Atwood's fiction.

The improvement in the social image of women by dispensing gender inequality has remained a topic of comprehensive debate over the years. These collections of information, ideas, and discourses have been acknowledged, perceived, regulated, and justified by the domineering class and revived the interest of scholars toward this area of knowledge. Power is an all-inclusive phenomenon and applies its effect inside political foundations as well as in the financial, military, social, and linguistic realms. Women's activist hypothesis audits numerous ways that the concurrent study of gender and politics has contested against standard ideas that design and promulgate gender inequity and reveals how feminism has grown new speculations and better approaches for surveying the world that advances social/sexual equity and female growth.

The rapid occurrence of the worldwide private enterprise and ensuing changes in workplace politics during the second half of the twentieth century modified the political situation of the female society across the globe. Post Second World War, around the 1960s, augmented the onslaught of the second wave of women's liberation in Europe and the United States of America. The states employed Keynesian financial strategies to sort out and coordinate

speculation, devised new entrepreneur opportunities, managed the corporate sector, and utilised tax assessment to redistribute the liquid assets. Roles were well-defined for the two genders in which the male prioritised over the female in the cognition of superior qualities of the former.

Feminism additionally highlights the ideas of social participation and performativity featuring the manners by which power is contextualised and justified. The feminist hypothesis is a sub-topic of a comprehensive poststructuralist venture: an undertaking where speculations of subjectivity, cultural procedures, and foundations are tested to comprehend prevalent power structures and to recognise regions and techniques for transformation. The contemporary feminist analysis primarily focuses on topics which are based on women's activist hypothesis and proffers a scope of devices that are pertinent to the revaluation of various socio-cultural issues. Accordingly, it is significant to examine gender stereotyping before embracing any viewpoint based on the investigation of gender issues.

The social consciousness of the twentieth century pressurised the women's society to tacitly accept decades-old gender stereotypes as the fixed determiners and final predicament of their life. The first two waves of feminism opened new vistas of knowledge and self-learning to reassess the female idea of freedom and united womanhood to a single cause, i.e., the acquisition of equality in all spheres of life. Writers like Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood, as the defenders of second wave feminism, reclassified not only gender roles but also manifested an outreach to the scope of a genderless society like Mattapoisett in Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* to show that women can deconstruct fixed personalities by forfeiting gender roles and similarly Piercy in her novel *Vida*, offers certain instances of same-sex relations and posits a direct challenge to the norm of universal heterosexuality. Piercy and Atwood's novels in the light of Judith Butler's hypothesis on performativity highlight the construction of gendered identities during the onslaught of second-wave feminism.

Notably, the two writers' novels ignite optimism in not only women but also other ethnic groups and especially among the minority classes of

society. Foucault contends that society is not accountable for the pronouncement of gendered identity rather it is derived from the procurement of language and the moment the subject is introduced to the social context, it receives a gendered identity. Both M. Foucault and Judith Butler maintain that gender is organised like the language and announces its effect through etymological execution and is likewise invested with the ability to undo that impact through shiftiness and transference of gender roles (as in Foucauldian terms) and performance of specific activities (in Butler's understanding). Women's activist history motivates us to envision the world in a novel way. It has the ability to change social relations by uncovering the non-deserving benefits that propagate the expansion of disparities in all the fields of life.

By featuring different concepts like eco-feminism, maternal feminism, and female Bildungsroman, both stated writers investigate the functioning of power and its impact on gender relations and contend for an esteemed status of the females that have long been subverted by the male-dominated society. The thoughts of radical women's liberation in the mid-1970s lend an understanding of the anonymous idea of the power that might be noticeable through the delineation of the social pact in which men relished unobstructed permission to gain economic prosperity and acted authoritatively both socially and, psychologically while the majority of the females were denied direct access to the privileges available to the males and the females received only backhanded access to these rights only by being alluring, sustaining, and subject to the men who owned them.

Feminism emerged as a weapon of the spiritual training of the female consciousness and the manifestation of the same can be inferred from the popular genre of science fiction. Despite the fact women's activists attempted to devise elective models to ensure female resilience, the prevailing society appeared to be continually fortifying females as fragile and less intellectual, and more adversely condemned to bodily existence. Feminists provided apparatuses to beat dread and denied the acceptance of the optional status that was globally conferred to the females. John D Emilio's book *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (1988) located the change from a conceptive society

during colonial times to a sexually manoeuvred set up of the twentieth century. The book contended against a straight, dynamic walk from constraint toward sexual freedom and underscored rather sexual legislative issues, especially the manners in which the sexual guidelines strengthened race, class, and sexual matters.

This chapter gives an outline of Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood's writing acumen with a brief description of an etymological survey and also provides significant information about the selected texts that offer a comprehensive reading of the female identity construction in light of governance of power politics and gender relations in society. The almost similar thematic structure of both Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood expands the issue of female consciousness and the aligned task of a search for identity. The fiction of Piercy and Atwood can simply not be interpreted in terms of significant commitment to the class of the females but also it motivates and energises further scope of freedom of expression in the field of women studies. A specific measure of satire in *The Edible Woman* and *Lady Oracle* is compared with the anxiety of the unnamed protagonist in *Surfacing* leading to the realisation that Canada is similarly as helpless as Piercy's America against frequently transforming and brutal manoeuvring practices of the modern world. A similar sort of tension pulsates in Piercy's description of the American imperialistic society which is accountable for the social and moral decimation of the individuals and also of the environment.

During the 1960s the human chauvinistic fervour for warfare and increment in nuclear technology had thwarted the notion of an ecologically balanced and harmonious society and a search for a peaceful and euphoric existence dominated the course of twentieth-century writers. Atwood develops her arguments on the existential dilemma of her female protagonists through the distinction between the individual need for autonomy and societal obligations. It is evident in her novel *Life Before Man* in which the depiction of Nate's and Elizabeth's looming separation is contrasted with the danger of national division in Canada. Likewise, a lamented worry for the foundation of sexual and social value is exhibited in Piercy's composition. Employing the difference between

two domains of life, i.e., utopia and dystopia, Piercy logically manipulates the contention between gender and man-centric society. The chief characteristic of second wave feminism, i.e., power struggle, is portrayed through the crawling strain between individual desires and socio-political responsibilities.

In addition, the issues like that of routine maltreatment of the females, workplace discrimination, the dilemma of the female protagonist between her feminine social image and individual desires, a pang of guilt for feminine *jouissance* or libidinal desires, and several other forms of repression are characteristic features of the second wave feminism and both Piercy and Atwood have embarked upon these issues with utmost interest.

The manifestation of the female desires is put to contrast with the patriarchal ideology of the imperialistic American society. A relentless sense of shame chases the cognisance of the female society and this complex is a by-product of the feeling of guilt that is suffused in the females' psychology by the standardised norms of the masculine society. Piercy's novels are replete with instances dealing with shame as in *The Longings of Women*, Mary feels ashamed of being a transient woman and relegates herself into nonentity to hide her complex. Connie in *Woman on Edge of Time* is bewildered to see herself among the disarray and hysteric women. Marian in *The Edible Woman* harbours the complex of being fat and suffers from anorexia. Clara from the same novel feels shameful over her forever distended belly. The handmaids from Atwood's novel feel ashamed in their own eyes for being treated merely as wombs, not humans. The expatriated women from the same novel feel ashamed over their infertile bodies and non-confirmation in the eyes of Gilead. Becky Burgess from *The Longings of Women* is marred by the complex of being an impoverished girl and this complex drives her crazy to the extent that she commits the crime of murdering her husband.

Ironically, the female writing is not only commanded through the patriarchal norms but is also susceptible to the ruinous sentiments of mediocrity and feebleness to the extent that feminist critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar introduced the term "anxiety of authorship" (Gilbert 49) to elucidate the solemnity of the matter. Along these lines, one could contend, that female

writers are constantly writing under the overwhelming presence of the male canonical figures who seem to mock the triviality of female imagination. However, Piercy and Atwood revived the fascination of the female autobiographical genre through the promotion of female Bildungsroman analysis that has issued an unmistakable fascination among the feminists to raise and vocalise the quieted female call against the pervasive disparity. The subject of maturing or becoming a woman has proliferated among contemporary women's activists and critics particularly Simone de Beauvoir and Elaine Showalter.

It is also true that the female Bildungsroman appears to be indiscernible to the male norms that basically introspect women as the beneficiaries of the patriarchal literary discourse. However, Helen Cixous introduced a hypothesis of *écriture féminine* which can be viewed as an undertaking to concentrate on female writing as exclusive and equivalent to the male artistic culture. Thus, taking inspiration from each other the contemporary writers have worked on the dual agenda of representation of the female characters not simply as insiders like mad women imprisoned in the attics rather as the female cyberpunks advancing and grasping the opportunities, and acting as free individuals devoid of feelings of remorse and ethics as is depicted in the fiction of Piercy and Atwood. The females are depicted as outsider ambivalent personalities and this outsider approach is manifested through the portrayal of homosexual characters in the contemporary texts.

The fervour of second wave feminism runs underwater in Atwood and Piercy's fiction however, the flow of their writing is not stored and compartmentalised within the precincts of the second wave only rather the two writers also meet at the convergence point of the second and third wave of feminism and arduously are employed in the task of writing with a renewed passion. It would not be unfair to call these two writers the herculean siblings of the second wave for two reasons: firstly, because their deep research into the psychology of the female and pairing of that psychic turbulence with the politics of the modern-day is not an easy task and secondly, the fundamental issues raised during the proliferation of the second wave peep through their novels

quite extravagantly. The two canonical writers took immense inspiration from the radical feminists of their time and utilised their vast knowledge and motivation to pen down those experiences in a realistic manner.



## Chapter 4

### **Futuristic Sisters- A Comparative Analysis of the Fiction of Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood**

A comparative analysis widens the extension for additional examinations however it cannot be denied that no similar investigation can be exact if the two writers stand in complete contradiction to one another. A specific measure of closeness of thought and perspective is fundamental for such an investigation. Interestingly, Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood, besides the fact that both hail from different nationalities, stand in cognisance with the issues central to the representation of female consciousness and ascendance of the female status in society and it is also true that both belong to the same period, i.e., post-second world war and share familiar understanding with one another.

The title phrase 'Futuristic Sisters' is an indirect reference to Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood's interest and active participation in the contemporary political discourse. Their interest in science fiction as depicted in this analysis validates this assertion. The portrayal of Mattapoissett as a futuristic land in Piercy's novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* and the possibility of corporal freedom for the female as Moira accomplishes amid the authoritarian system in Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, which in the Foucauldian terms can be associated with the heterotopia of sexual freedom, exhibits the progressive bent of mind of the select writers. Both authors show a keen interest in political activism and ponder over methods to achieve better living space for the female. The last four decades have witnessed the fast ascent and extension of the feminist movement as it has come to pervade artistic hypothesis and analysis, associating with and illuminating various other hypothetical and political fields. Apparently, this recent development, i.e., a combination of political activism and feminism implies that women's liberation is less a hypothesis-proposing a rational direction of thought-than a dialogue: a conversation of different related thoughts. The term

poststructuralist feminism is comprehended as a term encompassing and fusing a wide assortment of related yet different and conflicting talks, with a focus on all-pervasive power relations. The wide focal point of the contemporary feminist hypothesis is suitable to both Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood's ideological framework.

An assessment of both writers' books and the contemporaneous feminist movement of the 1960s to the present day rapidly uncover compassion of concern and happenstance of enquiry. Atwood has remained at jitters with the feminist entitlement that is generally attributed to her works. She has rehashed in different appearances the possibility of any equation with feminist interests. However, she met less success through such refusals to dissociate her from feminist circles. It is fair to realise that both Piercy and Atwood are legendary writers and their works are not confined to the narrow field of knowledge rather their works relate to the broad field of power politics and showcase the strategic construction of gender stereotypes. The authors are aware that no content can happen in a vacuum rather every write-up is dependent upon a large number of impacts and thoughts. These thoughts structure the social and political foundation against which an author works, and contradictions definitely pervade their content.

The social consciousness of the twentieth century pressurised the women's society to tacitly accept decades-old gender stereotypes as the fixed determiners and the final predicament of their life. The first two waves of feminism opened new vistas of knowledge and self-learning to reassess the female idea of freedom and united womanhood to a single cause, i.e., the acquisition of equality in all spheres of life. Writers like Piercy and Atwood, as the defenders of second wave feminism, reclassified not only gender roles but also manifested an outreach to the scope of a genderless society like Mattapoissett in Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* to show that women can deconstruct fixed personalities by forfeiting gender roles and similarly in her novel *Vida*, she offers certain instances of same-sex relations and posits a direct challenge to the norm of universal heterosexuality. Piercy and Atwood's novels in the light of Judith Butler's hypothesis on performativity highlight

the construction of gendered identities during the onslaught of second wave feminism. Butler contends:

It would be wrong to assume in advance that there is a category of “women” that simply needs to be filled in with various components of race, class, age, ethnicity, and sexuality in order to become complete. The assumption of its essential incompleteness permits that category to serve as a permanently available site of contested meanings (Butler, “Gender Trouble and the Subversion of Identity” 20-1).

Through a deliberation on Butler’s queer politics, the two writers’ novels ignite optimism in not only women but also other ethnic groups and especially among the minority classes of society. The thematic structure of both Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood expands the issue of female consciousness and the aligned task of the search for identity. The fiction of Piercy and Atwood can simply not be interpreted in terms of significant commitment to the class of the female but also it motivates and energises further scope of freedom of expression in the field of women studies.

A theory, for example, feminism, which is at the same time political, and scholarly, invites discussion from various other fields of knowledge. In this manner, it is to be expected that the author has created a unique commitment to feminist issues. An assessment of the impact of feminism as a political movement on Piercy and Atwood's work intends to represent that the reflections of feminist struggle are identifiable in the works of two writers. Besides, the subsequent component involves an exhibition of how feministic ideology intervenes and communicates with other recognisable factors inside the works of Piercy and Atwood.

Interestingly the author who plans and executes any work through imagination cannot deny the influence of certain socio-cultural elements on the work and likewise, it is to be noted that a writer has the ability to leave an impact. Now we arrive at the focal component of the writer’s progress with the text which is exhibited from the way the author assimilates impacts from the social life around, and these influences interface in a way that the hypothesis works as a secret agent in the manipulation of the character

portrayal, plot, and conditioning of the storyline, whereby the unadulterated hypothesis flows underneath the narrative. The complex procedure of writing, expansion, assimilation and adjustment brings about a winding of impact between the writer and the reader, or what could be better comprehended as an advantageous relationship, with each handling material to the predecessor. Despite the fact that it is difficult to give experimental verification of this procedure of text development, the accompanying sections feature how Piercy and Atwood's work certifiably envisions future developments inside feminism. Authors' work is not to be analysed as sheer impact or an immediate emergence resulting from the popularity of the feminist discourse rather it must be recognised as a notable and savvy part of general social awareness.

As contemporary authors both Piercy and Atwood compose on the issues of war, the economic emergency, ecological concerns, computerised societies, and comment on the way we interpret the family life, sexuality, and ourselves as part of the larger society. If Atwood in *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing* portrays the body as an emplacement of insight by distorting the image of unified, naturalistic, and coherent femininity then Piercy reproduces a mainstream figure of female hysterics in her *Woman on the Edge of Time*, *Longing of Women* and *Vida*. Hysteria is customarily viewed as a female affliction. The term hysteric finds its roots in the Latin language and the term connotes the malady associated with the womb, i.e., female. Elaine Showalter in her book *The Female Malady* (1985) comments "...by the end of the [nineteenth] century, 'hysterical' had become almost interchangeable with 'feminine' in literature, where it stood for all extremes of emotionality" (129).

The investment of Showalter's argument refers to Freud's classic book *Studies on Hysteria* (1895). Freud has been charged by the feminists as the radical anti-feminist revolutionary who reinforced the idea of sexuality and ridiculed the scope of gender neutrality by investing females with the essential biological subjectivity. However, post-Freudian Juliet Mitchell reinterpreted the Freudian concept of hysteria and stated in her book *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (2000):

Since there is no doubt that hysteria has a strong affinity with femininity, just as obsessional neurosis has with masculinity, it appears probable that, as a determinant of anxiety, loss of love plays much the same part in hysteria as the threat of castration does in phobias and fear of the super-ego in obsessional neurosis (90).

Key to the discussion in the select novels is the idea of an unaffected, unbiased, and neutral existence affirming despite dissimilarities and conflicts that how an individual can obtain freedom and identify oneself with the world at large. Thus, the conflict arises from the struggle of maintenance of balance between freedom of the self and the freedom of the state at large in which the latter constrains the freedom of the former. In the select works, it is conceivable that both writers battle with a portion of similar challenges, and the by the end of the narrative, one can still find a deep fissure between the self and the other. Power is so impactful that both male and female protagonists surrender before the manipulating agency of undetectable power and endeavour to distinguish their jobs inside the prevailing power structures. In a way, Foucault's speculations about the role of power in deciding freedom for the individuals work underneath the structure of the books.

To a critical degree, *Surfacing* follows the conventional quest motif and the same pattern resounds in Atwood's epic *The Edible Woman* in which Marian renounces food in order to identify her with innate femininity. This plummet is both strict and allegorical, as the unnamed protagonist from *Surfacing* plunges into the lake and extracts information about the reality of life. Apparently, the storyteller is questing for her father, however eventually; this turns into a quest for her missing recollections, which will demonstrate the way into her past and to her authentic self. Nonetheless, as the anonymous narrator travels into the wild, it becomes obvious that her mission was never expected to be a sojourn for self-articulation however, was rather an endeavour to escape into another world.

Atwood in *The Edible Woman* explicitly focuses on the meaning and importance of freedom in the life of an individual and how freedom is restricted to the context of relations of power. By the end of the novel, Marian

renounces anorexic tendency and starts eating like a normal human being and this retrieval to normalcy is highly symbolic of renunciation of one's fears and feelings of insecurity in wake of living a normal life. Similarly, Offred from Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* keeps searching for her real existence that is fringe to her previous existence and stays occupied in her extravagant flights to her past and dreams of a brilliant future away from the parsimonious dividers of the Gilead community. *The Handmaid's Tale* underscores the idea of the power that is always executed through the other and Offred devises a capacity to act both as a speaker and the listener, metaphorically, self and the other. The theme of sexuality and body politics runs simultaneously along with the other themes in the select novels. Vida's sporadic homosexual intercourses symbolically represent anguish against the female's sexual dependency on the male. In almost all the novels, the feminine *jouissance* is derived from same-sex relations.

Alternatively, Vida gets intimate with both sexes, i.e., her male friend Joel and female friend Eva respectively. She derives a euphoric and psychic pleasure from the sexual entanglement with Eva whereas Joel satisfies her physically. In comparison to Vida, Marian from *The Edible Woman* sets out to develop a secret relationship with Duncan and she intentionally hides this affair from Peter and derives pleasure from the idea that she is cheating Peter the way she is doing with her body by renouncing food and the edible products. Becky Burgess from *The Longings of Women* also utilises her body to win the flirtations and affections of a comparatively young boy and her relationship is a part of her strategy to get rid of her husband. Bob, Becky's boy obeys Becky's instructions as a real pet, and Becky feels overwhelmed to exert the power of her sexualised body. The handmaids receive the acknowledgment of Gilead society through their fertile wombs and sexual profundity. Dolly, niece to Connie Ramos, from Piercy's novel *Woman on the Edge of Time*, is exploited sexually by her boyfriend who puts his girlfriend's body on trade and also attacks Connie while she attempts to intervene. Mary, the cleaning lady at Leila Landsman's household, during the grey years of her

life finds a euphoric and psychic solace through the same-sex affiliation with a vagrant woman who is similar to her own standing.

It is evident from the analysis that sexual oppression is the core issue for both the writers which Foucault has delineated through his discourse on feminine hysteria and confession practices. The contamination of the earth and the impassive and indifferent attitude of humankind is a widely debated topic for contemporary literary circles. The ecological crisis has emerged as a significant point for broadening the scope of women's activist dystopian writing for more than four decades, and it is evident from a restored accentuation in the depiction of the dystopian and ecological oppressed worlds. The contemporary writers feature different anthropogenic exercises that cause disharmony to the natural world and ecofeminists contrast this regular disharmony with the debasement of the female status in society. In *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1975), for instance, Marge Piercy encourages cross-examination of our ruinous and harmful ways of human lifestyle. What appears to be typical and satisfactory to Connie is denounced by Lucientewho condemns the use of chemically-made dietary products.

Marge Piercy witnessed the beginnings of the worldwide familiarity with the devastation of nature and the setting up of such developments as Greenpeace, Save the Whale, the WWF, and some more. Both Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood issue significant alerts not just with respect to the cataclysmic outcomes of man-centric free enterprise on the planet yet additionally in their investigation of the accountability of common masses in realising ambitious political goals. The two authors expose the hypocrisy of customary western belief systems by highlighting a portion of the conflicting issues in their books, for example, new creation innovations, ecological debasement, farming procedures, gated networks. Nonetheless, my fundamental inspiration is principally not to investigate the manners by which Atwood and Piercy control and resist dominant and nonexclusive ideas rather I shall endeavour to draw an associative comparison between their fiction and present real scenario and to investigate the roads of expectation which they light up for the upcoming generations.

The ecofeminist activist hypotheses employed by the authors focus on an essential conviction that ecological imbalance is the unavoidable impact of Eurocentric entrepreneurship and man-centric social governance. The inescapable impact of a culture crafted through the belief system drawing parallelism between dominance and mastery of nature with a focus on the female body is the subject of investigation in the books of Atwood and Piercy. Likewise, the significant concern for a researcher is the commitment of the two authors to the political activism of eco feminist hypothesis. The contamination of the natural assets resulting from the emergence of modern technology is unquestionably a grave concern for dystopian fiction. Degradation of nature paralleled to the textual mulling of the female body has remained a debatable topic for more than forty years, and it is dominant still today with a re-established accentuation on the oppressed classes of society. The significant undertaking of numerous eco women's activists is to grill society by breaking down it from the viewpoint of Utopians, who every now and again allude to the anthropogenic time as the period of avarice and destitution. Due to the excessive utilisation of numerous synthetic compounds and additives, the natural harmony has received a massive setback and the manifestation of the perturbed natural cycle reflects through the writers' awareness about ecological imbalance. Piercy contends that progress cannot be attributed to a worldwide entrepreneur framework wherein millions perish through the wasteful utilisation of land and unjustified conveyance of needs of nourishment.

Atwood, on the other hand, depicts the breakdown of worldwide legislative issues, whereby an open commitment to the common welfare and the governance of a steady and democratic system has been uprooted by uncontrolled commercialisation, as proven by the misuse of natural resources. Atwood underscores the manner by which social and political advancement as far as the common improvement of the human community is concerned, as a rule, is progressively stifled by the quest for private interests.

Atwood and Piercy endeavour to accentuate that political encounter is not just a decision rather accountability. To envision a bright future for



humanity we must unite and participate in political activity because lack of involvement ensures oppression, and it gives rise to commonplace feelings like the dread of the disintegration of individual liberty, plundering of nature, and pulverisation of creature and plant species, insistence on unbending and troublesome codes of conduct, and an increased gap between the upper and the lower-class people. Atwood and Piercy both contradict the grasped thought of the radical feminists who affirm that female alone is engaged and is completely prepared to achieve the political change. Both authors cling to the belief that the male and the female complement one another and by cooperation they can reform society.

In the twenty-first century, cyberpunk had become a prosaic term. The vogue of programmed technology was dominant in almost all fields of studies. In the mid-1980s, an interest in the domain of science fiction received instigation. The mega-blockbusters like *Blade Runner* (1982), *The Terminator* (1984) were simply starting to investigate otherworldliness as an ideal condition for a splendid futuristic society. The recent up-gradation and advancement of science fiction enhanced the existential dilemma among the human race and also evidenced a hope for an ideal futuristic society. During the 1980s and mid-1990s, a heated debate encompassing issues of innovation, postmodernism and stereotyping of the gender attracted the attention of scholarly circles at large and probably that is the reason it was in any event somewhat liable for reviving scholarly enthusiasm for science-fiction.

In Piercy's science-fiction, the two worlds, i.e., utopia and dystopia are inseparably connected and closely interlaced. There is no possibility of an occurrence of absolute configurations of utopia or dystopia in her fiction as well as poetry. Her works revolve around ordinary or petty conditions of human life. Replete with instances of ordinary instances of life, her novels are well-read as novels of ideas, connections, and more importantly of sexed bodies. As a person, Atwood herself believes that the future doesn't look really awful. Various shared traits of the different meanings of an ideal world and the oppressed world are investigated to shape a system to work inside, and the works of two writers under study befit a comparative analysis in relation to the

political speculations as theorised by Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *The Handmaid's Tale* truly fit in an analysis of the mingling of the two worlds, i.e., utopia and dystopia. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* delineates an oppressed view of the world as pictured in the Republic of Gilead; a society administered by an outrageous Christian religious government. The dilemma remains with the reader whether Atwood indicates a possibility of a bright future that is bleakly present in Offred's imaginative flights to a distant past or is she referring to the hopelessness pervading everywhere as is depicted through Gilead which is a no woman's land! In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood has outlined a future that is implausible or, surprisingly more dreadful and incomprehensible.

The ability to manage bodies is all around characterised by Foucault as bio-power. Likewise, the same sort of power is exerted over the female bodies in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Piercy advocates that the females must develop and organise not only sister networks but also a global connection with men in cognisant association with the earth, networks that are active and reciprocal, sharing a way to deal with work, matters of sexuality, economy, and otherworldliness so that both genders stand resiliently to counter the oppressive forces.

*Woman on the Edge of Time* is about a longing for psychological space and Connie grabs an opportunity to flee away from her present bleak reality towards a golden land of possibilities in Mattapoissett. Discharge from detainment in Rockover, the mental asylum, would only lead Connie to further deprivation, expulsion, and disappointment like Offred who fantasises the same kind of exclusion outside the secured walls of Gilead. Luciente's Mattapoissett speaks to the sort of opportunity she never received and can scarcely envision a land where females relish unimaginable freedom of expression and equal rights along with men. Piercy's assertion meets Atwood's belief when the former suggests that the psychological space of Mattapoissett in her novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* cannot be interpreted as a utopian realm and the latter's declarations about her own books *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986) and *Oryx and Crake* (2003) are replete with instances of theoretical fiction and cannot be

simply perceived as the portrayal of sci-fi because her works refer to the possibility of a future occurrence.

Atwood posits her opinion on the portrayal of Mattapoisett in *Woman on the Edge of Time* in the following lines “Some reviewers treated this part of the book as a regrettable daydream or even a hallucination caused by Connie’s madness. Such an interpretation undercuts the entire book” (Atwood, “Second Words” 241). Interestingly the mutual interests and comparable encounters of the two contemporaneous scholars leave an indelible impact on the pervasive discourse of power politics and gender relations.

Sexual relations are supervised through a system of legislative governance. Sex functions as a peephole to monitor the hierarchal orders of societies, and also to depict the manner, by which sexual connections are utilised, standardised, and systematised in concordance to preserve the dominance of the elite classes. In Atwood and Piercy’s novels, sex is related to the female subjection and is laced with the gender disparity in all the formats. This is evident in Connie's personal encounters with sexual abuse and brutality (physically tortured by a spouse, befooled and molested into a sexual relationship by a high-rank colleague) and the same is solidly exemplified in her niece, who has been dragged to prostitution by her beau. In Piercy and Atwood’s fiction, females encounter uneasiness and develop worries, depression, and self-hatred over their physical presence. Women are bargained for either material benefit as Dolly and Connie in *Woman on the Edge of Time* or as a tool to gain transcendence as handmaids in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The woman is depicted primarily as a sexed body, bearing the burden of commoditising masculine needs and satiating the mental and physical vacuum of their bodies through motherhood. In *The Handmaid's Tale* Gilead represents a hetero, man-centric, and profoundly hierarchal society, and the role of the patriarch is clearly accentuated. However, sexuality must not be treated as a pertinent foundation for social administration as occurs in Gilead. In contrast to Gilead, the traditional models of governance and hierarchal standards and desires remain non-existent in Piercy’s Mattapoisett. Foucault in his work *The History of Sexuality* (1978) states:

Between each of us, and our sex, the West has placed a never-ending demand for truth: it is up to us to extract the truth of sex, since this truth is beyond its grasp; it is up to sex to tell us our truth, since sex is what holds it in darkness. But is sex hidden from us, concealed by a new sense of decency, kept under a bushel by the grim necessities of bourgeois society? (77).

For Foucault, sex is the epitome of power, and sexuality is used as a tool for oppression and control in Gilead and Rockover. Both males and females evolve as reasonably argued identities and receive preliminary ascent through their biological construction by investing in certain attributes that determine a quintessential sexual identity and draws an ineluctable contrast between the two sexes. Thus, it might be said that sex is a biological trait whereas the socially designed binaries like masculinity and femininity need a re-interpretation and constant revisions. From here we connect Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity with Foucault's neutrality of gender. For Judith Butler, gender is a performance and females can violate the repressions of basic subjectivity through dynamic participation in social practices and refutation of inferred acknowledgment of man-centric practices.

In Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, Marian endeavours to accomplish a definitive truth, i.e., freedom and in a much comparative style, the un-named storyteller from *Surfacing* enterprises inflexibly to exonerate from her past life that is typical to the bildungsroman style. Margaret Atwood and Marge Piercy, through their female protagonists, endeavour to manifest corporeal, metaphysical, prosaic, and symbolical levels of individual consciousness. Their expertise is laboured around building up and augmenting the self-realisation motive that paves furtowards the quest- myth, i.e., typical of the biblical tradition; a quest for the Holy Grail. During the 1970s, the female bildungsroman analysis gained the attention of the female scholars. Debates on women empowerment in a man-centric culture have remained the mainstream concern of the female critics. These social patterns add to the prospering of the female bildungsroman, in which the protagonists search for their authentic existence by prowling their mind-boggling social condition under the impact of

fast-trending imperialism. Both the writers provide hints of their personal youthful experience in their novels, which make their novels personal or semi-autobiographical.

Therefore, a comparative analysis of the two authors from the neighbouring countries, i.e., America and Canada, is very interesting particularly with an expansion that the two writers are very much aware of the centrality of association of the female in the political undertakings of the contemporary times. Knowledge of the deployment of the female from the mainstream of life is criticised stringently by both novelists. Their multidimensional methodology toward the objective of raising mutual awareness through positive cooperation, especially between the male and the female is noteworthy. The Foucauldian and Butler's speculation on power politics is most appropriate to propel the conversation toward widening the collective cognisance of society and a comparative investigation is keenly formulated for such a conversation.

## Chapter 5

### **Bodies That Do Not Matter: An Analysis of *The Edible Woman* and *The Longings of Women***

The demystification of biological determinism and deconstruction of gender stereotypes have invited much criticism by the proponents of the male-centric regime. The conspicuous word freedom carries multiple interpretations and it has widely been discussed through various forums. Here is Germaine Greer in *The Female Eunuch* (2008) writing about the corporate idea of freedom:

Freedom from being the thing looked at rather than the person looking back. Freedom from self-consciousness. Freedom from the duty of sexual stimulation of jaded male appetite, for which no breasts ever bulges hard enough and no leg is ever long enough. Freedom from the uncomfortable clothes that must be worn to titillate. Freedom from shoes that make us shorten our steps and push our buttocks out. Freedom from the ever-present juvenile pulchritude ... Freedom from the humiliating insults heaped on us by the top shelf of the newsagents... (8).

We must pay gratitude to the French critics Luce Irigaray, Wittig, Helen Cixous, and Julia Kristeva for their work on the body as a field of production of new techniques working against the creation of essential subjectivity and especially Beauvoir for the interpretation of the female body as a pre-requisite for a consummated presence. We may credit Foucault for having demonstrated to us how the body has truly been explained. Foucault carried on in his investigation of the body as the point of convergence for contestation over the issues of gender identity. Populace size, gender relations, and economic procedures all are the ideas that constitute the ideological framework of a society, and all focus is implemented on the definition and moulding of the body, which is a medium for the execution of certain practices.

Interestingly, Foucault's corporate idea of the power that works not through negative restrictions, however, is proliferative and contributes to the

designation of bodies in light of their materiality, powers, energies, and sensations. Foucault has distinctly been reprimanded for his harsh disposition toward female sexuality, however, in reality, he was a pragmatist and through his reasonable incitements, he built up the thought of the female body occupying a neutral space simply like the male and standardised her as a functioning member in the bout of power relations. The structuralist feminist scholars' provocations on body politics lack originality thus they recourse to Foucault exactly in light of the fact that his hypothetical device featured the insufficiencies of structuralism and helped in reconstructing the feminist discourse. The poststructuralist idea of the female body and the impact of power over it can be sought in Mary Wollstonecraft's exposition on the predicament of a meek woman in which she posits a question:

Women ought to endeavour to purify their hearts; but can they do so when their uncultivated understandings make them entirely dependent on their senses for employment and amusement, when no noble pursuit sets them above the little vanities of the day, or enables them to curb the wild emotions that agitate a reed over which every passing breeze has power? To gain the affections of a virtuous man, is affection necessary? (Wollstonecraft, "The Feminist Papers: A Vindication of the Rights of Women" 55).

By the late sixties and seventies, the female body was imagined as a flexible and socially versatile substance with no bent of sexual freedom. It was the point at which the old customary thoughts bolstered by scholars like Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and various others were set against another portrayal, i.e., the politically motivated issues of the body. Presently, women's liberation envisioned the human body as itself a politically engraved substance, its physiology and morphology formed and set apart by the accounts and practices of regulation and control involving corseting to assault and battering, to obligatory heterosexuality, undesirable pregnancy, and unequivocal commodification. As indicated by the predominant philosophy, the male longings have no obligation to endure, nor does the way of life which subordinates the female applies to the male, power sexualises and commodifies

female bodies, and offers them a minimal opportunity for social or individual gratification. Probably the acceptance of feminine gestures and binary cultural configurations has become a permanent feature of the female consciousness. For Foucault, power is never absolute because it shifts from one place to another and in this way, the sovereign power of the male is also non-dictatorial, not absolute, and without a doubt unsystematic, however, still power owns the capacity to validate, standardise, and very importantly, to put to servitude the bodies of both sexes through a play of signification. Firstly, it is important to unlearn the myths regarding the workings of power, as Foucault opines, power is not to be envisioned as an absolute authority owned by a particular section or group of society rather, he directs that we must perceive power as a dynamic phenomenon that is subject to interrogation.

At the time of the publication of Margaret Atwood's first novel *The Edible Woman* (1969), the second wave of feminism had clouded the insight of the women's activist researchers. Initially, the novel was written in 1965 yet it showed up in the book shops following four years, i.e., in 1969. Regardless of Atwood's fervent forswearing and the stringent refusal of tolerating any affiliations with the women's activist philosophy, she appears to stream profound with the current of women's activist idea as her novel *The Edible Woman*, reflects keenly on the equidistant issues key to the female awareness. Atwood's character delineation matches with Marge Piercy and Betty Freidan's trajectories of thought in various books. The female predicament of Atwood's character narration runs comparatively to the female characters of Piercy and Freidan. Similarly, Atwood and Piercy's novels reflect the struggle and resilience of female protagonists against male-dominated society. Both Piercy and Atwood portray the inescapable despondency of women during the 1950s and 1960s sticking to the customary and glorified roles but ending up in total despondency in spite of economic independence.

Atwood strived hard enthusiastically to separate her interest from that of bugling women's activist rackets. She firmly avows that experimental writing has an endless degree to relate and disassociate with the speculations and individuals at the same time. There is no reason for avoiding tolerating any



genealogy with a hypothesis in case one is engaged with it. As indicated by Margaret Atwood, there is an endless class of scholars who compose just to intrigue a specific sort or draw in the consideration of a specific segment of society however those writers who remain unaffected from the personal anxiety can produce works that grow from an altogether extraordinary impetus of the creative mind. Hence, she denies any relationship with the political polemics of contemporary society, and her meetings resound with the tension to shrink away from any discussion involving female issues specifically. Without a doubt, her works have an all-inclusive intrigue as they go from and through bigger issues of life including the universe of spaceships, mechanical technology, and sci-fiction. However, the dread of osmosis and compartmentalisation of the creative mind runs parallel and consistently appears to backfire and frequent her manner of thinking. In *The Edible Woman* (1969) Marian turns anorexic in order to invoke her bodily powers and thus fit in the feminine standards of masculinity. Marian's over-indulgence in her body matters may coincide with the Foucauldian hypothesis on the investment of power over the body:

Mastery and awareness of one's own body can be acquired only through the effect of an investment of power in the body: gymnastic, exercises, muscle-building, nudism, glorification of the body beautiful. All of this belongs to the pathway leading to the desire of one's own body, by way of the insistent, persistent, meticulous work of the power over the bodies ... power after investing itself in the body finds itself exposed to a counter-attack in that same body (Foucault, "Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977" 56).

In *The Edible Woman*, the charm and fear of the masculine gaze perplex Marian to the degree that she renounces food and nutrition to achieve a thin and contoured physical profile. We perceive that these powers are not irregular or random rather the power structures follow the set patterns embraced by the majority and if the need occurs the reverse channelling of the power may also be capacitated. The predominance of those structures is accomplished not from the authoritative declaration or plan from above but through various structures of different scattered territories monitoring the awareness of the larger parts of

the community. Foucault has revolutionised the field of feminist politics and it becomes evident when he opines:

...the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection (in which need is also a political instrument meticulously prepared, calculated and used); the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body. This subjection is not only obtained by the instruments of violence or ideology; it can also be direct, physical, pitting force against force, bearing on material elements, and yet without involving violence; it may be subtle, make use neither of weapons nor of terror yet remain of a physical order (Foucault, "The Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of Prison" 26).

Another potent female character from Atwood's novel *Clara* has been depicted as a hapless pregnant woman, distorted by the surge of an extra weight distending, and glaring through her swollen paunch. Clara is the typical portrayal of any house lady who invests the greater part of her energy performing the duties of a soothing mother and a coquet wife. Each time Marian sees Clara, it happens to her that she has changed herself into something different and it is apparent from her discussions with Marian that she tries to identify her worth as a mother only. Marian attempts to deter any solicitations from Clara since there prowls a dread in the profound openings of her heart that one day she also will step into Clara's shoes and in this way, she disregards any further coordinated effort with Clara as if she will be undermined just by an ethereal touch of the womanhood. During a visit to the hospital at the time of Clara's third delivery, an intense desire to escape hits Marian. "She had the sense of having escaped, as if from a culvert or cave. She was glad she wasn't Clara" (Atwood, "The Edible Woman" 145). The situation of housewives is all around explained in *The Feminine Mystique* (1974) by Betty Freidan in the section "Housewifery Expands to Fill the Time Available":

The more a woman is deprived of function in society at the level of she owns ability, the more her house-work, mother-work, wife-work will

expand-and the more she will resist finishing her housework or mother-work and being without any function at all. Evidently, human nature also abhors a vacuum, even in women (229-30).

The complicated and muddled family unit of Clara is symptomatic of her inward messiness and disquietude. The disengagement with society and overindulgence in family matters has destroyed her sense of freedom. Marian cannot help suspecting that Clara has intentionally learnt to become dependent on her husband Joe just to feed his male ego and Clara gives signs of mental servitude whereas Joe gives off an impression of being her guardian angel in every social issue, and he has nearly become a moderator between his wife and the world outside. Even Joe does not hesitate to preach to Marian on the ill-formed modern trends promoting females to get university education since he believes that the highly qualified women fail to adjust in the domestic affairs and remain dissatisfied. Joe tells Marian:

I think it's a lot harder for her than for most other women; I think it's harder for any woman who's been to university. She gets the idea she has a mind; her professors pay attention to what she has to say, they treat her like a thinking human being; when she gets married, her core gets invaded... (Atwood, "The Edible Woman" 261).

Atwood's deuteragonist from the same novel Ainsley condemns Clara for overloading Joe under fatherly commitments while she, (Clara) herself is sufficiently experienced to worry about the concern of her kids though Marian deciphers the circumstance as increasingly grave since the nurturing and household obligations of Clara have totally made her subservient to her body on which she doesn't have any control and Clara's projecting womb, unshaped body profile and shrivelled substance is a sight of frightfulness for her. Maternity turns into a wellspring of identification for female as Judith Butler in her book *Bodies That Matter* (2011) augments Foucault's contention about the self-detainment in the accompanying lines:

Power operates for Foucault in the *constitution* of the very materiality of the subject ... Foucault refers not only to the body of the prisoner but to the materiality of the body of the prison ... the prison is *materialized*

to the extent that it is *invested with power*, or, to be grammatically accurate, there is no prison prior to its materialization. Its materialization is coextensive with its investiture with power relation ... The prison comes to be only within the field of power relations, but more specifically, only to the extent that it is invested or saturated with such relations, that such a saturation is itself formative of its very being (9).

Here we are additionally helped to remember Butler's move from gender performativity, i.e., nurturing commitments in the event of the women to the negative effect of performativity that she credited in her book *Bodies That Matter*. Clara is obviously a detainee to her body and her detainment is a tribute to motherhood. From the above statement, it tends to be deciphered that the female body acts as a prison house and she gets power from the functionality of her body consequently the prison house or female body is naturally facilitated with the power of resilience. Clara and Marian both endure the aches of mental weariness albeit the two encounter it in an unexpected way. A feeling of purposelessness and predicting peril of the aggregated duties undermine Clara constantly while Marian hurls under the complex of dejection. So as to fill in the vacuum, Clara falsely delights her with the thought that she is equipped for playing out her obligations as a committed mother. Freidan sees that the housewives shield themselves for not working outside their home by a confirmation that they are to be sure bustling mothers:

That housewifery can, must, expand to fill the time available when there is no other purpose in life seems fairly evident. After all, with no other purpose in her life, if the housework is done in an hour, and the children off to school, the bright, the energetic housewife would find the emptiness of her days unbearable (Freidan 243).

Like Atwood, Piercy's books are composed of an expanded consciousness of the encoding power in both private relations and to a great extent male-characterised cultural and social settings. Marge Piercy has a sharp understanding that women have come up short on the capacity to guarantee an independent status and actually are dependent on their male points of view and encounters. So as to de-establish the binaries credited by the male-centric

society, Piercy works inside the domain of practical conditions and envisions diverse possible opportunities for the female that are employed through the manifestation of science fiction in her works. Since Piercy's books take after social authenticity, she offers models of conduct that could be moved to this present reality. Most recognising about Piercy's writing is her political inclination that highlights the corpus of her writing as intellectually triggered sentimentality.

Generally, men have been trained to view the dichotomised image of the women representing a fabricated, irrational, and divided entity, and such an investment is a pre-requisite for realisation of the patriarchal dream. However, for dismissing this apprehension, women, and men both must build up another cognisance where they should not only connect bodily and mindfully but also build up an independent and solidified account of their personality. This new self-discernment comes when both investigate their sexuality, comprehend and modify their connections to other people, and accomplish new information through their own intelligent ideas. Piercy's both male and female characters become mindful by recognising the material significance of their sexual development. As compulsive thinkers, Piercy's female characters confront the problem of the identity crisis which leads them to an open confrontation with the masculine chauvinistic practices.

In Marge Piercy's novel *The Longings of Women*, we meet three women each unhappy in her own way. Leila is a college professor in her mid-40s. As the book begins, her husband is out of town directing a play and, shacking up with one of the young actresses in the company, an arrangement of convenience that Leila has condoned throughout their twenty-four years of married life. We are informed in the beginning that Leila's best friend Melanie dies of breast cancer and with the demise of her bulwark; Leila's life begins to fall apart. Mary is Leila's cleaning lady and a white-collar class housewife. However, after being dejected by her husband who wanted to marry another woman, she started looking for opportunities to financially support herself and her family. Now she conceals that reality from her customers and two grown-up kids to keep her social image intact and also for the reason that her children should face no

disgrace for their impoverished and vagrant mother. Becky is another reckoning character from this novel and her presence completes the trio of three women suffering under various circumstances. Becky is an aspiring woman who sets higher goals to create better opportunities for her future life. Due to her material and narcissist interests, she is charged with murdering her husband and is taken in by the police authorities as the prime suspect. Three women are connected with each other in one way or the other. Their lives cross when Leila consents to compose a book about Becky's legal trial.

Initially, all three appear to remain ignorant and baffled about their relationship with the people around them. Leila mitigates herself in accepting that her husband Nick who is engaged in an extra-marital affair with a young artist will one day realise his folly and be back to her and consistent visits of her husband assure her that everything is not lost yet. Mary feels delighted in the nostalgic moorings of her past life when she was admired by her husband for her quintessential cooking skills and wryly holds herself responsible for the failure of her marriage. While Becky seems to believe that material prosperity is all one needs to lead a happy life.

Professionally, Leila is engaged in the researches on the life of lawfully condemned and manhandled women, and her personal life is not an exception to that since she is gradually heading toward the same predicament. Regardless of whether it be travelling to guide her sister who doesn't need or respect her assistance, on the grounds that their mother asked her to; or eating with her offended spouse and his sweetheart since her child asked her to; or never asking the goofball, Nick, to stop dating the young model, Leila has no control over her life. Both Leila and Mary thrive under the danger of being condemned to solitude by their husbands who are constantly pursuing progressively delightful, youthful, thin, and crisp bodies. The two women comfort thoughtfully that their mutilated and withered bodies are liable for the defeat of their wedded life. Mary and Leila perform their respective duties in order to establish a specific status to their personality and thus identify with the societal norms. The reiteration of activities is a stratagem to accommodate within the set patterns laid down by

the dominant class. Judith Butler in her book *Bodies That Matter* (2011) suggests:

...performativity cannot be understood outside a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject (60).

Likewise, Atwood's female characters continually feel confounded about the real purpose of their life. Marian wonders about Ainsley's strange demeanour and at first, builds up a solid abhorrence for her yet gradually she understands that Ainsley represents the other side of her cognisant self that she has purposely escaped so as to fit in the standards of society. Marian ponders over Ainsley's casual and light attitude toward sex and love, and unlike Marian for whom love demands lifelong commitment, for Ainsley sex is a tool for a woman to satiate her physical needs and procure freedom by begetting a child in the womb. In a way, Ainsley considers that the power of motherhood is a panacea to heal the ailment caused by the masculine dominance, and quite contrary to Ainsley's reflections on motherhood, Marian believes in wearing off all the unnecessary burdens and unite with a male in a puritanical bond. The desire for freedom stands in precedence to desire for domination which can be achieved through power, hence power and freedom are indistinguishable from one another and are committed to a cause-and-effect relationship. Foucault in his book *The History of Sexuality* (1978) argues "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (93).

In comparison to Atwood's discussion on body politics in *The Edible Woman* stands the issue of gendered vagrancy as one of the conspicuous stresses of the feminists discussed by Piercy in her novel *The Longings of Women*. The intangible and destitute Mary is symbolic of female physical depravity and through the depiction of her homelessness, Piercy has tried to exhibit the impact of gender stereotypes on female life. A homeless male does not stir the sentiments of embarrassment, alarm, and sexual obscenity while female vagrancy is dependent upon mortification and that is the explanation all through

the novel Mary attempts to conceal the status of her marriage and spends nights in the homes of her clients and lies abruptly to protect her social image.

Piercy has tried to distinguish between the status of a homeless male and a female. Piercy depicts the idea of the gendered vagrancy in Ontario and rises to contend that the topic is deserving of more noteworthy consideration by the women activist. It is forcefully assumed that the destitute female is subject to mortification since the female is tallied just her body and the domestic grid of the patriarch shields her from sexual aberration. This is evident that the power of the patriarch or the male governs her life cycle. The body of the female is materially functional and Judith Butler in her "Introduction" to the book *Bodies That Matter* (2011) composes:

...what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its move-ments, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect ... "Sex" is, thus, not simply what one has, or astatic description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the "one" becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility (xii).

Atwood's protagonist Marian thinks perseveringly about her degree of association with Ainsley, her flatmate. She is embodied as a strained woman from the very start while Ainsley is, to a greater degree, a freewheeling character. Drenched in her reality, Ainsley appears to care less for the individuals around her and has the craft of control which renders her an intrigue for innovation. Her innovation and manipulating nature are exposed as she uses her sexuality to fulfil her desire to become a mother without committing herself to a lifelong bond of marriage. She tells Marian that she does not intend to marry Len rather she will use his body to fulfil her desire and then both of them would depart from each other's life. "...And he'll evaporate. I won't be able to call him up when it's really essential, he'd accuse me of trying to monopolize his time or of making demands on him or something. But as long as he hasn't got me," she said, "I can have him whenever I need him" (Atwood, "The Edible Woman" 96). These lines fortify the idea that both males and females are entrapped in



the matrix of power structures. Neither male nor female can defy or challenge the power of discourse; a superstructural ideology.

Through the portrayal of Ainsley's narcissistic impulses, Atwood brings home the idea that a woman like the male is capable and skilful to make the optimum use of her body. Ainsley's character stands in direct comparison to Becky Burgess in *The Longings of Women* for the reason that like Atwood's deuteragonist Ainsley, Becky missions to extract maximum benefit from her body in plotting the murder of her husband. The sexual conflict between males and females is the basis of all relations of power.

Marian from *The Edible Woman* works in Seymour Surveys Company which handles the issues associated with individuals' dietary propensities. At first, she viewed herself as fortunate to attain such a position but continuously things have turned around inverse to her extravagant meditations. The depiction of her organisation office reveals insight into the division of employments to individuals based on their sex:

The company is layered like an ice-cream sandwich, with three floors: the upper crust, the lower crust, and our department, the gooey layer in the middle. On the floor above are the executives and the psychologists-referred to as the men upstairs, since they are all men-who arrange things with the clients... (21).

Marian ponders over the central layer of the authoritative structure of Seymour Surveys, i.e., her own section where only a limited amount of space and freedom is offered to the female workers, and their accommodated space points to their subliminal status in relation to the male colleagues. Females are encouraged to work on lower salaries with an explanation that males tend to be more apt in handling field tasks than females. "They don't make much, but they like to get out of the house. Those who answer the questions don't get paid at all; I often wonder why they do it" (21). Motherhood is qualified to be the most propitious occasion in the life of a woman yet it imbibes certain choking influences too. The dependence of the child on the mother delimits the mobility of the latter and she is forced to believe that nurturing kids is the only purpose of her life.

Atwood distinctly focuses on the advanced consumerist society wherein womanhood is least venerated. Mrs. Bogue, a senior representative at Seymour's excitingly announces to Marian the news that the organisation is uniquely keen on enlisting the new faces and adaptable bodies and chalk out designs to dispose of the anticipating mothers. ““Marian,” she said with a sigh of resignation, “I am afraid Mrs. Dodge in Kamloops will have to be removed. She’s pregnant.” Mrs. Bogue frowned slightly: she regards pregnancy as an act of disloyalty to the company” (27). Foucault's hypothesis of body politics is very critical to the comprehension of materialisation and politicisation of gendered bodies. For Foucault body is both a mode of subjection and domination and in his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995) he contends “This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with the complex reciprocal relations with its economic use...” (25-6).

Mary in *The Longings of Women* satiates her ego through performance and rehearsal of housewifery duties by cleaning the houses of her customers and is reminded of her obsessive passion for home at one point in time. Mary's motherly affection toward Leila is symbolic of her lost maternal bond with her daughter and son who have almost dejected her for their material benefits and find it irrelevant to embrace the affections of a withered body. By the end of the book, Mary is transported to the country life and starts a new life with Leila's sister Debbie and develops an intimate bonding with Debbie. “They gossiped about the horses as if they were the people ... They had a good relationship with each other too, a nice mother-daughter affection...” (Piercy, “The Longings of Women” 275).

Judith Butler brings in the Lacanian term *jouissance* to emphasise that the body of both males and females are charged with the power to not only confront autonomy but also for deriving physical pleasure. She writes that the female body “designates a relation of continuity rather than a discrete subject or object of desire; indeed, it designates that *jouissance* which precedes desire and the subject/object dichotomy that desire presupposes” (Butler, “Gender Trouble” 105). The depiction of vagrant, homosexual and gay couples is highly symbolic of the fissures present in the cemented walls of heteronormalcy.

Piercy portrays men in her novels as murderous, alcoholic, self-indulgent, irresponsible, and emotionally stunted. They act as seducers, betrayers, rapists, and blackmailers: a miserable bunch of subhuman beings. They desert pregnant women and even don't pay child support. Leila's mother is in a lesbian relationship and declares it to be not only a successful but also gratifying affair whereas Leila's husband reminds his wife repeatedly that he abhors men. Interestingly in Piercy's books, women mate with women not out of biological predisposition, but out of disgust and disappointment with men; i.e., as the second choice. Debbie's husband vehemently disapproves of his mother-in-law's lesbian entanglement and corners Debbie to the complaint. "Your mother's a dyke," he said. "I can't believe it. We're getting out of here tomorrow. I don't want the kids exposed to this kind of thing" (Piercy, "The Longings of Women" 86). The problem of identification suffuses an interest in homosexual affiliations among Piercy's protagonists. Judith Butler makes a comprehensive analysis of the concept of identification in the following lines:

Identification is constantly figured as a desired event or accomplishment, but one which finally is never achieved ... identifications belong to the imaginary; they are phantasmatic efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporal cohabitation; they unsettle the "I" they are the sedimentation of the "we" in the constitution of any "I", the structuring presence of alterity in the very formulation of the "I" ... Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability (Butler, "Bodies That Matter" 68).

The indulgence of Leila's mother in a lesbian affair is identical to Butler's understanding of the notion of performance which manifests itself in a form of revolt against hierarchal patterns of sexuality. The instituted heterosexuality dominates the social lives of people and makes them subservient to the universally embraced norm, i.e., heteronormality. The word heteronormality is itself contradictory because it denotes that any relationship except between male and female, is immoral and this notion widens the gap between the status of male and female wherein male is both naturally and physically endowed with

the power to dominate the female. In both novels, the female characters are additionally analysed through their plunge into encounters of psychical upheavals, frenzy, and schizophrenia, and all these projections are designed to disintegrate the limits of subjectivity and conscience centrality. Interestingly in Piercy and Atwood's fiction, we see a refusal of exclusionist transcendentalism of identity formation, and condemnation of marked division of stereotypical roles for both the sexes. The struggle of the female is to be assessed from the continuous focus on the redemptive practices for her through an allocation of abstract rules for her to follow in a stringent manner.

Foucault brings to focus the intrigued ways in which the female is deliberately stupefied and mentally debilitated with the affirmation that the male can unequivocally claim himself as a unified identity; the roller of big cigars. For Foucault power does never possess a focal position and does never stay concentrated on a solitary substance; it continues moving from one source to the next:

A double impersonation in which each element is doubled, thus forming that renewed exchange of the real and the illusory which is itself the dramatic meaning of madness ... Tamed, madness preserves all the appearances of its reign ... It plays on the surface of things and in the glitter of daylight, over all the working of appearances, over the ambiguity of reality and illusion, over all that interdeterminate web, ever rewoven and broken, which both unites and separates truth and appearance. It hides and manifests, it utters truth and falsehood, it is light and shadow. It shimmers, a central and indulgent figure, already precarious in this baroque age (Foucault, "Madness and Civilization" 34-6).

The portrayal of hysteric females by both novelists suggests that a female feels ashamed to believe that she is naturally disembodied and depends on the male for a purposeful presence. However, Marian in the deep recesses of her mind struggles against the overwhelming domination of her fiancé Peter and her playing out as a hysteric woman by fleeing from Peter is reminiscent of her rebellion against man-centric society. For Foucault, hysteria can energetically

be concocted as a methodology to challenge the authority of the cultural standards progressed by the prevailing class of society. Madness can reverse the channel of power and open up new possibilities of freedom by foregrounding reason. “Madness is here, at the heart of things and of men, an ironic sign that misplaces the guideposts between the real and the chimerical, barely retaining the memory of the great tragic threats—a life more disturbed than disturbing, an absurd agitation in society, the mobility of reason” (37).

Marian has been dating Peter for quite a while however their relationship is set apart by an ambiguous quiet which had been prodding her quite frequently. She hears from Peter that his closest companion Trigger was going to get hitched soon. She gets extremely excited to hear such unexpected news because Trigger and Peter claimed to detest the institution of marriage and vouched for never getting hitched. Indeed, even the discussion about the issue was unpropitious and choking for Trigger. Without a doubt, Peter was annoyed with Trigger's choice since he was very much aware of predicting dread of his own exploitation because of a similar destiny. Atwood exhibits the dramatic melodrama of the two mates, i.e., Peter and Trigger in the following lines. “He and Trigger had clutched each other like drowning men, each trying to make the other the reassuring reflection of himself that he needed. Now Trigger had sunk and the mirror would be empty” (Atwood, “The Edible Woman” 30). Marian feels jubilant to hear about Trigger’s marriage and foresees her as a beloved wife of Peter who has no intention to get married but she keenly notices Peter’s reactions to Trigger’s state of affairs in which Peter seems to have received the biggest setback of his life. Marriage is like a trap for Peter because it may put an end to his free-floating revelries of life. Marian feels relieved to know that Trigger’s submission to a committed life is symbolic of his surrendering to the social norms and the male additionally like the female cannot eschew the power of societal obligations.

While in the deep recesses of her mind Marian feels terrified about Peter's approaching response on the issue. She does not want Peter to hold her responsible for Trigger’s sorry fate. In order to divert her attention from Peter, Marian accepts Clara's proposition to join her for supper. However, she feels

perplexed to confront Clara in all her motherly gait since there is a fear of meeting the same fate as Clara's in a similar way Peter feels for Trigger. She insists Ainsley join her for supper at Clara's home. Marian feels perturbed and fails to meet Clara's gaze and advances Ainsley to participate in a friendly discussion with Clara. The female body and bodily gestures act as a mirror to her soul while Ainsley drives the discussion further, Marian keenly observes Clara in her domestic demeanour. The woman's body has remained a subject of enthusiasm for both Atwood and Piercy and Atwood's novel *The Edible Woman* is woven around female body issues. Marian mindfully steps into Clara's home and discovers Clara encircled in her defensive buoyancy:

...Clara in the garden, sitting in a round wicker basket- chair with metal legs. She had her feet up on another chair and was holding her latest baby somewhere in the vicinity of what had once been her lap. Clara's body is so thin that her pregnancies are always bulgingly obvious, and now in her seventh month she looked like a boa constrictor that had swallowed a watermelon (34).

Strikingly, the cultural weight laid on the concept of motherhood is noticeable from Marian's response towards Clara. A horrific sensation crosses her whole self as she witnesses Clara in her full sprout. She feels frustrated about her hopeless condition however all the while she attests that Clara is herself accountable for her plight. "I sometimes think she's all covered with suckers, like an octopus" (35).

Marian feels blocked and discovers nothing important to converse with Clara. Her quietness compromises her from inside as she feels powerless through and through. Marian longs to remind Clara about her extrovert trips and social activities with a motive to extract her from catacombs of domestic inertia. "...but anything I could mention, the office or places I had been or the furnishings of the apartment, would only remind Clara of her own inertia, her lack of room and time, her days made claustrophobic with small necessary details" (35-6). Marian understands that Clara appears to have lost all enthusiasm for life and her overindulgence in domestic matters suffocates her deeply. She feels puzzled and considers what fate may have been available for

her as well. Clara's vulnerability, chaotic predicament makes Marian feel progressively protective of her chastity. Clara's frequent reference to her fattened belly by rolling fingers over it is reminiscent of her honour retrieved through motherhood but this esteemed position is gained at the expense of loss of individuality. She assumes that Clara has arranged her family in an impromptu manner. "The babies had been unplanned: Clara greeted her first pregnancy with astonishment that such a thing could happen to her, and her second with dismay; now, during her third, she had subsided into a grim but inert fatalism" (40).

Society compliments and applauds women for their spiritual excellence, caring nature which enlivens love and deference in their male accomplices, and raises motherly expectations without which mankind would get terminated. The absence of an adjusted hypothesis of subjectivity clashes with a key point of the women's activist venture to rediscover and reconsider the encounters of females. Foucault criticises the customary standards of the hierarchal excellence in his article "Nietzsche, Genealogy and History" (*Nietzsche* 1977) where he assaults conventional types of history which he views as being ruled by totalitarian ideas derived from the theory of subjectivity.

Foucault questions western metaphysics for erroneously commending and attributing extraordinary significance to the human as the centre of the universe and aligning that central figure at the focal point of the development of history. The constructed concept of divine motherhood is also an intrigue to feed the ego of the female in order to make her stand parallel to the male in the row of events. Interestingly, it is the female body that is capable of gaining precedence in the arrangement of things. Her sexuality is employed to gain material benefits. The body is a site for contestation for the acquisition of power between the two sexes and Foucault theorises that all forms of confrontations derive vehemence from physical force.

Foucault seems to opine that historical criticism of a given period is based on the body politics of that phase of time. The body is a constructed reality and all efforts directed to control its functioning or one must say rather tame its functioning is devised in consonance of its physical profile. Moreover, the ideas

are created and popularised by the dominant classes of society and are finally recorded in the archives for the successors to follow. Primarily, the characteristic division between masculinity and femininity is erroneous since it is universally acknowledged that males and females are naturally and biologically distinct. However, the crisis begins when the naturalness of the body is carried forward and is fore-grounded to acquire the essentialist understanding of the body.

While Foucault evokes the naturalness or the neutrality of the gender; it is Judith Butler who conspires to carry forward the Foucauldian concept of gender neutrality through her concept of performativity. According to Butler, through the gendered performance female becomes capable of giving rise to the multiple identifications and challenge male hegemony. "...multiple identifications can constitute a nonhierachial configuration of shifting and overlapping identifications that call into question the primacy of any univocal gender attribution" (Butler, "Gender trouble and the Subversion of Identity" (84).

Marian profoundly ponders how the life of a woman undergoes a complete transformation after marriage. Clara is the epitome of grieving womanhood. Marian marvels that Clara was never a customised woman, her feeling of mayhem, wildness never left her. Furthermore, even after several years of marriage, she has not changed and has retained the same messiness that once she had. Terribly, Clara's loosened profile is symptomatic of her inner turmoil; she seems to have lost all control over body and mind:

She simply stood helpless while the tide of dust rose round her, unable to stop it or evade it. The babies were like that too; her own body seemed somehow beyond her, going its own way without reference to any directions of hers. I studied the pattern of bright flowers on the maternity smock she was wearing; the stylized petals and tendrils moved with her breathing, as though they were coming alive (Atwood, "The Edible Woman" 41).

In *The Longings of Women*, Marge Piercy takes a gander at the journey of three women by establishing a trio of their shifted encounters. The significant



longings of three women have been portrayed through their undertakings to search for freedom from male domination. Piercy effectively motivates the interest of her readers by situating the fact that shrivelled bodies are despised by society. “Malls were full of old people killing time, retirees, people on fixed incomes in tiny rooms. We’re all superfluous and we go to the mall the way in the past we might have sat in the sun in the village center watching the world go by” (Piercy, “The Longings of Women” 59).

Mary dreams over the charms of brilliant days of her past and invests the limit of her energy in remembering those recollections in the present. Piercy presents an obvious truth of a self-centred contemporary society in which the parents, especially mothers, are disdained for turning inadequate particularly and the elderly thrive on the false hope that their children will accommodate them during bleak days. Notably, Leila is the first to comprehend that she ought to hear her heart and nobody else might be allowed the option to choose for her life even she liberates herself from the preposterous weight of her husband Nick and only son, who constrains her to implicitly acknowledge his father's extramarital undertaking. Through the character portrayal of Mary and Leila, Piercy seems to establish that female bodies have a critical influence on their life. Mary and Leila share a similar destiny since both have been deceived by their husbands for another youthful body whereas the third woman Becky has been anticipated as an antagonist who uses her sexuality as a tool to gain maximum monetary benefit by trapping a young guy in a love bond who on the behest of Becky kills her husband.

There is an element of compulsion that haunts all the female characters and this imposed performance is hidden under the concept of essential femininity. Butler contends that the body is a free-floating and uninhibited entity and is prior to the act of signification however the materiality of the body is determined through power play of signification. “The body posited as prior to the sign, is always *posited* or *signified* as *prior*. This signification produces as an *effect* of its own procedure the very body that it nevertheless and simultaneously claims to discover as that which *precedes* its own action” (Butler, “Bodies That Matter” 6). Butler opines that there is a bright chance of

free play of signification for both sexes and it can redeem them from the imposition of the essential subjectivity. Through the free play of signification, the female can overcome the stereotypical conventions of identity formation. Impactfully, the depiction of gay-lesbian and bullying relations based on power, in the fiction of Atwood and Piercy, is the embraced topic of discussion for the stated critics.

Probably, the body is the medium for both sexes to exert their impact over one another, however, this transitory appeal of consistently blurring body provides no confirmation to the sexual liberation. The indication of the male allurements for youthful bodies in Atwood and Piercy's books is intriguing and stirs the imagination of those who believe that sexuality can be utilised by the female to accomplish the material autonomy from males. However, the female body is more of a source of pleasure for the male, and approval of the male system is essential to render it an important qualification. Here we can insinuate the Marxian hypothesis for which woman is a contained and universalised trading body prompting the growth of the luxury market. The female body is treated like a piece of land and the male is the owner of that land. Clara's undaunted denial of Joe's hankering to have more kids could de-regard the status of Clara as a significant lady since ripeness is the main trademark for a female to fill in an incredible vacuum. This is the explanation both Piercy and Atwood weigh on the need for the financial freedom of the female with the logic that the female must not shroud her noticeable attributes in the facade of divine maternity. Financial autonomy helps women to feature their genuine attributes of body and mind, and women no more require showing their ability by bringing forth a column of children. Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1999) opines "...the place of the maternal body is established in the body, "encrypted," to use their term, and given permanent residence there as a dead and deadening part of the body or one inhabited or possessed by phantasms of various kinds" (87). In Piercy's novel *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Connie's extravagant yearnings to sustain her motherly affections that are evident from her hankering after the dissipated motherhood and projection of affections on her niece Dolly is symptomatic of

her inner vacuum that is instigated by the flamboyant recognition of feminine maternity.

Lacan presented the image of the father as an all-encompassing preserver of the grand household whose endorsement is accepted unequivocally as the final word. Besides, society embraces and stratifies the male perspective on a subjective/hierarchical plane. Female is deceived to believe that commitment to her man decides her status in the public arena as occurs in *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood wherein the handmaids obtain a restricted measure of freedom through their fertile wombs and obeisance toward Gilead men. Disloyalty is an extreme danger for male kind:

Infidelity then is a feminist practice of undermining the Name-of-the-Father. The unfaithful reading strays from the author, the authorized, produces that which does not hold as a reproduction, as a representation. Infidelity is *not* outside the system of marriage, the symbolic, patriarchy, but hollows it out, ruins it, from within (Gallop, "Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction" 48).

Gallop brings forth the idea that in actuality infidelity does not herald a heavenly disaster as scripted in holy manuscripts rather the concept of infidelity is constructed by the patriarchal society to rule the psyche of the female and make her realise that her body is vulnerable to profound debasement. In *The Edible Woman*, Marian and Ainsley perceive Clara's submission to motherhood from alternate points of view; the former is anguished at Clara's forswearing of selfhood by troubling herself with the commitments of domestic life and the latter sees optimism in Clara's utilisation of her womb and herself longs to become independent from male reliance by giving birth to a child following an intrigue to condemn her sexual accomplice later. For Marian, Clara has given up and expected herself as a non-existent substance, whose body can be utilised and reused through the cycle of multiplication. Ainsley is sore at Clara for burdening Joe with the excessive pressure of fatherhood and she holds the opinion that Clara's weak disposition and burdening her husband would lead to Clara's enslavement. Ainsley blames Clara for playing as a puppet in the hands

of Joe and for submitting her fate to the acceptance of a passive and subservient role of a mother. She disagrees with Marian who seems to pity Clara and Joe:

...You can't say the sort of household Clara and Joe are running is an ideal situation for a child. Think of how confused their mother-image and their father-image will be; they're riddled with complexes already. And it's mostly because of the father ... She would have to cope by herself. And she would cope, and their total upbringing would be much more consistent. The thing that ruined families these days is the husbands. Have you noticed she isn't even breast-feeding the baby? (Atwood, "The Edible Woman" 44-5).

It is evident that Margaret Atwood is judiciously cognisant about the plight of the male society, especially through Joe's character, she brings home the idea that like the female, the male has to undergo immense physical as well as the financial burden of his family. Ainsley's instructions to Marian regarding Clara's passive role in rearing the family are thought-provoking and logical. The gender-stereotypical standards allocate certain roles for the two sexes and in this way, both remain confined within the nominated characteristic framework and thus lose the freedom to act.

Leila's developing disquiet and the final separation from her husband, followed by an extra-marital involvement with another man, Becky's extramarital bond with a youthful guy, and Marian's secret relationship with Laundromat boy, is reminiscent of women's separation from customary conventions of unbending obeisance to man-centric standards. Interestingly, the female protagonists from the two books challenge the inflexible ideas of humility and betrayal. Ainsley immovably accepts that Clara must demonstrate her value to her family through some scholastic achievement which will help her in supporting the family in the future. Ainsley contends with Marian about Clara and says "Well, she should do something; if only a token gesture. She never finished her degree, did she? Wouldn't this be a perfect time for to work on it? Lots of pregnant women finish their degrees" (42). Ainsley wants Clara to step out of her miserable femininity by accepting her accountability as a functioning member by sharing the financial burden of her family and her

participation will give her the respective amount of freedom that each woman genuinely deserves. Judith Butler in her notorious book *Undoing Gender* investigates the manners in which a woman can fix her oppression by obtaining financial autonomy. She emphasises that all contentions are focused on securing recognition which can be accomplished through performance:

...the schemes of recognition that are available to us are those that “undo” the person by conferring recognition, or “undo” the person by withholding recognition, then recognition becomes a site of power by which the human is differentially produced. This means that to the extent that desire is implicated in social norms, it is bound up with the question of power and with the problem of who qualifies as the recognizably human and who does not (Butler, “Undoing Gender” 2).

Ainsley during a deep conversation with Marian detonates with an admission communicating her craving to turn into a mother. Marian portrays Ainsley as a woman who yearns for physical culmination and in this way, she gets exhausted with men after some time and firmly denounces any commitments. However, Marian is baffled to find that Ainsley is resolved to turn into a mother and she reveals to Marian that she will derive satisfaction from her child and had no prospects to commit her life to the father of her child. Ainsley’s yearning to give birth to a child might be viewed as a craving to turn into a defender of autonomous parenthood. Jane Gallop writes in her book *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1982) “...what the woman ‘really’ wants is not the penis but the phallus” (97). She outlines that for a woman the physical male organ, i.e., a penis is less important than its signification: the phallic power. While the male has the penis, and the female is overpoweringly lost in the whirlpool of lack. Juliet Mitchell also quotes in her book *Psychoanalysis and feminism* (2000) “We have a culture in which, with infinite complexity, the self is created divisively; a patriarchal culture in which the phallus is valorised and women oppressed” (361).

Lacan changed the course of dialogue by thinking that the penis is certifiably not an alluring organ rather phallus is the focal point for both the male and the female fascination. Penis-envy is utilised similarly as a barrier for

the female since the male has the penis, and the female is overpoweringly lost in the whirlpool of lack. Unlike Lacan, Foucauldian phallus is not interpreted as the delegate of male-centric force but is impartial since it is a theoretical idea, not an encapsulated organ. The craving to accomplish phallic control comprises the tension between the two genders. It is the body which can be restrained not the mind subsequently an oppressed body is contorted in a manner that at one point in time, it begins accepting the unreal and unbelievable. Foucault in his case studies concentrates on hysteria with a special reference to females who are compelled to acknowledge their powerlessness and ability to surrender. Foucault's insistence on hysteria as a tool to castrate female sensibility is encoded in his case studies:

...men writing about hysteria, in male or females can masquerade their own emotions as reason, or disguise feeling and prejudice behind other terminologies and self definitions ... Thus, female activism becomes merely a constructive pathology, and feminism only a healthier form of hysteria (Showalter, et al.290).

Foucault's positivism ignites hope among feminists by alluding to the shifting nature of power structures and hysteria is not an exception to this. Both phallus and hysteria are abstract concepts, and as containers of power, indulge in the free play of signification. *The Longings of Women* uses a strategy to sensationalise a social issue. Her depiction of three female protagonists enacts the sorry tale of three ladies who invested in marriage and ruined their lives. Mary Ferguson Burke, who was a provincial housewife in her past, presently destitute, compelled into misery, because her husband tricked her for another woman who was more delightful and youthful than Mary.

On the other hand, Becky Burgess, though portrayed as more of an antagonist since she is involved in planning the murder of her husband, is another hapless woman who becomes a victim of consumerist practices of society. Becky is an over-ambitious woman who has spent most part of her life as an impoverished girl and after interacting with a boy with rich family background, she wants to leave no chance to extract fiscal advantages from her parents-in-law, however, her karma does not bolster her, because her husband

is not a skilful guy and thrives on the support of his parents. Becky, in order to inherit his property, murders her husband with the help of a young boyfriend and due to the indiscretion of her young friend, she is put to trial. Becky's approaching concern for materialistic values can be seen as an effort to relatively place herself in contrast to the masculine dominancy.

Becky thinks that the female overwhelms the male by burdening him with economic pressure whereas the male oppresses the female for the consummation of his biological need. She wants to remain independent because the conjugal bond enslaves both males and females which leads to imbalance and conflict in their respective lives. Becky's illicit relationship with a young guy is comparable to Marian's secret relationship with Duncan with the only difference that Marian does not hanker after material gains as she is more inclined toward a committed relationship. Ainsley appears to search for some redemptive measures to conquer complexities fundamental to both the genders, while Marian neglects to comprehend her position and investigates profoundly, and in an endeavour to look charming, she turns anorexic. Marian's hysteric behaviour like that of fleeing away from her fiancé Peter is emblematic of her hankering after the acquisition of freedom.

Hysteric women constitute a significant piece of Piercy and Atwood's composition. Piercy and Atwood's female characters are afflicted with hysteria and episodically behave in an unnatural way. A grieving silence haunts the women figures and they struggle to search for a medium of expression which is evidently denied to them. Feminists especially Elaine Showalter and Helen Cixous have stated the importance of language in redeeming sexes from inherent personality disorders. "Language has played a major role in the history of hysteria; to pry apart the bond between hysteria and women, to free hysteria from its feminine attributes and to liberate femininity from its bondage to hysteria, means going against the grain of language itself" (290). Marian from *The Edible Woman* remains carelessly occupied in her whimsical drives and quite intentionally engages in an unlawful relationship with Duncan with a motive to overcome Peter's possessive demeanour. She behaves abnormally and starves her body almost to death. In *The Longings of Women*, Becky's

frenzied moorings and actions also suggest her inner turmoil whereas Leila Landsman turns neurotic as she feels unfit to keep tolerating her husband's disloyalty.

The poststructuralist conflict is centred around the deception of documented and standard information about the event of hysteric conduct specifically among women. A human being can never be analysed as a composed, controlled, and stable personality. Freudian and post-Freudian arguments criticise the modernist assumptions pertaining to unified and coherent personality traits. Incidentally, women are envisioned to be more vulnerable to hysteria since they belong to the domain of nature. Even eco-feminists have stringently been criticised for their extravagant indulgence in the comparison between nature and women:

Hysteria has been linked with women in a number of unflattering ways. It's vast, shifting repertoire of symptoms reminded some doctors of the liability and capriciousness they associated with female nature ... an essential and organic female biology that produces hysteria have mutated into more psychological portraits that link hysteria with *femininity*- with a range of "feminine" personality traits ... women have been seen as disadvantaged in mastering oedipal tasks and thus disposed to hysteric behaviours (286-7).

According to Foucault, a specific discipline of the body is expected from the female whereas the male is free to make the best utilisation of his creative mind and heal the hidden complexes of the psyche. The discourse about sexuality is forbidden to women whilst male is unrestrained to speak on the topic. Lack of expression confiscates women from the biological traits of their bodies and makes them believe that their bodies are the most vulnerable part of their life. Women are portrayed as characteristically obsessive about their bodies as Marian shows up in *The Edible Woman*.

All women from both novels exhibit hysteric behaviour in various ways. In those intimate moments which are no more intimate and soothing; Marian gazes at Peter's immaculate skin which has no traces of human disfigurement, she stringently starts searching for indications of defect yet discovers no such



thing. Peter's clear and flawless skin puts Marian to jitters, and she thinks of herself as inferior, less refined, and less impeccable than Peter. She looks at Peter intently and needs to feel the demeanour of conventionality around him however she fails in her attempt and is left restless. As a matter of fact, Marian is vigilant for indications of debasement which are fundamental pieces of the human race. Her female anxiety yearns to see the weaker and dependent side of Peter, yet she discovers no signs of perforation:

People noticed him, not because he had forceful or peculiar features, but because he was ordinariness raised to perfection, like the youngish well-groomed faces of cigarette ads. But sometimes I wanted a reassuring wart or mole, or patch of roughness, something the touch could fix on instead of gliding over (Atwood, "The Edible Woman" 68).

Leila Landsman, an educator, and a writer cross Becky's way after the latter's trial starts and Leila is offered the undertaking of composing and reporting Becky's case history while the third woman Mary is a housekeeper who had been hired by Leila Landsman. The three ladies not just leave an enduring effect on one another's life yet, in addition, get propelled by the shared struggles. Piercy's novel exposes how women are deceived and forced to accept their creatureliness and powerlessness. Atwood and Piercy both seem to suggest that economic independence is the only way for females to acquire freedom from male dependency.

It would not be extravagant to assume that hysteria is an antagonistic performance; a kind of negative capability, a mechanism of self-articulation. The handmaids from Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* can be seen on the verge of hysteria. The handmaids like many other subjugated women including econowives, unwomen, and nomads crave to speak their hearts out however the solicitous presence of men around suffocates their voices. Only a few women like Moira assemble the mental fortitude to elope from Gilead setup yet once caught they are transferred to jezebel; a place more hellish than hell. For the two writers, the body whether a male or a female, is not something inarticulate, dysfunctional, negligible, or a conceptual idea rather the body is all the more real and utilitarian since it is the repertoire of knowledge:

And what about the body? It is the referent of the deed; And what about the body? It is the referent of the deed; it is that whose activities are reported, relayed, communicated. But in the confession, the body acts again, displaying its capacity for doing a deed, and announces, apart from what is actually said, that it is, actively, sexually there. Its speech becomes the present life of the body, and though the deed is made more real by virtue of its being spoken it also, at the moment it is uttered, becomes strangely past, completed, over (Butler, "Undoing Gender" 165-6).

A middle-aged, economically independent Massachusetts-based professor Leila Landsman despite her twenty-four years of devotion to her married life is dominated by her husband Nick. He boasts about his sexual freedom and casually reprimands his wife for her over-protectiveness. Piercy drew the same kind of fate for her protagonist Davida Whippletree from her novel *Vida*. Leigh Pfeiffer like Nicholas is inebriated in his masculine sexual revelries to the extent that he exploits his wife by granting her shallow freedom and under the veneer of hypermodernity, he develops extramarital affairs with several women. Leila knows very well that whatever she is doing is not protectiveness rather it is a circumscribed phobia; anxiety to save her life from foreseeable devastation. She hopes for a better future for her only child and is afraid of the negative impact of family nuisance on him. She needs the help of her husband to run the wheels of her household while Nick stays occupied in his lavish gratification and disappoints her as a husband and father too. She intensely feels insecure in her married life. "It was worse than before, when she had simply accepted his out-of-town affairs as the price of the marriage. She had been overjoyed that he had finally relinquished his long, long adolescence and was settling down with her" (Piercy, "The Longings of Women" 21).

Through the portrayal of three women, Piercy exposes the hollow, unethical, and prejudiced approach of male society toward the female. At first glance, Becky does not seem to fit in the frame of victimised women like Mary and Leila do. However, a close analysis of her character reveals the perturbed state of mind of a woman who is heaving under the pressure of male dependency

and needs a breakthrough though Becky's criminal act can never be calculated as prudent or moral.

The condemned women find reclusion in negative performance exercised through their bodies. The torturing treatment, especially self-torture is embraced by most of the women and this torture is propelled by the female on their bodies. Bodies are thought to be the site of penance. Peter loves his body and likes to remain shaved and groomed whilst Duncan appears as the opposite to Peter and stays ignorant about his shabby ways. He gives a damn to the importance of the sense of clothing and believes in extracting momentary pleasure from smoking and copulation. Marian in *The Edible Woman* turns anorexic, Ainsley materialistically plans to utilise the male body to procure a child and leave the father of her child later, Clara identifies herself through her fertile womb and feels pride in her capacity to produce many children, Leila in Piercy's *The Longing of Women* repents over the loss of her youthful charms and holds her wilted body liable for her husband's infidelity, Mary's penance runs similar to Leila's as the former busies herself in performing household duties at her customer's place so that she can fill in the vacuum created by her old age. Becky too uses her body to win the affections of a young boy and tricks him to murder her husband. Broadly, speaking, the theme of body politics marks its sovereignty in the two books. Foucault in his book *Discipline and Punish* (1995) opines:

It might be objected that imprisonment, confinement, forced labour, penal servitude, prohibition from entering certain areas, deportation- which have occupied so important a place in modern penal systems are 'physical' penalties: unlike fines, for example, they directly affect the body ... The body now serves as an instrument or intermediary: if one intervenes upon it to imprison it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as a right and as a property. The body, according to this penalty, is caught up in a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions (11).

In *The Edible Woman*, Peter discloses to Marian that he had felt attracted to her because of an air of independence around her however he also pronounces that

he would never tolerate being restricted in his freewheeling reveries of selfhood. He praises Marian for being an exclusive woman who does not encroach upon the freedom of other people. The dread of ownership, dominance, and the oedipal drive are noticeable in Peter's opinion about the other sex. Psychoanalysis reveals that both the genders dread the maiming complex. Conventional morality believes that the phallic prick is the ultimate source of pleasure for the female and that is the reason universal heterosexuality is condemned by the radical feminists and they have embraced the Lacanian concept of *jouissance*. The phallic prick searches for vulnerable sites in the female body. Interestingly, the poststructuralists detach the term phallus from its essential biological configuration, and refurbish it as a culturally defined and abstract term which according to Foucauldian critic Lois McNay is subjected to the shifting order of power relations:

The idea that women are inferior to men is naturalized, and, thus, legitimized by reference to biology. This is achieved through a twofold movement in which, firstly, women's bodies are marked as inferior by being compared with men's bodies, according to male standards (*homme manqué*) and, secondly, biological functions are conflated with social characteristics. In many respects, masculine characteristics can be seen to be related to dominant perceptions of the male body, i.e, fitness, aggression, strength. However, man, unlike women, is understood as being able to transcend being defined in terms of his biological capacities via the use of his rational faculties (McNay 17).

Atwood's protagonist Marian does not receive any physical gratification in those intimate moments with Peter rather she feels suffocated as if someone gasps for breath. She does not succeed in reciprocating her dissatisfaction in sexual encounters with her fiancé however she lies to him about the shallowness of the event and moans to please his male ego. She tricks herself into believing that the male is the supplier of pleasure to the woman. Actually, it is not Peter to whom she bodily resigns rather it is the phallic power that she embraces joyfully. Peter's stubborn proclamations to remain single upset her since she wants to possess his body which is the container of power. Decisively Peter is

persistently undergoing a dread of losing his masculinity, mental fortitude, and the risk of osmosis drives him near the plain of servility and helplessness that is by and large connected with the female.

According to Foucault, the struggle for power is preeminent; both the male and the female unite and disunite in order to stifle one another and not only male/female but all religious and social structures, networks, and races in society contest each other for the acquisition of power. Marx rearranges the subject by arguing that all confrontations are woven around the issue of the economic structure of society and all other structures are subjugated to a superstructure of society. Power is ubiquitous and magnetic. A sense of insecurity chases both genders likewise Marian and Peter observe each other from strained lenses. Peter closely monitors Marian's body language and attempts to assuage from her tempting feminine tricks whilst Marian is watchful of her penis-envy, to which Freud entails the term; *Penisneid*, denoting privation. The male envisions his penis as the most powerful and to the contrary most vulnerable organ also. For this reason, the penis stands for masculine power and a male can assert his authority over the female with the assessment that the female lacks the penis, and thus is less fortunate:

But Freud's sexuality differentiated reading sees the threat of castration as the male version of the complex, whereas privation is the woman's story. She is under no threat; she has been deprived of a phallus ... *penisneid* (penis-envy) is the female version of the castration complex, experienced not as a threat but as a privation (Gallop, "Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction" 25).

Several feminist circles have interpreted Freudian psychoanalysis as the anti-feminist school of philosophy but some contemporary feminist scholars like Jane Gallop have analysed Freudian views in a different way. Castration is neutral anxiety however both sexes experience it in different ways; for males, there is *a loath of flesh* (my italics) that he has to preserve against the threat of female temptation whilst the female needs one, *penisneid*, and she wants to hide her lack through privation. Marian does not deceive Peter by engaging in a

secret relationship with Duncan rather her act is devised as a challenge to the phallic authority.

Ainsley plans to utilise her sexuality for the gratification of not physical but social needs. Atwood portrays Ainsley as a dissymmetrical character who needs to underwrite her man so as to become a mother. She is well aware that the social identification of a woman depends upon her status as a mother but she is not prepared to acknowledge the obligations of a wife. Ainsley watches intently the dilapidating condition of Marian's association with Peter and additionally, she has decided on the existence of a drifter, a non-believer. Essentially, relations choke Ainsley and she needs to stay reserved from any committed bonds with men. Marian intelligently reads Ainsley's mind and comments "Ainsley, what you really need is a blueprint of your boredom" (Atwood, "The Edible Woman" 95). After her visit to Clara's household, Ainsley turns out to be progressively persuaded about her choice of turning into a mother but not a wife. So, she starts prying for a male who can gratify her craving. "The man wants to be with his woman: the woman stays 'for the sake of children'. This is not a balanced, symmetrical dual relationship one of the three parties. The child is to the woman what the woman is to the man" (Gallop, "Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction" 24). Interestingly, the two writers Piercy and Atwood conjecture a society that, to a greater degree, is independent of masculine control. In *The Longings of Women*, all three female characters Leila, Mary, and Becky seek freedom from the male-centric society and they do achieve freedom with the exception of Becky who abuses her idea of freedom.

The multifaceted nature of the connection between the two sexes is extended by female anxiety to break the silence. Speech is vehemently denied to women moreover an outlandish woman is accounted as a sorceress and receives no commendation from society. Foucault and Butler seem to nominate new roles for a woman through their notions of gender neutrality, neutral space, and gender performativity. Close monitoring of the Foucauldian discussion on hysteria may reveal the significance of the hysteric behaviour that excessively is productive to break the chains of servitude. Piercy's transmigration of the

female protagonist to the other land, Massachusetts, specifically, invokes a renewed sense of freedom for earthly existence. Atwood's un-named protagonist from the novel *Surfacing* hides in bushes to conceal her real identity is symbolic of the female cognition and retaliation against enslaved existence. Additionally, Piercy and Atwood's female characters do not act as stereotypically gendered identities rather they are portrayed as non-believers, vagabonds, revolutionaries, and above all existential seekers.

The theme of homosexuality is another accomplishment of both the novelists though Atwood does not extravagantly focus on gay-lesbian relations whereas Piercy accounts for much of her works on this subject. Homosexual commitments occur naturally in Piercy's novels. Both sexes feel a need to empower the other through sexual intimacy and quite often develop homosexual relations, and in contrast with this current in Piercy's novels, Atwood's protagonists get involved in extra-marital relations, which is essential for exposing sexual autonomy. Marian from *The Edible Woman* feels alienated in her commitment to Peter who here and there seems, by all accounts, to be a complete outsider for her and will always remain the same. She attempts to persuade herself that her activity as a beneficiary, co-accomplice is to satisfy her accomplice but all of a sudden, a surge of musings backfires her assorted manipulations for winning Peter's affection. She wanes from inside whether she should bolster Peter's declaration about the victimisation of Trigger in the hands of a possessive woman or she should straightaway admit her feeling to him that marriage is anything but an uneven undertaking. "If I agreed with him it will only intensify his depression, and if I disagreed he would suspect me of siding with the bride" (Atwood, "The Edible Woman" 71).

Atwood very sharply brings out a general feeling of malice among females for their male counterparts. Len comes up like an old companion of Marian who subsequent to meeting Peter, seems to adorn his idea of freedom. With the development of Peter and Len's association runs a parallel idea of masculine rage against female autonomy. Despite being a womaniser, Len guards Peter against the coquettish etiquette of women. He appreciates Peter's sense of wisdom and comprehension about life yet, in addition, warns him by

stating “But you’ve got to watch these women when they start pursuing you. They’re always after you to marry them. You’ve got to hit and run. Get them before they get you and then get out” (73). Atwood, very shrewdly, brings out the idea that both sexes feel insecure in the company of one another, and no one whether the male or the female wants to surrender their freedom to the other. Joe and Clara’s relationship looks quite strong and this strength or solid bonding is an outcome of the sacrifices made by the two partners in one way or the other. If Clara has sublimated the youthful charms of her body in giving birth to Joe’s kids, then the latter also has surrendered his idea of free life to a greater degree and fulfils his responsibilities as a fulltime husband and also as a father of many kids.

The investment of power in relations is established through sex and discipline. Discipline can be conceived as law, political force, or open eye; the eye of the oppressor. The Marxian dialectics of form and content depends on the conflict of predominance and has remained an uncertain dispute for a very long time. Such a kind of duality is found in power relations where power is a neutral force. Sexuality and law are the two pillars of the grid of power relations and struggle to sustain their dominance over each other. For this reason, sexual aberrations can be analysed as a challenge to the monolithic structure of society. Atwood's portrayal of extra-conjugal relations and Piercy's depiction of gay relations can be interpreted as substitute prospects to challenge the heteronormative idea of society. McNay quotes:

Foucault recognizes that for an oppositional discourse to be effective it can strategically deploy the notion of truth in order to break down the monolith of ‘official’ or received truths and thereby open up a fluid space where alternative truths-other ways of living and of conceiving of the world-can be articulated (138).

Piercy in her novels raises a voice in favour of homosexuality which is a mechanism to achieve freedom for both sexes. Strikingly, homosexual undertakings provoke antagonism among the female that is seriously disdained by the society for the reason that the idea of deriving pleasure from one’s own body substantiates the claims of masculine/feminine sexuality. In physical



consummation with males, females act as passive bodies; the recipient of pleasure is determined through the male, and the females as subordinate bodies are thought to be ever-prepared for indulgence in the sexual enterprise. In wake of being furiously denounced for his speculations on subjectivity, Foucault concocted another discussion on the techniques of the self in which he developed a theorisation based on the connection between power and the body:

Foucault acknowledges that, in his previous work, the emphasis he placed on the effects of power upon the body resulted in an understanding of social agents as passive bodies and in a monolithic and functionalist account of power. In retrospect, Foucault argues that in order to reach an adequate understanding of the modern subject, an analysis of techniques of domination must be counterbalanced with an analysis of techniques of the self... (48-9).

That counterbalance between the genders can be achieved through techniques of the self, to which Judith Butler denotes the term gender performativity. The lesbian undertakings of Piercy are matched with Atwood's depiction of extra-marital affairs; however, their art of characterisation befit the theorisation developed by Foucault and Butler's hypothesis on body politics. Peter has always remained aware of Ainsley's malefic aroma of insurgency, progressive intensity, and he instructs his fiancé Marian to stay at an arm's length from her friend. "He had met Ainsley before and hadn't liked her, suspecting her of holding what he called "wishy-washy radical" views because she had favoured him with a theoretical speech about liberating the Id" (Atwood, "The Edible Woman" 74). Marian feels at jitters with an unholy trinity comprising of her fiancé Peter, friend Len, and roommate Ainsley. A feeling of discouragement and non-similarity plagues Marian since she holds no determined opinion about her identity whereas Ainsley, her female adversary is continually rising with confidence. Marian desperately longs to identify with a person or a thing, and probably this is the explanation that she endeavours to identify herself through her body and turns anorexic.

Like Ainsley who tempts men in order to gratify her physical pleasure, Becky from *The Longings of Women* utilises her bodily charms to entice a

young boy and takes advantage of his masculine capacity. Marian's hysteric moorings and ventures and Becky's criminal demonstration of homicide express the state of perturbed femininity aiming at achieving liberation from the ghastly power of male dominance. Marian's strict dietary schedule confiscates her sense of understanding. She feels disempowered and finds her body repulsively unshaped. Susan Bordo cites from her "*Reading the Slender Body*" about the issues of the body:

...I decode the meanings of fat and thin in our culture to expose the moral significances attached to them, revealing the slender, fit body as symbol of "virile" mastery over bodily desires that are continually experienced as threatening to overtake the self. This construction of self is then located within consumer culture and its contradictory requirement that we embody both the spiritual discipline of the work ethic and the capacity for continual, mindless consumption of goods (Bordo, "Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body" 15).

Piercy and Atwood's novel *The Longings of Women* and *The Edible Woman* are profoundly established in the enthusiasm of second wave feminism, particularly the effect of Betty Freidman and Simone de Beauvoir's theories can be effectively traced in their novels. Simone de Beauvoir discoursed about the gender differences with special reference to binary politics stipulated by the western ideologists indicating that the females consistently stay at a secondary place, and for this predicament of the female, the male is not solely responsible rather female's inferred acknowledgement is a major obstacle. The existentialists uphold the view that freedom is the basic need of every individual and it is delivered to each human being at the time of birth and freedom paves the way for a dignified existence.

Tragically, a woman is compelled to accept that freedom is not her bequest rather it is a blessing that will be conferred upon her only if she serves her duties as indicated by the principles of patriarchy. Marian feels that it is simply through tricking that she can shield herself from Peter. She feels comfortable with Duncan, the Laundromat guy who never tries to judge her standards of life, and feels more real and relaxed in his presence. There is no

lifetime commitment between her and Duncan, and such flexibility draws her closer to him. The obligations of relations dissuade her from moving further that is the explanation she needs to have a migrant existence from which one can discover a getaway at any point in time. Evidently, traces of vagrancy are vital to both Piercy and Atwood's character depiction. Homelessness provides new opportunities for the female that helps to discover their true idea about life. The over-accentuation of the female body has established the conviction that a woman is nothing more than a delicate structure made of flesh and bones with no intellectual bent of mind. She is the Helen of Troy or a malevolent sorceress, and rarely an individuated self. In order to tame her progressive spirits, it is believed to be critical to dispossess her from naturally constituted powers of the self.

However, Foucault rationalises the idea of the body which can be understood through his notion of the neutral nature of power and Judith Butler's notion of performance provides vehemence to the Foucauldian logic. Toward the start of his theory, Foucault introduced bodies, of both genders, as passive; it is just in later implications particularly in his conversation on techniques of the self he projected bodies as functional and overpowering. The two genders with the assistance of their abilities can dismiss or acknowledge the administration of power. Bodies as neutral entities are free to act in an independent manner. The expansion of individuality through freedom of action can be utilised in equal measure by both sexes to disclaim dominance. Marian mirrors her body as defiled and while having sex with Peter she finds her body as repulsive as it never was. Peter's touch frustrates her because his immaculate body exasperates her substantial nervousness. She concedes with dismay "She was becoming more and more irritated by her body's decision to reject certain foods. She had tried to reason with it, had accused it of having frivolous whims, had coaxed it and tempted it, but it was adamant; and if she used force it rebelled" (Atwood, "The Edible Woman" 196).

Atwood and Piercy caricature their female characters from multiple dimensions. Marian from *The Edible Woman* paints her face to remain non-identified, the anonymous protagonist from *Surfacing* and hidden network agent

from Piercy's novel *Vida* endeavour to remain unidentified through various mechanisms, Atwood's housemaid Clara uncloaks her pregnancies and Ainsley devises techniques to deceive Len so as to accomplish her desire to be a mother. Marian has manufactured a detractive distance between a "thick Sargasso sea of femininity" and a "solid, clear" masculinity (184).

Judith Butler highlights Beauvoir's detestation for the divine maternity. For Beauvoir, the propagation of maternal femininity weakens and debilitates females' status in society. The burden of maternity cripples a female's sense of intellect and understanding. Toril Moi hails Beauvoir's concept of nullification of maternal femininity. Toril Moi contends that Beauvoir's speculation is an undertaking to distance female from biological essentialism. Through Ainsley Atwood appears to adjust the disequilibrium occasioned by Marian's insouciance in childbearing. Ainsley is well aware of the challenges of being a single mother yet she chooses to be one. She wants to attest that a woman can live independently without the aid of a male accomplice.

In the two books, *The Edible Woman* and *The Longings of Women* almost all male and female characters keep looking for affirmation from an outside source; each looking inside-out to bring in self-acceptance. More than Atwood, Piercy leaves her readers with some apparently glad endings, yet her characters have neither addressed nor outgrown their essential psychic destitution. Marge Piercy seems to advance the idea that the best endeavour of a writer is to enlarge the scope of human understanding and such an understanding may be achieved through narrating the stories dealing with the ordinary life of the people. Such an encounter is found in Piercy's novel *The Longings of Women* in which she portrays the life of ordinary women during the twentieth century. She endeavours to showcase how even ordinary women can take command of their lives and the writer coercively implicates that the developing angst among the female for the male-centric culture can likewise be perilous as occurs on account of Becky who murders her husband with the assistance of a young guy by alluring him through her bodily charm.

Piercy's protagonists long to achieve freedom by trying to dissipate the impact of men around them. Mary the housemaid comes across homosexual

couples and is compelled to spend a night in their deserted room. She meets several vagrants during her days of homelessness and encounters that she shares the hapless destiny with several other people and is assuaged to perceive that her redemption lies in her capability of achieving economic independence. However, debilitating her state of vagrancy provides her an opportunity to come across various people who are sharer of the same destiny as hers. Mary over the course of time realises that she is a part of a close-minded society; that is the explanation she will have to expand her own consciousness to survive in this merciless world. Leila ponders over getting a divorce from Nick who has always remained immaterial in husbandry obligations and eventually she embarks on her decision and decides to separate from Nick. Becky is certifiably not a vicious character rather she transforms into one. The increasing strain of material and marital insecurity leads her to the wrong path. Becky knows that her husband, under the pressure of his rich parents, can leave her at any point in time, and moreover he is neither a financially secure man nor a reliable partner.

Additionally, the house wherein Becky and her husband live is gifted to them by Becky's in-laws. Thus, she becomes restless and in order to avoid vagrancy since she would not have a place to go after divorce from her husband, she intends to murder him. *The Longings of Women* is a typical feministic study since the themes of sisterhood, shared concern, the ordinary predicament of millions of women peeps through this novel. Positing a challenge to the male-centric society, Piercy's works oscillate between the individual desire for freedom and societal pressure, and specifically in this novel the strain occurs between the traditionally defined roles for women and the expansion of female awareness. Marge Piercy approaches the fervour of feminism in her books in two different ways: initially considering the male-driven perspectives; a couple of characters act as essentially determined physical selves, and on the other side; a few characters attempt to change their destinies through mental fortitude. In the two cases, Piercy accomplishes awareness for women and firmly repudiates the concept of essential subjectivity within a man-controlled society. Various shades of a woman sneak through her characters.

Problems of old-age, homelessness and failed marriages structure the significant piece of her fiction. By foregrounding the wants of the women and the contentions they face, Piercy has rethought female characters as subject to their own origination of reality restricted to their way of life as characterised by male and orthodox female segments who have either not recognised or remain unaware of the freed and autonomous cognisance of the female and the marginalised. Susan Bordo also comments on the mind-body duality in her book *Unbearable Weight, Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (1993), she argues "...the body, by contrast, simply receives and darkly, dumbly responds to impressions, emotions, passions. This duality of active spirit/passive body is also gendered, and it has been one of the most historically powerful of the dualities that inform Western ideologies of gender" (11).

The term narcissism is quite useful in the context of especially females because a narcissist denotation of the female dispossesses her from the divine aura of a sacrificial lamb as prescribed in our holy scriptures. In other words, the divine, chaste, and sacrificing image of the woman does not validate her interest in the narcissist drives, and if a woman tends to live for herself then she becomes a target of society whilst the male is revered as a narcissist hero. His disapproval of being a narcissist is invalidated. After Mary's husband brought in another woman Mary, truly and metaphorically, had lost everything she had. Her husband, children, social filiations became ignorant about her and never tried to persuade her to make a new start. Now she was supplanted as a wife, mother, and all other entitlements. Leila also wonders what wrong has she done? She never burdened her husband with economic worries and never acted disloyal to her husband yet she could not save her life from disaster. Becky intentionally broke down her marital life due to the increased economic insecurity. Interestingly, Piercy focuses on how a woman is identified only in relation to the male. She is looked at with misery and ill omen, and the other women maintain a distance from her as if she carries contagious diseases. Susan Bordo argues that the tacit acceptance of exploitation by the female conjoined with the faith that she is meant to be tortured is the root cause of much of the problem:

My point here, if it requires saying, is not to accuse all men of being potential rapists and wife-batterers; this would be to indulge in a cultural mythology about men as pernicious as the sexual temptress myths about women. Rather, my aim is to demonstrate the continuing historical power and pervasiveness of certain cultural images and ideology to which not just men but also women (since we live in this culture, too) are vulnerable. Women and girls frequently internalize this ideology, holding themselves to blame for unwanted advances and sexual assaults (Bordo, "Unbearable Weight, Feminism, Western Culture and the Body" 7-8).

Not only females like Mary and Becky are forced to endure the materialistic aspirations of society, yet Mary's daughter Cindy likewise gripes the unnoticed weight of the wedded life and denies to spare some time for her mother. It appears that human life has been gripped by some materialistic monster that has plundered all the moral, affectionate values of society and has left individuals infertile of spiritual deeds. On the other hand, Leila's son embarks on the assignment of satisfying his young lady companion and does not want his mother to meddle in his personal dealings and furthermore reprimands his mother for not having the option to deal with the turmoil of her married life. Women are less blessed in light of the fact that society does not endorse their value as practical members of the family like males. Cindy's father, who has cheated on his wife for another woman, obliges his daughter's desires and the former remunerates her delicacy by satisfying him as a dedicated daughter.

To fit in the established norms of society, women are obsessed with a desire to please their men. They are so much in trouble under the masculine gaze that they start endorsing the masculine cultural values and become more conscious about the defilement of their bodies and there occurs guilt within their minds which leads to their subordination. Susan Bordo writes:

This guilt festers into unease with our femaleness, shame over our bodies, and self loathing. For example, anorexia nervosa, which often manifests itself after an episode of sexual abuse or humiliation, can be seen as at least in part a defense against the "femaleness" of the body

and a punishment of its desires. Those desires (as I argue in “Hunger as Ideology”) have frequently been culturally represented through the metaphor of female appetite. The extremes to which the anorexic takes the denial of appetite (that is, to the point of starvation) suggest the dualistic nature of her construction of her reality: either she transcends body totally, becoming pure “male” will, or she capitulates utterly to the degraded female body and its disgusting hungers. She sees no other possibilities, no middle ground (8).

Marian in *The Edible Woman* turns anorexic and her fetishism and over-possessiveness about her body are symptomatic of her grieving soul. She is an utterly restless woman and the denial of appetite aggravates her restlessness. For her, the body is the mechanism of persecution and she pledges to starve in order to free herself from the substantial subservience. Marian feels attracted to Duncan who treats her in an impartial manner and regards female pride whereas for her fiancé Peter she is nothing more than a source of physical delight. Subsequently, so as to challenge Peter's predominance, she dates Duncan and feels eased to dump Peter which for Marian is upright retaliation for her domineering fiancé. Peter eschews any discussion on the topic of marriage since he believes that marriage cripples the male by burdening him with unnecessary filiations. “By virtue of her sex, she represents the temptations of the flesh and the source of man's moral downfall. By virtue of her race she is instinctual animal, undeserving of privacy and undemanding of respect” (11). Interestingly, penance is considered to be a panacea for treating female ailments, especially that of hysteria. Hysteria in males is compared to upheavals of mood swings and is regularly identified with the financial weights laid on them by the female. Evidently, for males, hysteria is not a natural ailment whereas hysteria is thought to be a natural characteristic of the female; an inborn malady.

Leila's mother is in a lesbian relationship and announces her success in a homosexual love bond. Nick, Leila's husband, time and again, reaffirms his faith in heterosexuality by showing abhorrence and contempt for homosexuality. The general tone that suffuses Piercy and Atwood's books is



female egotism which is seriously condemned by the male-driven society. Piercy and Atwood appear to take a shot at the theme of becoming a woman; a maturation process dealing with self-identification. Piercy's characters are more adaptable and idealistic than Atwood however her characters do not wind up as non-contradictory and settled identities. A component of other-worldliness heats up the expectation for extended awareness and a brilliant future. The two writers obliterate the hypothesis underlying the necessity to entice men through feminine charms and even challenge the male hegemony through the manifestation of successful homosexual bonds in their books. At the surface level, it may appear that Piercy and Atwood seem to convey that for females to obtain consummation, one incredible alternate way is to live without men however, it is a narrow and one-sided observation of their writing because deep scrutiny of the books will demonstrate that the absence of men has never remained the cherished goal of the two writers, rather they believe in a matured, interactional, and positive relationship between the two.

Foucault has discussed elaborately on the topic of body politics, in general, not from the office of gendered subjectivity as one would casually assume. According to him, there are certain misinterpretations associated with the term body politics. In his *Discipline and Punish* (1995) he argues “One would be concerned with the ‘bodypolitics’, as a set of material elements and techniques that serve as weapons, relays, communication routes and supports for the power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subjugate by turning them into objects of knowledge” (28). The body is trapped in the techniques of punishment and it reciprocates to the practices of social norms that seize the body to obtain political autonomy over other bodies. Foucault posits that there is another side to this condemned and chained corporal body to which he denotes the term “non-corporal” or “soul”. This ‘soul’ rises from the history of punishment and the institutions of power of a society. Foucault calls it “surplus power” (29) that is, exercised by the powerful over the underlying structures of society. This ‘surplus power’ is not fiction but it is real and it assumes full potential after it embodies the corporal body:

Rather than seeing this soul as the reactivated remnants of an ideology, one would see it as the present correlative of a certain technology of power over the body. It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary, it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished ... on those on supervises, trains and corrects, over madmen, children at home and at school, the colonized, over those who are stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives (29).

The guilt complex among the female enforces a craving for self-punishment that helps gratifying the need of the conscience. Marian's obsessed concerns for her body drives her crazy to the degree that she denies nourishing her body which subsequently leads to the downfall of her cogent thinking capacities. Susan Bordo (1993) opines "The body as animal, as appetite, as deceiver, as prison of the soul and confounder of its projects: these are common images within Western philosophy" (3).

However, Piercy's homosexual talk can be associated with Butler's hypothesis of a strange phallus. For Butler, the real contention was never supreme phallus, but a lesbian phallus. Versed in the psychoanalytic hypothesis, Butler in the mid-1990s contended for something like a phallus in lesbian want and sexual practice. Based on the psychoanalytic differentiation between phallus and penis, Butler points to the activity of the phallus through the notion of sexuality without a penis. De Lauretis supplanted Butler's term lesbian phallus with the word fetish to extinguish the further risk of externalisation. The phallus, for de Lauretis, is a signifier of want, yet when she needs a signifier of illogical longings, that is, a mysterious phallus, she inclines toward not to utilise the expression phallus since it is not isolated from the penis. Rather, she uses the term fetishism, another psychoanalytic term, in spite of her mindfulness that this term has its own disadvantages. Eroticism is the standard theology for the supporters of homosexuality who proclaim the distinction between the two categories, i.e., masculine and feminine as vital and subjected to phallic, autonomy.

Piercy's eagerness to exhibit lesbian relationships through her female characters posits a challenge to the male-ruled phallus and relate it with Butler's 'lesbian phallus'. Butler bases her commitment to the hypothesis of the phallus on Lacan's declaration that the phallus is not the penis. She at that point proceeds to set that the phallus is displaceable, and can exert its authority over the demeaned sex, the phallus has outreached biological significance and thus its mammoth presence dominates the submissive female organ. This feature of transference of power has invoked a new hope for the lesbian phallus. While Butler cautiously demonstrates that the phallus in Lacan is displaceable, transferable, portable, and liable to transgression.

Butler's lesbian phallus is different from the Lacanian theory of male-phallus. The lesbian phallus is a transgressor for Lacan, an intruder in the psychoanalytic hypothesis of the phallus. Butler's lesbian phallus mediation is less expected, however, it at that point continues to display its power in offering pleasure to a woman, working its lesbian temptation. It is much the same as somebody without a penis may gratify a female's physical needs, or provide sexual delight to a woman. As indicated by the male polemics, Butler's phallus is unnatural, eccentric because it is lesbian and has no place in the natural order of things. Butler in *Bodies That Matter* (2011) writes:

...the phallus as transferable or plastic property, is to destabilize the distinction between *being* and *having* the phallus, and to suggest that a logic of non-contradiction does not necessarily hold between those two positions. In effect, "having" is a symbolical position which, for Lacan, institutes the masculine position within a heterosexual matrix, and which presumes an idealized relation of property which is then only partially and vainly approximated by those marked masculine beings who vainly and partially occupy that position within language (33).

The French poststructuralist hypothesis has focused much on body matters. The explanation behind the transcendence of this thought is that it is significantly connected to the theory of deconstruction promulgated by the poststructuralist thinkers as a challenge to the norms of standardised and rigid patterns of the constructed realities. However, the classical system of thought adheres to the

values embracing dualistic categorisation of gendered identities, the poststructuralists construct antagonistic practices and divide it into two sections: 1) the reversal of various standardised patterns, for example, the resistances between reasoned and unreasonable and 2) deconstructing what are held to be fundamentally unrelated components of the hierarchal binaries and exhibit interpersonal relations between them. The key ramification of western philosophy is woven around the Cartesian rationale setting a sharp contrast between body and mind. Mind rationalises the body and the male as a rational being proffers relevance to the naturally ruthless femininity.

The body needs to be tamed as well as trained to rationalise and discipline the unruly physical force. However, the two contrastive terms *tamed* and *trained* (my italics) are extremely critical for this conversation. If patriarchal vehemence is focused on the taming of the feminine body; Foucauldian trained bodies posit an open challenge to taming bodies with his theory of training bodies. Additionally, Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity adds fuel to Foucault's attestation because Butler's insistence on performance annihilates all claims of binary division theories. Her theory of the lesbian phallus is a derivation from the idea of gender performance and lesbian phallus stands in complete retaliation to the dominance of masculine phallic authority. Patriarchy extracts power from classical dualistic patterns that situate the subject, i.e., male, at the centre and woman is always peripheral; an essentially unruly body who needs to stay in magnetic touch with the male. "What overhangs human existence is this conclusion and this order from which nothing escapes. This presence that threatens even within this world is a fleshless one" (Foucault, "Madness and Civilization" 15).

In this chapter, I accounted for various experiences depicting strategically the channel of construction and deconstruction of identities. It is discussed how the impact of power is profoundly imbricate in the psyche of both genders and how Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood struggled to reveal the functioning and utilisation of power. The indoctrination of futuristic possibilities as advanced by the two writers is a certified endeavour to redeem femininity from the anathematisation of the body matters. The criticism of over

veneration of maternal values, social inequity, workplace discrimination, female homelessness, extramarital affairs, financial dependence, material exploitation, hysteric perversions, and quite significantly gerontology are major discursive elements of the two novels. Our experiences, interaction, and performances all are executed primarily through our bodies. The poststructuralists do neither exaggerate the significance of sexed bodies nor do they underrate its workability, rather they insist that bodies can be utilised to maximise opportunities for the growth of one's life, however, the freedom to act is not absolute instead it is relationally restrictive.

## Chapter 6

### **Dialectics of Utopia/ Dystopia and the Heterotopias in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Woman on the Edge of Time***

Dystopias depict male-centric oppressed regimes wherein the law of the land is dominated by the ruthless treatment of the weaker sections especially the female and the old age people and is characterised by racism, discrimination, and degenerate social administration. The omnipresent and abstract domination of the patriarchal standards has given rise to a sense of misogyny among the male members. The task of the feminist critic is crucial because the critic has to highlight the uneven distribution of rights and opportunities between the two sexes. Voyaging through the literary studies of the 1960s and 70s one can markedly notice an upsurge in the female authorship laying much emphasis on the legislative issues and power struggle between the two sexes.

This renewed interest originated through the active participation of the female in global politics. The discussions on utopia, dystopia and speculative fiction emerged as a fast-developing trend during the second half of the twentieth century with an impetus to scrutinise the hybrid possibilities for survival by excavating new spatial opportunities for all kinds of gendered identities. Speculative fiction is the meeting point of utopian and dystopian fiction and it has become quite popular with the writers who in the beginning had preferred to study and analyse utopia and dystopia as reverse and distinct domains of existence.

A never-ending quest to achieve sexual independence has haunted female society under an authoritative male-centric culture. The women during the second half of the twentieth century endeavoured to design their own individual characteristics of sexuality amidst steady criticism from hierarchal generalisations and textual representations of females as the secondary self. The transformation, specifically in women's consciousness, is thought to have started with Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) that reciprocated a new role for the woman which was independent of the stress of motherhood. Before the newly designed idea of sexual independence could catch momentum, the spread of AIDS

accentuated the need for constraining the open sex culture. In a way, it led to the re-establishment of gendered hierarchal roles for both sexes. The patriarchal values received a setback from the threat of sexual autonomy which may undermine long-held and affixed normative values proposed in the favour of masculine society thus clusters of powerful elite classes united and utilised their political capacities to hinder the growth of the open sex culture. The intrigue was designed to regain control over sexual relations and subjugate genders for decades to come. Additionally, the financial downturn of the 1980s, however, was liable for the advancement of profanity and pornographic trends among the general masses. Due to the extension of sexual freedom individuals had begun spending less on the objects of delight and the luxury industry received a setback, to restore their industrialist advantages, the exclusive classes, bolstered by government officials, protested for a prohibition on sexual independence.

The development of a free enterprise is connected to the exploitation of people and we can well figure out why government officials would intensely restrict any extension or continuation of sexual freedom. However ironic but is true that for the economy to succeed common masses should be miserable and by restraining sexual autonomy capitalists could fulfil their desired practices. Therefore, the bureaucracy contested against the open sex culture to recover both social and financial control in both the countries, i.e., the United States of America and the neighbouring country, Canada. This is the explanation of the effect of the social and economic struggle of the female that is broadly detectable in the fiction of Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood. Women activists felt a need to confront the bewildering dominance of the capitalistic and patriarchal standards and endeavoured to discover approaches to deconstruct power structures.

Judith Butler's hypothesis on the falsity of gendered constructions nails the argument that the construction of gendered identity is plotted by the male-centric society to preserve their traditional status of prominence in society. Butler deals in detail with the problem of differentiation between social and sexual gendered identity. In *Undoing Gender*, Butler revises her idea of performativity in light of the fact that there are certain negative effects of gender performance hence an act of performance is always construed in concurrence with the effect on the other so

performance may become a liability and delimit the individual freedom to act in a most personal way if there is any! Butler's revision of performativity brings us back to the point of contention between individual desire and the existence of the other. We as social beings live in a relational space. The acknowledgment of a distinguishing space between one another is significant to acclimatise oneself in relation to the other. Foucault argues that a desire for speculative existence is an endeavour to deal with the external reality. That is the reason the postmodern feminist critics exhibit interest in Foucault's revised views about the construction of identities wherein he condemns the fixed, permanent, eternal, and essentialist understanding of gendered identities. Foucault denotes the term *heterotopias* that discredit and deconstruct the notion of stable identities:

...on 'emplacement' as a set of spatial and temporal coordinates, he shows an interest in space, not only as an alternative to history, but also as its complement and corrective ... Foucault's vision of space had nothing to do with any kind of spirit of time' generalizations but was instead a microphysics of power, the very means that allows history to develop through 'implications and insights concerning spatiality' (Palladino 14).

Speculative fiction has emerged as a contemporary genre adopted specifically by the new age feminists to vocalise the cause of feminist discourse. Invariably the science fiction genre withholds a hypothetical ground from which emanates several aligned ideologies representing manifold layers of the social consciousness. Science fiction has promulgated deep affinities with dystopian and utopian forms of writing. Merja Makinen in her book *Feminist Popular Fiction* (2001) theorises that the science fiction genre in the 1970s and 90s broadcasted various discussions on feminist issues on certain themes ranging "from ideal feminist communities, to the phallogocentric dystopias; from explorations of the alien 'other', to questions of identity with the cyborg" (129).

In Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* and Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, occur a perceptible sense of insecurity hence the female figures from the two books feature a similar kind of dread hovering over their mind, i.e., the dread of being disregarded accompanied by a sense of dejection. Offred and Connie both realise that they do not seem to have control over their lives and both lack a sense



of belongingness. This perturbed state of mind is the chief feature of postmodern life. The two protagonists closely examine their bodies and realise that their confiscated and fleshly presence has made them subservient to the substantial needs of society. Connie is both bodily and psychically tortured by her niece's pimp and the infirmary staff. She assumes that her physical delicacy is responsible for her regrettable state whilst Offred and other women like her are all treated only as fleshed entities.

The handmaids are made to accept that they are truly engaged until they have fertile wombs and as long as they can assist with expanding the Gilead populace; they will be credited with much regard. "But she'll never be sent to the Colonies, she'll never be declared Unwoman. That is her reward" (Atwood, "The Handmaid's Tale" 95). Offred reflects on her present state and is baffled to decide whether her present life is a benediction or a curse. Looking beyond Gilead's life, she feels panicked to envision the predicament of women who are slaughtered and assaulted in this manner she feels euphoric to be a piece of the Gilead community. Aunt Lydia, her chief instructor and supposedly a stout legal representative of the Puritan community endeavours to instil a reverence for the Gilead values among the women section of society which makes Offred believe "I am alive, I live, I breathe, I put my hand out, unfolded, into the sunlight. Where I am is not a prison, but a privilege..." (13). However, during profound monologues, she considers her incredible and pointless existence as she is expected to be nothing more than a swollen womb. "I am the outside woman. It's my job to provide what is otherwise lacking. Even the Scrabble" (121).

Foucault's use of the term *Panopticum* (14 Palladino) which was originally coined by Jeremy Bentham in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, seems to be quite useful in the context of *The Handmaid's Tale* as Miller correlates Foucault's use of the term *Panopticum* in understanding the network of power structures. "Finally *Panopticum* is the perfect synopsis of a hermeneutic system and its presuppositions ... seeing that an actual place, an architectural product, with all its planning implications, is both the form and instrument of the dynamics of repression and control" (14). And interestingly Foucault's concept of *heterotopias* is connected with the idea of *panopticum* with the exception that heterotopias offer a free,

unrelated idea of existence. *Panopticum* is a space inside a space; an enveloping space, similar to that of Gilead in the Puritan system. Connie's Mattapoissett from the Foucauldian viewpoint can be deciphered as a free reality, an image of the heterotopic vision of life in which people meet and isolate and don't infringe upon others' freedom and refute all bogus claims of precedence. In Mattapoissett people can change their names or put it more simply, they can change their identities, and children are fed and nurtured by several mothers. To Connie's investigative queries about naming culture in Mattapoissett, Jackrabbit responds about the selection of his name "It was the name chosen for me. When I came to naming, I took my own name ... I became Jackrabbit you see ... I will change my name again" (Piercy, "Woman on the Edge of Time" 72). Judith Butler has researched a great deal on the queer nature of identities as a part of her endeavour to demolish the traditional set of rules mandated for the prescription of gender roles.

Initially, the word queer was invoked to deconstruct the claims of universal heterosexuality and the term was quite flexible and fluid in nature. In the present scenario, queering the rigid identities has become a heated topic for debate amidst scholarly groups. Critics, like Judith Butler, has oriented the discussion toward a new field that is a queer space or a utopian land where the rigid norms of universal heterosexuality do not perpetuate. This is equally true that queer identities or queer status in society are not widely acceptable or socially identifiable. Thus, instead of using the term queer utopia, the writers and critics have embraced the Foucauldian term the heterotopias and associate it with queer patterns of sexual life that is broadly depicted in Connie's Mattapoissett:

The tree became a human couple embracing, man and woman. They clutched, they embraced, they wrestled, they strangled each other. Finally, they passed into and through each other. Two androgynes stood: one lithe with black skin and blue eyes and red hair, who bent down to touch with her/his hand wide to the trees and sky the earth; the other, stocky with light brown skin and black hair and brown eyes, spread his/her arms wide to the trees and sky and a hawk perched on the wrist (175).

Within a heterosexual society, there is no opportunity or a free play of sexual relations and no one is allowed to perform their sexual role as one's desires, and queer relations

are deemed to be unnatural and malevolent for society. In heterotopias, no one is forced to follow set patterns laid down by the social system and everyone is free to play their sex roles. The queer heterotopias stand in total retaliation with the patriarchal hegemony and render freedom to individuals to derive maximum benefit and pleasure from their inherent attributes. Queer heterotopias evacuate the trepidation of a minimised, subsidised, and regulated gendered existence. Foucault exhibits his dissatisfaction and distrust with the possibility of a utopia since the thought of a utopian society is quite unrealistic.

Human life is complex and suppressive thus in order to counter the suppression and protect the individual sense of freedom, it is pertinent to envision the heterotopic utopias wherein individual bliss is commended and every individual can lead a free and independent life. Butler opines that queering utopia is one step toward the formation of heterotopias which empowers the individuals to realise their utmost desires and most importantly for the accomplishment of a sense of freedom. They always exist in relation to the heteronormative spaces and are shaped by them, however, the queer heterotopias act in opposition to the heteronormative spaces and proffer the alternate spaces where individuals seek to disrupt the heterosexual discourses. Luciente in *Woman on the Edge of Time* is represented neither as a complete man nor a woman. At first sight, Connie is perplexed by his strange demeanour that does not seem to fit in her standardised set of beliefs. But gradually she becomes aware of variations in gender identities in the realm of another world: Mattapoissett. Foucault's hypothesis of the spatial aspect of the heterotopic society is very significant for the reason that it is an area where history, geography, science, and all other discourses merge together to create another worldliness:

...idea of history is dismantled in the background, geography itself becomes a source and an antidote for the immovability of historical or scientific discourse, thanks to its ability for highlighting local variations that reconsider and contradict the continuity and the coherence of these subjects (Palladino 16).

The idea of space is very crucial to understand Foucault's discourse on relations of power. Miller opines "Foucault also has a type of space, where expectations, prohibitions and achrony occur, and space becomes the necessary condition for

power” (16). In both novels, there is a chronological development oriented toward the accomplishment of space. The Handmaids, Econowives, Unwomen, and Marthas from *The Handmaid's Tale* and Connie, Dolly, and a trail of other prosecuted, enslaved hysteric women from *Woman on the Edge of Time* struggle to break the chains concatenated by the patriarchy to dominate their lives. Each individual occupies space and the physical space is controlled by all, i.e., historical, geographical, scientific, socio-cultural, and speculative vision of space. Foucault features the discontinuities existing between these spaces and infers that through the discontinuities, gaps, and fissures in the structure of power relations, additional opportunities of existence occur and homosexuality, transgender and all other unnatural disciplines seep through these fissures and challenge the established rules of society:

According to Foucault, knowledge is actual power, and not just a reflection of the power relations that exist within institutions: for this reason, some aspects of reality may or may not be presented as natural in his proposals, in a context where the basic idea is that power is generally concealed, despite its pervading presence (17).

Our world is constructed in a way that we easily perceive what is presented to us. Reality or determined meanings are served to us just like a fixed menu in an eatery. All institutions of knowledge and governance are constituted for privileging the dominant classes of society. The surfacing of heterotopias features the discontinuities, anomalies that are persistently regulating the order of things. Foucault does not intend to envision the utopic realms of existence in an attempt to escape reality rather he conceptualises space, not as a real, physical space of direct experience; however, a theoretical encounter of discernment that challenges the hegemonic pervasiveness of power. Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood's queer utopian delineations posit a threat to the heteronormative practices formulated by masculinity. The manifestation of queer identities is found in androgynous and transgender relations.

Especially, Piercy's novels are replete with instances of homosexual longings. Her novel *Vida* primarily is centred on the theme of self-centred and narcissistic desires of the female figures. Luciente's hermaphroditic aura and the profound nature of Mattapoissett; a semiotic space, is a direct connotation to the reflections of queer

utopias in postmodern fiction. Judith Butler in her book *Undoing Gender* (2004) asserts:

...individual agency is bound up with social critique and social transformation. One only determines “one’s own” sense of gender to the extent that social norms exist that support and enable that act of claiming gender for oneself. One is dependent on this “outside” to lay claim to what is one’s own. The self must, in this way, be dispossessed in sociality in order to take possession of itself (7).

Butler’s chief argument supports Foucault’s view that identities are relational and distinct at the same time. By relational it means that no individual can claim to live a free life without the interference of the other, however, the relation between the two is complementary and distinctive at the same time. The major focus for the two writers by all accounts is sexual contrast and its negative effect on the female. On account of the female, sexuality is a characterising feature whilst male sexuality is both a possibility and freedom. Piercy’s *Mattapoisett* is devoid of sexual differences that is the reason hermaphrodite Luciente seems to appear to be terrible to Connie from the outset since she is not familiar with this dual and feminine side of a male character:

The face of the young Indio smiling, beckoning, curiously gentle. He lacked the macho presence of men in her own family, nor did he have Claud’s massive strength, or Eddie’s edgy combativeness. His hands as they clasped hers, however, were not soft. Shaking hands? Absurd. Warm, calloused, with a faint chemical odor (Piercy, “Woman on the Edge of Time” 33).

However, with the progression of time, she marvels at the synchronised and free space of *Mattapoisett* and wishes to remain there until the end of time. The problem of sexual difference has remained a primary concern for the second wave feminist movement and Judith Butler as a chief proponent of this movement centred her dialectics around the idea of sexual difference. In *Undoing Gender* (2004) she attests:

As a latecomer to the second wave, I approach feminism with the presumption that no undisputed premises are to be agreed upon in the global context. And so, for practical and political reasons, there is no value to be derived in silencing disputes. The questions are: how best to have them, how most

productively to stage them, and how to act in ways that acknowledge the irreversible complexity of who we are? (176).

The three terms structure Butler's contention in *Undoing Gender*: gender, sexuality, and distinction. These three terms are indistinguishable and relevantly work together to shape our notion of identity. Piercy is often scrutinised for unrealistically propelling her thoughts of freedom by presenting a bisexual figure from a non-existent land. Her work is in some cases considered exceptionally conventional and shallow since it denotes an aggressive move to dispense with sexual contrast which is the foundation of the male authority:

Defenders of sexual difference make dismissive reference to the famous feminine “protest” elaborated by psychoanalysis, and in this way the protest is defeated before it is articulated. To challenge the notion of femininity is the consummately feminine act, a protest that can be read as evidence for that which it seeks to contest. Sexual difference-is it to be thought of as a framework by which we are defeated in advance? Anything that might be said against it is oblique proof that it structures what we say (177).

Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood have appeared as the two prominent writers of the science fiction genre of contemporary times. Their works exhibit the possibility of spawning new forms of political and social life and discuss various issues related to gender, class, and identity. Successfully both writers contested the cause of female writing by breaking away from the myth of the stereotypical subject matter of the feminine writers. Merja Makinen further elaborates on the contribution of the science fiction genre to that of feminism:

By the end of the 1970s, feminist criticism had moved from its initial criticism of the sexism in mainstream sf, to rediscover women's presence in the history of the genre and to welcome the feminist appropriations of the 1970s with an awareness of sf's subversive potential and its ability to envision a feminine experience, both in its representations and its discourse (139).

In this chapter, the emphasis will not only be laid on evidencing the usability and viability of the two terms, i.e., utopia and dystopia but also on how the science fiction genre has potentially widened the scope of the writers in portraying the experiences central to the feminine and masculine attributes of identity. The dialectics centring on

utopian/dystopian settings will further be investigated and mediated through the Foucauldian term the *heterotopia* discussed in his 1989 book *The Order of Things*. The *heterotopia* dwells in the space or one must say may be situated between the contrasting worlds of utopia and dystopia. “Utopia is a place where everything is good; dystopia is a place where everything is bad; heterotopias is where things are different—that is, a collection whose members have few or no intelligible connections with one another” (Mead 13).

The female figures in Atwood’s novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* do not belong to anything and do not have any place to go and quite similar to this, Connie Ramos meanders on the wings of poesy and steps in an outsider land inhabited by the individuals who live freely and are not prejudiced on the basis of their gendered identities. Connie feels light as though she is a pixie and Luciente introduces her to a society where nothing exists in binaries and each individual appreciates a freed existence.

Likewise, Foucault’s heterotopia is a place where no intelligible connections are formed between groups of people. This lack of connectedness is the chief characteristic of postmodern existence. In the heterotopic vision of a society, no relationships are sought and the idealism established by primitive cultural and ethnic social groups meets a backlash. Russell Mead writes about the postmodern condition. “The hottest debate left seems to be about whether where we is a good place to be: whether our heterotopias is a utopia or a dystopia” (15). However, the reflections of utopian and dystopian society are not envisioned exclusively by the female society; it is more of a universal condition and can be termed as an outcome of the postmodern identity crisis.

Close analysis and comparison of the three terms, i.e., utopia, dystopia, and heterotopias perpetuate that the heterotopias are more realistic than the two stated realms. Utopia and dystopia despite being contradictory terms are complex and somehow unrealistic. If utopia promises an idealistic and faultless society then dystopia presents a hapless state of existence. Foucault has astutely endeavoured to bring in an interceding state, i.e., the heterotopias. Strikingly Foucault’s reasonable comprehension of the term heterotopias has a close association with the hypothesis of social realism which is based on the relationships of cultural productivity. The

Foucauldian insightful replication of the airport culture, free trade, socio-cultural affiliations completely identify with his hypothesis of heterotopias. In heterotopias there is an equal opportunity for each individual to reach his/her maximum enterprise and this aspect of Foucault's argument is embraced by the postmodern feminist critics who were by now caught in the dilemma of envisioning a utopian or dystopian social existence:

...we live in a heterotopia-an airport ... The differences between the passengers in an airport do not rub on; the devout Muslim woman visiting relatives is not much affected by the fashion model next to her, who is flying off to Tokyo for a shoot. As a heterotopia, an airport is a place where differences does not really make much difference; thesis and anti-thesis run side by side, and there are no syntheses to be seen or had (14).

Undoubtedly, the fusion of utopian and dystopian forms of writing opens up new vistas of knowledge and offers a wide range of possibilities of comparison and contrast to feminist criticism. Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood's novels *Women on the Edge of Time* (1976) and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) represent the utopian and dystopian world vision and sharply criticise the traditional version of female experience especially that of motherhood. This chapter will closely scrutinise the two above-mentioned novels by two distinguished writers of the contemporary literary world.

Two contrasting worlds clash in the specific novels of Margaret Atwood and Marge Piercy respectively. However, Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* depicts the reverse side of a utopian society that is marred by violence, execution, and butchery forced upon both genders. A dystopian setting represents a phantom world inflicted with terrorism, coercion, and omnipotent intimidation. Michael Gordin, Hellen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash in their combined venture *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility* (2010) rectify the earlier errors in classification of the two genres as extreme opposites to each other and argue that it may be erroneous to state and compare utopia and dystopia as the extreme opposites:

Every utopia always comes with its dystopia-whether the dystopia of the status quo, which the utopia is engineered to address, or a dystopia found in the way this specific utopia corrupts itself in practice. Yet a dystopia does not



have to be exactly a utopia inverted. In a universe subjected to increasing entropy, one finds there are many more ways for panning to go wrong than to go right, more ways to generate dystopia than utopia (Gordin et al. 2).

However, in the depiction of a dystopian society, there is a considerable difference between appearance and reality. What seems to exist on the surface turns out to be fallacious at the end of the tale. However, both dystopia and utopia exhibit a tendency to “seek to reimagine their present and transform it into a plausible future” (2).

Realistically, the heterotopias can be conceived as a provider of equal opportunities to all sexes; open space for the social, psychical, and cultural development of every individual. In her 1962 novel *Memoirs of a Space Woman*, Naomi Mitchison recounts the experiences of a female protagonist who is a biologist by profession and conducts research on her own body to find new ways in the field of reproduction that may help the female to get rid of the stereotypical process of childbirth. From here begins the trend of a new style of writing that was based on the freedom of expression and also an insurgent cry for the rehabilitation of the female voice. Shulamith Firestone in her 1971 book entitled *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* argues that technology is equipped with the right amount of knowledge and resources that may demonetise the authorial control of the patriarchy over the female regime and empower her by granting personal freedom.

In *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (1983) it is stated that for Foucault “sexuality is a historical construct, not an underlying biological referent. He disputes the widely accepted notion of sex as the underlying essence, as an archaic drive...” (Dreyfus and Paul 168). A chief argument of both Butler and Foucault is oriented toward a discussion about the body as a historical but ever-developing entity. Bodies are structurally constructed to maintain equilibrium in the socially ordered relations of power. Foucault attests that the body as a politically engraved system of knowledge received a meaningful contour only during the nineteenth century before that body was considered nothing more than a piece of flesh; an unleashed animal.

Science fiction emerged as a specific genre that deals with the scientific investigation and genealogical comprehension of the structure of the body. Various themes like genetic engineering, pastiche, revolutionary reproduction practices are

connected with the postmodern hermeneutics of the body as a science; a repertoire of immense possibilities. Marge Piercy in her novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* shows a profound enthusiasm in the futuristic scope for the advancement in the field of knowledge that might redeem female from the burden of a sole carrier of the womb; she envisions a society in which both sexes are capacitated to reproduce that is the reason she presents Mattapoissett as a land of immense possibilities wherein both sexes are equipped with the capacity to give birth. The incubation can take place outside the womb of the mother and the progression of innovation will help in recovering the female from reallocated patterns and confiscated entanglement with binaries and gender stereotypes. However, Connie is not an ardent receptive of the idea of the male giving birth to the child:

She felt angry. Yes, how dare any man share that pleasure these women thought they had won, but they had abandoned to men the last refuge of women. What was special about being a woman here? They had given it all up, they had let men steal from them the last remnants of ancient power, those sealed in blood and milk (Piercy, “Woman on the Edge of Time” 128).

Science fiction delivers a sense of freedom and allows fluidity of expression to the women writing. A renewed interest in exploring the undiscovered possibilities for female literature led the female writers towards science fiction. As a predecessor to Peter Fitting’s assertion in his 1985 article concerning the reversal of reproduction process and the possibility of the male progeny, Marge Piercy in her novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) transports the reader to a far-fetched utopian world of immense possibilities that otherwise remain absent even from human imagination.

*Woman on the Edge of Time* revolves around the chief character Connie Ramos, an American woman in her mid-thirties during the 1970s. Connie Ramos like Atwood’s protagonist Offred from the novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* is separated from her daughter and both the women feel alienated from their surroundings. Connie had earlier been charged for accusing and maltreating her daughter and that is the reason her daughter has been taken away from her. Connie, at the beginning of the novel, is shown as a tender woman who is impoverished both financially and physically. She is bullied by her niece’s pimp cum boyfriend while she struggles to protect her niece from him. Her attacker traps her in a false accusation and forcibly admits her to a

mental hospital where she is imprisoned like a mentally retarded child. She repeatedly tries to reveal her sorry tale by narrating the actual encounter that took place between her and her niece's boyfriend, but everything seems to fall on deaf ears.

It is further revealed that it is the same mental hospital where she was admitted for abusing her only daughter Angelina and was diagnosed with acute depression. Connie Ramos after her husband's death had started galloping gallons of alcohol and in a fit of intoxication mistreated her daughter and as a result, she lost custody of her only child. Having lost her daughter, Connie Ramos finds purpose in taking care of her brother's daughter, but she also turns her back on her, and Connie is left alone to suffer the pangs of loneliness. She fails to find any relief hereafter her admittance to the infirmary doctors plan to experiment on her body by inserting an electronic device in her brain in order to monitor the hysteric impulses of her neural activity:

She could feel the pressure, she could feel the bone giving way, she could hear the drill entering ... They were dyeing her and she was dying ... Next they fitted a machine over her, what they referred to as a stereotactic machine, and they pounded it into her head with sharp metal pins ... How wonderful that they did not simply use a great big can opener and take off the top of her skull and scrape out the brains with a spoon. Some people ate brains ... They had a dummy second machine, like the one sitting on her skull squatting like a mosquito about to draw blood, and they were fiddling with the dummy (275-76).

During her tormented stay in the hospital, Luciente, an alien figure from the year 2137 tries to establish contact with her. Luciente tells her that Connie has the ability to establish contact with the other world through the medium of an alien body. Connie develops a mental/virtual connection with future time and space and frequently dangles between her present time of the 1970s and the future time of the year 2137. At first, Connie is shocked to witness the unearthly existence in the alien land of Mattapoissett; it is a town where everyone looks similar in physical profile and no one treats others as inferior or superior. All people look alike and gender differences do not exist at all. At the outset, Connie is awestruck to see that Mattapoissett in the year 2137 is free from utilitarian, authoritarian, and materialistic values and she draws a

comparison between the earthly existence that is dominantly afflicted with the above-mentioned values, and the free state of Mattapoissett. As a spokesperson of the earth and biased femininity, she loathes the site of men who have swollen bellies and are awaiting the birth of their child and she abhors the females who indulge in the activities that [as a rule of her land, i.e., her present] are assigned only to the male society. But gradually she develops affinities with the life of Mattapoissett and longs to become a permanent resident of this future land.

In sharp contrast to Piercy's depiction of the utopian world, we come across the dystopian delineation of Atwood's protagonist Offred from her novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. Offred is confined to the Gilead regime of domesticity from where she meditates over her idyllic and pleasant time spent with her family. Now she has become a resourceful womb and is devoid of any love in life. In order to strengthen their community, the Gilead regime is dedicated to the task of increasing the populace. For that matter, they need maximum fertile wombs and Offred is also one of them. Offred is not ashamed of her capacity to procreate rather she finds a sea of immense possibilities through her bodily procurement. "Then I find I'm not ashamed after all. I enjoy the power; power of a dog bone, passive but there" (Atwood, "The Handmaid's Tale" 24). Sarah LeFanu theorises dystopias depict women bewildered through their sex, their femininity, and transport them from subjecthood to sheer body matters.

In Foucault's 1980 article "Truth and Power" included in his *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* we discover a reference to *Gulag* (111); a government organisation managed by Vladimir Lenin in which the labourers had to work for over fourteen hours every day and it was an orchestrated oppression camp in which political defaulters, hoodlums were shipped from various parts of the nation to serve the exclusive classes. A close examination of *Gulag* society obviously uncovers a comparable example of dominance and persecution that is employed by the puritan idealism in *The Handmaid's Tale* with the main exemption that the inhabitants of *Gulag* are primarily male and exploited physically while in Gilead the women are persecuted and silenced, and unlike the workers of *Gulag*, are abused sexually.

Foucault argues that the intensity of *Gulag* is inescapable; it operates everywhere, in all social groups and circles. “The *Gulag* is not a residue or a sequel of the past: it is a positive present” (136). In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Offred’s sporadic clairvoyant moorings and rambling endeavours to break her silence is symptomatic of anticipating an opportunity to detonate. A veiled woman, Offred, with time, figures out how to acknowledge her current state but also intrigues about devising new opportunities to obtain the position of an empowered woman like that of the aunts in the book. She endeavours to create a utopia of her own fancies and realises that it is all state of the mind that creates its own reality.

Foucault conjectures that power is ever-moving and cannot be contained; it is like the progression of time and slippage of the sand “We must open our eyes on the contrary to what enables people there, on the spot, to resist the Gulag, what makes it intolerable for them, and what can give the people of the anti-Gulag the courage to stand up and die in order to be able to utter a word or a poem” (136). Foucault has much to say about *plebs* forming the network of power. Unequivocally it is accepted that the nucleus of power lies in the grip of the elite classes of society however the execution of power depends on the common class of society that is plebs that give shape to the institution of power. An analysis of power relations discloses that plebs too constitute the networks of power; the pickets, strikes, and mass agitations all are examples of such networks and in Atwood’s novel Offred is searching for such a congregational occasion wherein she might have the option to withdraw herself from the absolutist system of Gilead community. Foucault theorises in detail about the network of power relations within all spheres of human life which exists in the form of conceptual power.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, one critical part of the Gilead authoritarian system is its prejudiced socio-political understanding of the female that is additionally cemented through sexual exploitation of females through the promulgation of male-centric values in society. Sexual freedom is denied to the female and even male members like that of Captain and Angels have to follow the set patterns of sexual practices laid down by the puritan social order. However, Offred satiates her conscience by assuming that she can enjoy sexual freedom through Commander who completely is subservient to her for proving his masculine worth. As typical sex

workers, men are trained to play their part in multiplying the receding populace of Gilead, and women are served to them like tasteless dishes; the latter is just blank bodies and are forbidden to participate actively in the sexual discourse. Offred conjectures “Something could be exchanged, we thought, some deal made, some trade-off, we still had our bodies. That was our fantasy” (Atwood, “The Handmaid’s Tale” 11). Judith Butler’s understanding of gender stereotypical roles assigned for both sexes is quite significant in this context.

Atwood emphasises how power or the idea of male power undermines females and flummoxes her self-confidence. Butler redefines Michel Foucault’s concept of power by showing the construction of power and manipulation of gender roles in society. She profoundly centres her theory on the domination of power as the catalytic agent giving rise to relations and circumscribing individuals as framed identities. Judith Butler asserts that mindfulness is exceptionally fundamental for the female to get reclamation from the gendered identity. It is pertinent to note that identity is relational and conditional; it is never static and is constructed as well as deconstructed through language. Foucault’s adherence to the idea that law always favours the powerful is perceptible from this context that Gilead’s belief system is arranged around the foundation of standards most appropriate to the conventional vision supporting male progression and widespread heteronormality. The autocratic rule of Gilead is dependent on its suppressive policies as Foucault states in his 1980 *Selected Interviews*:

The state is superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth. True, these networks stand in a conditioning-conditioned relationship to a kind of ‘meta-power’ which is structured essentially round a certain number of great prohibitions can only take hold and secure its footing where it is rooted in a series of multiple and indefinite power relations that supply the necessary basis for the great negative forms of power (Gordon 122).

In this context, the meta-power exists in the form of prevalence and naturalness of heterosexuality, and this relevance of heterosexual relations is embraced by the reproduction process. Gilead like any other lawful society has a backing of power

structures of society. Foucault in his book *The Order of Things* (2002) uses the term *heterotopias* which somehow contradicts the utopian discourse that for Foucault is chimerical:

Utopias afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold; they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy, even then the road to them is chimerical. Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next two and also opposite one another) to 'hold together' (xix).

Piercy's in her novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* endeavours to create equilibrium between the utopian and dystopian vision of society. Connie, a mother combats psychically against the set of characteristics laid out by society as a pre-requisite for the welfare of women race in general. She is deafened by the shrilling voices symptomatic of male dominance and feels helpless and hapless at the same time. Hence, she finds solace in internal moorings and frequently flies to a far-fetched utopian land named Mattapoissett and distances her from the emblematic law of her physical space, and discovers a semiotic space that lends her a voice to exist vocally and freely.

In Foucauldian terms, Mattapoissett may be understood as a heterotopia: an unaffected and stable place where relations do not occur, neither person bind themselves with each other. Importantly, the differences between genders do not exist. Heterotopias are just like airports where people of different genders, classes, races, and age groups meet and separate simultaneously. An airport is a miniature form of heterotopias representing a panorama of various shades of disconnected lives; a cauldron of different shades of life, a conglomeration of thesis and anti-thesis, and approaching toward their destinations.

In Mattapoissett, Connie comes across a society that is completely detached from a wide range of predispositions and contrasts. People meet and separate without any obligation toward each other and the accomplishment of individual euphoria is the preeminent concern. Connie Ramos acknowledges the need for independence and freedom of expression for every woman on the planet and this transformation of thought

in her is brought about through an interaction with the residents of Mattapoisett, especially Luciente and the mothers of an alien land. In Mattapoisett, Connie relishes the sonorous music in celebration of life but on the other hand in her real physical space, she is perturbed by the deafening cries of other women who are tortured only because they posit a threat to the male dominancy. Piercy's world of speculation appears to offer prospects of free land in which the gendered identities acclimatise in a composite entirety. Connie is thrilled to imagine a fantastic and bright future for the upcoming generations like that of Mattapoisett:

A better world for the children-that has always been the fantasy; that however bad things were, they might get better. But if Angelina had a child, and that child a child, this was the world they would finally be born into in five generations: how different was it really from rural Mexico with its dusty villages rubbing their behinds into the dust? (Piercy, "The Longings of Women" 69)

Similarly, for Atwood's protagonist, Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale* the present state is so difficult to endure that she travels through her past to relive good old days spent with her family and delights in the desire for a cheerful future life. She ponders whether her current condition is fortunate or unfortunate since she is mentored by the matured Aunts of Gilead that the outside world is perilous for females and the domesticated walls of the Gilead community can shield all women like her from evil intentions of the male society. In her novel Margaret Atwood, expressively features the issues identified with gerontology precisely in a manner Piercy did in her two books *The Longings of Women* and *Women on the Edge of Time*.

The aligned issues of sexuality and maturing demonstrate that for male society female body is only a wellspring of delight and the matured figures and wilted bodies are suspended from society as occurs in the novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, particularly on account of Offred's mother who was sent to settlements, or a dead zone from where nobody at any point returned. Piercy and Atwood both relate the problem of aging with female servitude. Piercy's close examination of gerontology through Connie from *Woman on the Edge of Time* and Leila Landsman and Mary from *The Longings of Women* can be compared to the portrayal of matured Aunts and Offred's mother in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Caught in the whirlpool of stereotypical thinking, females regard their bodies as nothing more than decrepit and loathsome pieces of flesh. A woman as



long as she is youthful can utilise her body to demonstrate her affinity with the male and win recognition from her male partner. Women like Offred learn to live with the thought of a compromised existence and feel relieved to fantasise that they are precious wombs and their bodies are instruments of power, however, this affirmation is coupled with an intrinsic fear that there is no escape from this system. Offred contemplates:

What I need is perspective. The illusion of depth, created by a frame, the arrangement of shapes on a flat surface. Perspective is necessary. Otherwise there are only two dimensions. Otherwise you live with your face squashed against a wall, everything a huge foreground, of details, of close-ups, hairs, the weave of the bedsheet, the molecules of the face. Your own skin like a map, a diagram of futility, criss-crossed with tiny roads that lead nowhere. Otherwise you live in a moment. Which is not where I want to be (Atwood, "The Handmaid's Tale" 108).

However, both writers incline to use the sci-fi theme to challenge the stereotypical norms of society. Piercy envisions a society in which gender differences and stereotypes do not exist. Science fiction provides suitable measures to figure out how the identity crisis of the female is woven around her body and especially an analysis of female gerontology opens up new vistas of knowledge to the field. Foucault in his book *The History of Sexuality* (1978) contends:

Power is essentially what dictates its law to sex. Which means first of all that sex is placed by the power in a binary system: licit and illicit permitted and forbidden. Secondly, power prescribes an "order" for sex that operates at the same time as a form of intelligibility: sex is to be deciphered on the basis of its relation to the law (83)

It is generally assumed the masculine gaze is designed to pierce the female dignity, dissecting her self-confidence and making her defensive in an encompassing masculine gaze. Likewise, Offred feels humiliated during her encounters with the male members and the masculine gaze seems to tear her body in parts. In essence, the tacit acceptance of masculine hegemony and feminine timidity as naturally formed qualifications are responsible for this state of affairs. Foucault insists that all relations are based on and work through the power structures, and the validity of individuals and machines is established through these structures but he additionally clears that power relations are

never stagnant due to the slippery nature of power and therefore any time victim may become capacitated to play the role of a victimiser. Foucault's argument can well be adjusted in Atwood's portrayal of Aunts and Wives who despite being physically incapacitated can exert their power over the maids and other subservient female ranks. The main objective of the aunts is to indoctrinate puritan values among the female residents of Gilead so that the latter remain loyal toward the standards of Gilead's ethos of morality. Aunt Lydia during one of her preaching sessions states:

Women united for a common end! Helping one another in their daily chores as they walk the path of life together, each performing her appointed task. Why expect one woman to carry out all the functions necessary to the serene running of a household? It isn't reasonable or humane. Your daughters will have greater freedom. We are working towards the goal of a little garden for each one, each one of you ... But we can't be greedy pigs and demand too much before it's ready, now can we? (Atwood, "The Handmaid's Tale" 120-21).

The following statement provides a sharp distinction between two kinds of structures of society: Mattapoisett and Gilead. In Mattapoisett, the burden of mothering is shared by all men and women and both sexes perform parental responsibilities without any gender distinction. Bee, a resident of Mattapoisett, instructs Connie about the Mattapoisettian culture of mothering in the following statement:

It was part of women's long revolution. When we were breaking all the old hierarchies. Finally there was that one thing we had we had to give up too, the only power we ever had, in return for no more power for anyone. The original production: the power to give birth. Cause as long as we were biologically enchained, we'd never be equal. And males never would be humanized to be loving and tender. So we all became mothers. Every child has three. To break the nuclear bonding (Piercy, "Woman on the Edge of Time" 100).

In sharp contrast to protruded wombs in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* exhibits feminine men like Luciente, and Connie's initial introduction of Luciente as a feminine man may be perused as her longing to reciprocate to the call of her animus self. Her desire to communicate with a male may be due to a hysterectomy or from a certain lack of masculine nearness. Her longing for manly presence may have been instigated due to her banishment from the manly regime. Luciente is the symbolic

representation of all fears and oppressed feelings she has long stored in her heart. Peter Fitting argues that utopian fiction:

...goes beyond issues of economic exploitation to show that alienation and domination are embedded in the patriarchal structures of everyday existence ...these works develop new social forms based on equality of the sexes and on alternative forms of love relationships, living patterns, and parenting. Women are in full control of their reproductive functions and there is an acceptance of diverse forms of sexual expression, most particularly of homosexuality (Fitting 158).

Michel Foucault in his *The Order of Things* (2002) opines that in order to assume power and authority one has to be aware of the network of information including the structure of power. The rationale of *mathesis* (79) predominantly establishes the authority of the knowledgeable by a sequential structure of ordering things. *Mathesis* follows the standardised equation of algebra. Michel Foucault uses the term *mathesis* for an ordered system of knowledge. In addition, he mentions the term *taxinomia* (79) which deals with "...the ordering of complex natures (representations in general, as they are given in experience, one has to establish a system of signs" (79-8). Semiotics is a system of signs and symbols that operate through language.

In this way, construction and deconstruction of meanings occur in the semantic domain. Foucault focuses on the hierarchical understanding of power relations and such relations circumscribe the notions of identity formation. Foucault minutely investigates the relationship between *mathesis* and *taxinomia* "... it is clear that the *taxinomia* relates wholly to the *mathesis* ... *mathesis* is only one particular case of *taxinomia* ... *Taxinomia* also implies a certain continuum of things (a non- discontinuity, a plenitude of being) and a certain power of the imagination".

Foucault establishes a link between *mathesis* and *taxinomia* and this connectedness is caught between continuity of *mathesis* and the discontinuity of *taxinomia*. Foucault presents "an analysis of knowledge-an analysis that must show how the hidden (and as it were confused) continuity of being can be reconstituted by means of the temporal connection provided by discontinuous representations" (80). Foucault weaves a model wherein continuity and discontinuity exist together. In a way, he outlines the possibility of disjunction or a fissure imbricate deeply within the knitted

structure of power. The network of power is loosely constructed hence it is never absolute.

Protagonists from the two books *Connie* and *Offred* feel a compulsive need to connect to something more ardent than their fragile body; some invisible force reassuring them that they too belong to something other than their bodily existence. That is the reason *Offred* succumbs to the idea to use her sexuality and more precisely her womb as a tool to earn an exclusive and esteemed status in society whilst *Connie* through her psychological moorings travels to *Mattapoisett* and tries to identify with effeminate *Luciente* and gain control over her perturbed state of mind. *Luciente's* voice is symptomatic of *Connie's* alter ego's yearnings to acquire independence from the oppressive society.

The structured order of knowledge is displayed to disjunction by relating and replacing the present state of *Connie* to the superficial world of discontinuity; *Mattapoisett*: a land of displaced knowledge, a mirror world heterotopia; a nowhere land. According to Foucault "All the modes of domination, submission, and subjugation are ultimately reduced to an effect of obedience" (Foucault, "The History of Sexuality" 85) and the abstract concept of power is not only tempting but all-embracing, and that is the reason both protagonists through their utopian yearnings long to curtail the masculine dominance.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the infertile wombs are transported to the Colonies or a nowhere land from where no woman ever returned! That land is inhabited by Unwomen—a class of women who fail to provide material benefit as assigned by the Gilead regime. Ironically each woman has accredited a rank according to her sexual contribution and obedience toward the system. The established fact that the male administration is most appropriate for the development and progression of any association is the hallmark of patriarchal power structures. Everything in the world is channelled through the power and all efforts are centred around the acquisition of power. Foucault tries to clarify the misunderstandings encircling the concept of power in the following lines:

But the word *power* is apt to lead to a number of misunderstandings—misunderstandings with respect to its nature, its form and its unity. By Power, I do not mean "Power" as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the

subservience of the citizens of a given state. By power, I do not mean, either, a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, has the form of the rule ...power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organisation; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens or reverses them ... forming a chain or a system... (92).

Feminist criticism has focused much on the sheer, unbiased, and univocal experience of femaleness. Elaine Showalter in her article 'Towards a Feminist Poetics' argues that a female network for the investigation of women's literature is strongly felt in modern times and in the absence of such an analysis there may emerge an irrevocable tradition of female subjugation. Showalter intended to convey that the experience of a female towards her femaleness is apparently different from the experience of a male. For centuries female and feminist criticism have relied completely on the male delineation of female experience because the focal point of feminist critics has remained the books and literature written by the male authors based on the experiences of the females. In the 1970s Showalter coined the term gynocriticism which stamps the experience of the female as primary and central. Science fiction has emerged as a tool for the expansion and proliferation of female experience at fictional and non-fictional levels. Breaking away from the norms of traditional roles of femininity, the writers like Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood, through speculative fiction, have revolutionised the sphere of feminist writing.

Piercy in her novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* has attempted to transpose the reader to a genderless society and revolutionised the process of reproduction by granting freedom and power to the female to reproduce outside her body. The female body has remained a fragile and easily assailable target for the male society and the seeds of violence against females are sown at the time of the birth of the female child. In contrast to Piercy's vision of the utopian realm of reproduction possibilities in *Woman on the Edge of Time* stands Atwood's most celebrated yet bleak dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* in which the female is eternally confiscated through the medium of her fragile corporeality. Margaret Atwood depicts how the fertile female body

objectifies the female and transforms her into a senseless machine devoid of any personal affection.

The true meaning of motherhood loses its viability and cognisance under the stark rule of the puritan regime. The two novelists present two different approaches to experience motherhood and femininity. In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Marge Piercy dreams of a society in which there is an abundant possibility of redemption for the female from the politics of binary gender constructions. Piercy revolutionised the cause of motherhood by the introduction of new techniques of child-birth while Atwood's female protagonists suffer the tortures caused by the infertile womb. The relevance and utility of the female in Atwood's world depend on her physiognomy whereas Piercy's female character especially from *Woman on the Edge of Time* comes across a choice of reproduction outside the female body. In Mattapoisett, Piercy introduces the theme of genetic engineering through which the birthing takes place outside the female body. Bee introduces Connie to the mechanism of birthing and tells Connie "Here embryos are growing almost ready to birth. We do that at ninemonth plus two or three weeks" (Piercy, "Woman on the Edge of Time" 97).

Utopia consigns to a fictional space that is more advantageously accommodated than the non-fictional world. Sarah LeFanu recounts the significance of a utopian world by assuming that the foremost significance of an ideal world can particularly be called a productive outcome, perfect society as a fantastical space, an alien land, a domain like the oblivious, in which the unachieved fantasies may prosper and longings are fulfilled. Joanna Russ's arguments stirred the imagination of many female writers including Margaret Atwood, Marge Piercy, Ursula Le Guin, and many others who realised the lack of speculation in the field of female writing and opted for science fiction in order to renew their experiences, especially concerning gender identity.

The second wave of feminism embarked on the futility of a genuine female experience partially dissociated from male sensibility. Sarah LeFanu analyses second wave feminism as an important event for the growth of female society. Peter Fitting in his article "So We All Became Mothers: New Roles for Men in Recent Utopian Fiction" opines:

The first characteristic of this recent utopian writing lies in its differences from older utopias, which include not only the "contents" of the utopia, the changed

sexual and social relations, but also its very form and focus. The influence of feminism, as well as the anti- utopianism of the Cold War period (particularly in the linking of utopian thought with socialism) and the present reality of the existing socialist countries, has produced a shift in utopian writing, away from the older, systematic, planned utopias... (Fitting 157).

Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopias is grounded in his assertion that every life is unique in its own right however this uniqueness is confiscated and dominated by the contextual and circumstantial setting of the subject. The relations of power are hierarchal and are an integral part of our lives:

There is certainly no such thing as 'the' plebs; rather there is, as it were, a certain plebeian quality or aspect ('de la' plebe). There is plebs in bodies, in souls, in individuals, in the proletariat, in the bourgeoisie, but everywhere in the diversity of forms and extensions, of energies and irreducibilities. This measure of plebs is not so much what stands outside relations of power as their limit, their underside, their counter-stroke, that which responds to every advance of power by a movement of disengagement (Foucault, "*Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* 138).

Margaret Atwood portrays a dystopian view of life in her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* surveying the fate of womanhood that is pawned in the hands of a totalitarian regime. In the puritan regime, infertility discredits the status of the female not only on a biological level but also designates her as a socially unwanted creature. Rosemary Sullivan writes about Atwood's writing space. "Margaret Atwood came of age as a writer at a time when the currents of feminism and Canadian nationalism met. She was central to that period in the late sixties and early seventies when Canadian writers established themselves in the national imagination" (Sullivan 59).

The explosion of environmental pollution and degradation of natural resources inspired Margaret Atwood to write about the debilitating effects of pollution on the female reproductive system. Consequently, in 1985, she published her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* to draw the attention of the masses to the most crucial problem of the present time. The looming danger of infertility motivated Atwood to survey the other problems connected with environmental pollution and degradation of the status of not only infertile but also the fertile womb in society. Gilead is a

society in which the merchandise of the female body is the chief occupation of the inmates of the male-centric regime. However, on the surface level, it appears a utopian view as the females are duly protected and respectfully treated by the male community. No one except the Captain of the house is allowed to intrude on the privacy of the maids. Infertile females are excommunicated or sent to the distant colonies to spend their life in social service and the fertile wombs are protected till they spring the fruit from their wombs. However, a closer look unravels the intrigued motifs of the patriarchal regime and the discussion will evaluate how the subjection of women and reproductive practices in Gilead outline and illustrate the plight of women in the male-dominated non-fictional world.

*The Handmaid's Tale* has infertility as its central theme and the novelist never mentions the cause of the expansion of infertility at such a large scale. Probably the indirect allusion to the increase in environmental pollution is the basic reason for this problem. Atwood takes into serious consideration the problem of infertility that is pre-eminently caused by environmental issues:

The air got too full, once, of chemicals, rays, radiation, the water swarmed with toxic molecules, all of that takes years to clean up, and meanwhile they creep into your body, camp out in your fatty cells. Who knows, your very flesh may be polluted, dirty as an oily beach sure death to shore birds and unborn babies... A cradle of life made of bones; and within, hazards, warped proteins, bad crystals jagged as grass. Women took medicines, pills, men sprayed trees, cows ate grass, all that souped-up piss flowed into the rivers. Not to mention the exploding atomic power plants... (Atwood, "The Handmaid's Tale" 85).

The novel describes the totalitarian regime of the Republic of Gilead in which everyone follows the instructions laid down by the Bible and Christianity but ironically the so-called rulers of the puritan governance redraft and amend the rules for their society and dominate immorally over the inmates of the community, especially the female. In order to captivate the female sensibility, they are deprived of the acquisition of education that imparts knowledge. Knowledge for women is regarded as pernicious because it is believed that educated women tend to become non-responsive to their motherly and feminine responsibilities. Gilead community is



driven by the faith that knowledge can corrupt the benign heart of the female that is why women are forbidden to read and write. Women are assigned specific roles associated with domesticity and are conditioned regularly by the elderly maids to follow the instructions laid down by the Gilead with utmost sincerity:

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood creates a society where men are the dominant sex and a cultural system which is patriarchal, rigid, and phallic. A phallic system, according to Jane Gallop, is an inevitable element of the human condition. Chaos and madness would be the result of a non-phallic system. The mistake that culture makes is equating the phallus, a signifier with the penis, a real physical organ thus equating phallic power with male power (Loudermilk 125).

The theme of time and age is artfully dealt with by the novelist. The aging women either are deported to the other land of anonymity or find a place of an elderly patron for controlling and directing the lives of the young maids. Wives enjoy the most favourable position in the household who have been endowed the responsibility to set everything in order. Marthas occupy a lower status than the wives as they function as cooks and housemaids for households. Aunts hold the responsibility to indoctrinate the moral and ethical values among the Handmaids who otherwise may go astray from their *true* (my italics) path. Aunts occasionally show porn documentaries to the Handmaids with an aim of assuring them how secure and free one woman may feel within the precincts of the Gilead regime. Econowives are placed at the lowest level of the hierarchy and they have to perform duties of all kinds and manage with meagre sources. The Handmaids symbolically occupy a most significant place in the hierarchy since those are the women with fertile wombs and their chief duty is to safeguard their health and bear maximum children till their womb soak out the capacity to hold more. The handmaids do not find access to reading material as if a written word may invoke an evil desire in their hearts. "In fact, in a culture where written language is forbidden to women, word becomes more than the *representations* of desire. When the Commander asks Offred to play Scrabble, a language game with me, she remembers that she once found the game boring" (126).

Unwomen suffer derision and humiliation for being infertile and Atwood stringently attacks the objectification of womanhood in a dystopian setting. For

Gilead motherhood is the first and last resort for a woman to impress the male and it is only through fertility she gains the right to enjoy her sense of freedom. The unwomen are sent to an unknown land of terror from where they never return alive. Offred's mother is also sent to the colonies and the former is also awaiting her trial to meet the same fate as her mother. Kim Loudermilk also mentions the categorisation of male tasks and comments that men are also assigned specific tasks in comparison to the female:

Gilead, however, has institutionalized the equation between the penis and the phallus. Men literally rule this world. They run the government, oversee education, and write the law. They have power over every aspect of life, and they have state-sanctioned power to kill. As the Gileadean comes to be defined by her womb, so with the equation of penis and power, men come to be defined by their penises. (125).

Commanders are the most powerful of all the governing male members in the Gilead. The good, heroic men who prove their worth in shaping the fate of the Gilead community are offered the best, fertile maids so that the population of the regime may increase. In a way, women are bartered to the male as a sacrifice for the dutifulness of the latter. The Handmaids are presented as a bounty to physically built chivalrous men as prize money for not only their obedient and humble submission to the community but also for protecting women against sexual invasions from the outer society. Connie's stay in the mental asylum can be compared to the bleak state of affairs of all women ranks in Atwood's novel. Like Offred, Connie foresees no chance of escape from the heterotopias of crisis like the asylum in which:

Most of the women were sitting on the plastic chairs that came in ranks of four against the wall, but there were more women than chairs. Though some were old, some children, some black, some brown, some white, they all looked more or less alike and seemed to wear a common expression (Piercy, "Woman on the Edge of Time" 20).

The entire narrative is told from the perspective of Offred's solitary moorings and repository of tapes and records. The Handmaids are superior to the other maids due to the highest rate of fertility and the former is mated with the Commander only when a wife fails to spring her womb. The Handmaids like other women accept their role

tacitly, and in a way feel superior for their chance of mating with the most potent men of the community. Offred reflects on her role in the household of the Commander:

We are for breeding purposes: 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 flowering of secret lusts; no special favours 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 chalices (Atwood, "The Handmaid's Tale" 146).

The body of the woman redeems her from the pressures of male dominance and the Handmaids think of their bodies as the tools which guarantee their freedom and separate them from the other inferior maids. The fear of losing puberty and aging lurks deep in the mind of all the female residents of Gilead. In Gilead motherhood is suggested as the only medium to lead a solitarily comfortable life and the absence of any love life for the maids is fulfilled by the illegal children begotten as an act of misogyny. The puritan society proclaims their system of discipline as peremptorily justifiable as the system assuredly provides freedom of movement and protection to the female inmates. The men-guards, Angels, and Commanders never lift their eyes to catch the glimpses of the maids and whatever communication is needed takes place in the form of gestures. Atwood satirises Gilead's governance through the portrayal of muted, dumb, mechanised, and puppet-like maids. The indifference seeps through their eyes and the enforced sexual assaults deepen their vacuum to the core. Foucault utilises the term *Panopticon* to consider the directing of the establishment of surveillance and he derived this term from Jeremy Bentham's book *Panopticon* that was published in 1791. In his *Selected Interviews* he composes:

By the term 'panoptism', I have in mind an ensemble of mechanisms brought into play in all the clusters of procedures used by power. *Panoptism* was a technological invention in the order of the power, comparable with the steam engine in the order of production ... This was where the experiment of integral surveillance was carried out (Foucault, "Power/ Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings" 71).

Panopticon was an uncommon kind of jailhouse that worked to watch out for the movements of the convicts without their insight that they are being watched. The architectural plans of the structures were profoundly unpredictable to screen and control even the essential activities of the detainees. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, we run over such kind of unbending cautiousness by the patriarchs and the guardians who have doled out the obligation to keep a vigil over each verbal and non-verbal motion of the female inhabitants, particularly the youthful ones because of their young tempting bodies. The handmaids are confined to divulge their appearances and need to wear long dresses to cover their whole bodies. They resemble strolling mummies. On the other hand, Connie Ramos is admitted to an infirmary which forms a reference to Foucault's depiction of panopticon cells. The doctors are encouraged to utilise their full energies to pull out the concealed pits of mystic disturbance from Connie's brain following an intrigue to additionally cast her out from enlightened society. "She would be a walking monster with a little computer inside and a year's supply of dope to keep her fit" (Piercy, "Woman on the Edge of Time" 276). Law disallows her from meeting her only girl child with a justification that she is a clairvoyant lady along these lines she should be detained until she gains a sense of normalcy.

In his *Selected Interviews* under the title "The Eye of Power" Foucault quotes "With these themes of surveillance, and especially in the schools, it seems that control over sexuality becomes inscribed in architecture" (Foucault, "*Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*" 150). Foucault formulates his analysis of the system of surveillance through the working of power relations. He emphasised two terms: "gaze" and "interiorisation" (154). Power is addressed through gaze, i.e., strict reconnaissance and the addressee internalises that gaze as something pernicious and imposed, yet wanting. "We are talking about two things: the gaze, and internalisation. And isn't it basically the problem of the cost of power? In reality power is exercised at a cost" (154). Gilead community is well aware that females are generally docile, subservient, and above all, sexually innervated. There is hardly any urgency to apply physical force to contain their activity, thus the aunts as assignees, indoctrinate puritanical values among the young women and the strict surveillance of the guards restricts their motions and similar kind of surveillance is directed on the female inmates of the mental asylum in *Women on the Edge of Time* wherein various

experimentation takes place on the female brain to analyse the hysteric jolts of the feminine mind.

Similar to the plight of Offred and other female ranks who tacitly submit to the oppressive practices of the Gilead and mechanically perform through their dutiful wombs, the women patients like Connie too meekly follow the governing principles of mental asylum lest they should be punished. “To keep quiet as you watched them beat other patients. To pretend that the rape in the linen room was a patient’s fantasy” (Piercy, “Woman on the Edge of Time” 188). Foucault dwells on the magnitude of power that is exercised through effortless gaze:

...you have the system of surveillance, which on the contrary involves very little expense. There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously and for that turn out to be a minimal cost (Foucault, “*Power/ Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*” 155).

Atwood expresses the helplessness of Offred in narrating or writing her story. She endeavours to believe that whatever is she experiencing at the moment is all an unreal flight of imagination and if it is real; it is horrifying. She experiences herself as an entity caught between her past and future. She never relishes her present and thus she falsifies every occurrence as imaginary, not real:

I would like to believe this is a story I’m telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance. If it’s a story I’m telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending to the story, and real life will come after it. I can pick up where I left off. It isn’t a story I’m telling it’s also a story I’m telling. 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. But if it’s a story, even in my head, I must be telling it to someone. You don’t tell a story only to yourself. There’s always someone else. Even when there is no one (Atwood, “The Handmaid’s Tale” 36-7).

Offred often marvels at the subservience of the female race and reflects whether each of them must be heaving with the same sense of burden as her? In her silent moorings, she tries to decipher the purpose of her stay within walls of Gilead domesticity and often dreams of an escape and leap towards either an idyllic future of immense possibilities or regression to her pleasant past. Her present traumatises her to the point that she never takes interest in pondering over her gloomy state and looks for an opportunity to escape. Atwood hints at the subjection of women that reflects from their dress code. The Handmaids are obliged to wear a red robe and cover their face and head with a white fringed cloth. The dress code specifically assigned to the different levels of females designates their place and status in society. Atwood through Offred sketches the dress code of the handmaids:

Everything except the wings around my face is red: the colour of blood, which defines us. The skirt is ankle-length, full, gathered to a flat yoke that extends over the breasts, the sleeves are full. The white wings too are prescribed issue; they are to keep us from seeing, but also from being seen (13-4).

The Handmaids live and pass a life of anonymity and wherever they go and move from; they are chiefly recognised not by the name but through their dress code. Thus, the dress code determines the status and identity of the female residents of Gilead. Strategically the Handmaids are robed in a way that no part of their body is revealed to the onlookers. Usually, maids feel strangulated due to the fact that the dress they are forced to wear even seems to choke their breadth. One probable reason for the close-fitted dress is to constantly let them realise their subservience and staunch morality. A little more comfortable blue flared dress is codified for the Wives because they need to work more freely and perform household chores. Marthas hold a lower position in the hierarchy and that is the reason they wear faded green gowns and Aunts, for being more conservative and elderly, are supposed to wear brown uniforms. Moira, another Handmaid, and a close acquaintance of Offred manage to escape from the dormitory by just putting on the dress of one of the aunts. She succeeds in escaping because the robe defines the category of every female and the brown colour is meant for the senior staff only.

Atwood starkly criticises Gilead for depriving the female of the fundamental right to speak and write. Women are disowned strategically from literacy and remain

aloof from the political, social life of their time. Aunts as the spiritual leader tutor Handmaids and lecture them on the sanctity of leading a pure, austere, and selfless life. Both writers Marge highlight the significance of language in human life. “For although Offred is able to tell her tale and uses language in a way that disrupts the symbolic order, ultimately her discourse changes nothing” (Loudermilk 130).

Atwood sarcastically characterises the oppressive side of the puritan regime in which silence is embraced as the chief virtue of a female. A silent woman retrieves respect and enjoys a dignified place because she remains tacit and secretly bears the explosive dominance of the male society. Except for a few occasions like at the behest of the authorial commands; Handmaids remain silent and even mumbling is proscribed. Offred and the other Handmaids have to pay close attention to the religious lectures that are imparted regularly to them by a senior male member who reads an excerpt from the Holy Bible: “*Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the silent.* I knew they made that up, I knew it was wrong, and they left things out too, but there was no way of checking” (Atwood, “The Handmaid’s Tale” 70).

There is no room left for free expression of speech or writing for the Handmaids and most of them accept the atrocities as the divine ascent and bow down to the authority to express the reverence towards their benefactors. The name denotes an exclusive character and individuality to any person; in other words, the name defines an individual. But in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the Handmaids are even stripped of their nomenclature and are usually known after the name of their Commander or master. Offred receives her new name after she has been assigned as a Handmaid of Commander Fred’s household. Otherwise, her real name is never mentioned in the novel. In a meditative mood, she reflects:

My name isn’t Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it’s forbidden. I tell myself it doesn’t matter, your name is like your telephone number, useful only to others; but what I tell myself is wrong, it does matter. I keep the knowledge of name like something hidden, some reassurance I’ll dig up, one day. I think of this name as buried. This name has an aura around it, like an amulet, some charm that’s survived from an unimaginably distant past (66).

A feeling of disgust impregnates Offred as she contemplates her loss of identity. She craves for sharing her stories of previous blissful days spent with her little daughter and husband, and she wants to talk about the free state of affairs of her golden past. She also nurtures a streak of hope for her future days after she will manage to escape from the Gilead community. She witnesses the Handmaids with swollen bellies and recasts a disgusted look at her own and expects to meet the same fate in the near future. The Handmaids are put into several trials where they are physically molested by the Commander of the specific household for the sole purpose of impregnation. Offred narrates the story of her physical trial in the following lines:

Above me, toward the head of the, Serena Joy is arranged, outspread. Her legs are apart, I lie between them, my head on her stomach, her pubic bone under the base of my skull, her thighs on either side of me. She too is fully clothed. My arms are raised; she holds my hands, each of mine in each of hers. This is supposed to signify that we are one flesh, one being. What it really means is that she is in controls, of the process and thus of the product. If any. The rings of her left hand cut into my fingers. It may or may not be revenge (73).

In reality, Gilead disrespects the dignity of motherhood. The Handmaids function as mere tools to keep the channel of the Gilead population running. The Handmaids give birth to the Commander's children and hereafter only act as the surrogate mothers who do not possess any claim on their offspring. They simply act as a link between the Commander and his wife and the link breaks down immediately after the ritual of childbirth is accomplished. The Handmaids are treated so mercilessly that they are banished after the birth of the child and they even are forbidden to see the face of their child. The child is immediately handed over to the biological father and his wife. Offred narrates the pitiful and merciless ceremony of childbirth: The two Wives in blue help the third Wife, the Wife of the household, down from the birthing stool and over to the bed, where they lay her down and tuck her in. The baby, washed now and quiet, is placed ceremoniously in her arms ...The Commander's Wife looks down at the baby as it's a bouquet of flowers: something she's won, a tribute ... We stand between Janine and the bed, so she won't have to do this.... she's crying helplessly, burnt-out miserable tears (137).



Atwood characterises the patriarchal monstrosity through the depiction of suffering wombs who even do not have a freehold of their bodies. The wombs are bartered in the name of social and financial security and the only consolation a Handmaid receives after giving birth to a child is that she will never be deported to the Colonies because she has succeeded in proving her worth through motherhood. Big relief for the mother is that “she’ll never be sent to the Colonies, she’ll never be declared Unwomen. That is her reward” (95).

Atwood portrays a patriarchal society in which women are subjugated to men on the basis of their biological ability and sexual slavery. This study illustrates how, in this patriarchal society, women’s basic freedom is left out by society. It is apparent that females within the Republic social structure are considered less of human; but more as mechanised bodies. Connie is the representative of sorrowful motherhood. She primarily endeavours to identify herself as a mother and also as a branded insane figure, however, she is well aware of the fact that this garb of insanity is fake yet she needs to stick to it in order to escape from the illicit and suppressive administration of mental asylum and through her fancy moorings, she creates another worldly space within which she finds solace and assurance for a pleasant future for the upcoming generations.

In one of the epiphanic moments, she invokes Lucienteand says “Yes you can have my child, you can keep my child ... she will be strong there, well fed, well housed, well taught, she will grow up much better and stronger and smarter than I. I assent, I give you my battered body as recompense and my rotten heart (Piercy, “Woman on the Edge of Time” 134-5). It will be argued that Connie only identifies herself as a mother and heaving under repentance that she has no one to nurture results in the distortion of her social identity but Piercy optimises this lack by filling in a purpose for Connie who starts struggling to become something else than a childless womb.

With this in mind, it is miles truthful to mention that Connie is a consultant of the conventional female position as typically being a mother, she may be seen to spotlight the feminine style of the societal attributes and prescribed roles that are imposed on to biologically sexed bodies. Dorothy Dinnerstein channels the discussion towards the division of responsibility, opportunity, and privilege that

prevails in the life of each male and female, and the patterns of psychological interdependence that are implicit in this division. “The specific nature of such arrangements varies, often dramatically, under varying societal conditions”. These “sexual arrangements” (Dinnerstein 37) are designed in such a hierarchal order that the females heave under immense pressures; bodily, technological, emotional, and sexual dichotomy which are hailed as the chief characteristics of difference between the male and the female, and these characteristics gradually become an inherent part of the symbolic order. Piercy responds to this principle by using a contrasting challenge to the contemporary day western world in which Connie lives.

Mattapoisett embodies a society wherein the notion of maternal femininity is debunked but without compromising the significance of nurturing the infant body. Luciente shares the sweetest truth on the earth for the female existence in his revered acceptance “We’re all a mixed bag of genes” (Piercy, “Woman on the Edge of Time” 95). In Mattapoisett, the traditional family dynamics have been transformed so that each male and female parent has a similar connection to the child. In levelling, parental obligations, Piercy’s Mattapoisett has advanced her reader’s attention toward the possibility of an androgynous society wherein social structures of gender and their related roles have been negated. Barbarossa, a hermaphrodite resident of Mattapoisett, is engaged in the task of feeding a young sapling “He picked up the crying baby ... he sat down with the baby on a soft padded bench by the window and unbuttoned his shirt ... He had breasts. Not large ones. Small breasts, like a flat-chested woman temporarily swollen with milk” (127). Piercy provides a parental practice that bridges the gap between the male parent and the child, negating the ideology of maternal barriers and the aspiration of the male to turn out to be a patriarch and therefore, breaking the cycle of patriarchy.

Through her leading character Connie Ramos, Piercy exposes the destructiveness of the concept of essential and divine motherhood which patriarchy eulogises. In order to focus on this point, Piercy negates the ideology of supreme motherhood by creating the society of Mattapoisett, supplying an alternative to the conventional circle of divine motherhood. According to Piercy, women and men must be capable of questioning the socially constructed roles of gender that have been

assigned to them by society. Susan Bordo in *Up Against Foucault* (1993) acknowledges:

When I first read Foucault, I remember thinking: ‘finally, a male theorist who understands western culture as neither a conversation among talking heads nor a series of military adventures, but as a history of the body!’ What fascinated me most about Foucault’s work were the historical genealogies themselves (Ramazanoğlu, C 190).

According to Foucault power is non-concentrated and cannot be occupied or possessed by a singular community forever. It can be sustained only temporarily. Foucault asserts that “prevailing forms of selfhood and subjectivity are maintained not through physical restraint and coercion, but through individual self-surveillance and self-correction to norms” (191). Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex* (1949), portrays a feminine image and also defines it in relation to the patriarchal society. She asserts:

Woman? Very easy, say those who like simple answers: she is a womb, an ovary; she is a female. From a man’s mouth, the epithet “female” sounds like an insult; but he, not ashamed of his animality, is proud to hear: “He’s a Male!” The term female is pejorative not because it roots woman in nature but because it confines her in her sex, and if this sex, even in an innocent animal, seems despicable and an enemy to man, it is obviously because of the disquieting hostility woman triggers in him (41).

In Gilead, the kingdom controls and manipulates women’s biological and reproductive functions. Atwood creates a society in which female biology and her function to procreate are of utmost significance and sexuality is also used as a weapon to control female bodies. Offred feels awestruck at Commander’s guilty confession as he surprises her by a meek acceptance of masculine physical incapacities in these lines “Most of those old guys can’t make it anymore ... or they’re sterile” (Atwood, “The Handmaid’s Tale” 52) and astonished by Commander’s assertion Offred thinks “There is no such thing as a sterile man anymore, not officially. There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that’s the law” (52).

In Atwood’s novel, the female is thought of as nothing greater than an ambulatory womb. In Gilead, females are disadvantaged in their gender identification

in the event that they lose the potential for procreation. In *The Handmaid's Tale* biology is truly an important element for women's oppression. Patriarchy has constantly convinced women that they exist due to their reverence to the male who helps the woman in reaching her excellent condition that is realised through her biology. In patriarchal societies, maternity is the biological mission of the female race. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the Commander justifies the policies of Gilead to Offred by assuring her that inside the new state women are granted real freedom from physical oppression and they will be able to draw fruitful gifts from their wombs. Michel Foucault in his book *The History of Sexuality* (1978) hypothesises that sexuality is repressed because it is the most vulnerable concept that binds a body to its material significance:

The notion of repressed sex is not, therefore, only a theoretical matter. The affirmation of a sexuality that has never been more rigorously subjugated than during the age of hypocritical, bustling, and responsible bourgeoisie is coupled with the grandiloquence of a discourse purporting to reveal the truth about sex, modify its economy within reality, subvert the law that governs it, and change its future ... To say that sex is not repressed, rather that the relationship between sex and power is not characterized by repression, is to risk falling into a sterile paradox (8).

The Handmaids possess a higher status yet never they qualify the status of distinguished members like the male residents of Gilead homestays. Atwood's fiction, just as verse, is brimming with twofold realities; a few issues emerge considering duality forming her main logic. The characteristic dilemma of her characters speaks of their struggle with this duality. She imagines a state where this duality can be supplanted by the completeness of experience which, by the existential logicians, for the most part, is embraced as the existential solidarity; a feeling of assertion which coordinates the individual with its context. Beauvoir is highly critical of the idea of physiological variations between men and women and for her, this gender difference is non-justifiable and leads to female oppression. In this way she questions the idea of biology as the touchstone for the process of identity formation:

She also would like to be a man, and she hates men; she does not accept herself in her generality; she wants to "distinguish herself"; because the great stream

of life does not pass through her, she can be a sorceress or a priestess, but never a bacchante; she is moved by things only when she has re-created them in her soul, giving them a religious value: this fervour itself separates her from life; she is poetic, mystical, maladapted (Beauvoir 277).

Beauvoir repeatedly emphasises that the female is categorised as the second sex and this assertion is embraced and propagated by the male-centric society for the vindication of their (male) rights as naturally privileged qualities. She notes that biology is one of the major factors for society to determine women's subordination; therefore, there is an absolute human type, the masculine. There is a synchronic development of thought for Atwood that seems to receive motivation from Beauvoir's speculation on sexuality. Beauvoir's reference to masculine female can be traced in Piercy's search for an ideal space of existence, Mattapoisett in *Woman on the Edge of Time* and Lucient, a bisexual gender, is the encapsulation of a genderless identity which apparently is envisioned in Beauvoir's feminist writings.

Like all other basic hypotheses, women's liberation has a basic history. Feminism has always been underestimated and considered as a substandard discourse. Feminism questions the existential choices of the world and raises some pertinent questions like whether the world is governed judiciously and if it is not then how can we transform the system of textual or theological knowledge? The three principal ideas dominate the corpus of knowledge: misogyny, the presumption of male predominance, and the centrality of determined meanings. Ironically various investigations have till now been directed on hysteric diagnostics which is primarily associated with the female psyche.

The psychoanalytic system of thought channelises its emphasis on the bizarre functioning of the female mind that is the explanation that the domain of feminine artistic excellence has always remained underestimated. R. Satow, a psychotherapist states "... 'hysteria' has been a label used for a potpourri of female ailments and non-ailments alike since antiquity ... The Greeks and Romans called almost all female complaints hysteria and believed the cause of all these female maladies to be a wandering uterus" (Showalter, et al 4).

The female womb is the most vulnerable and resourceful organ of her body around which all fantasies of the masculine mind are interwoven. In *The Handmaid's*

*Tale*, the swollen wombs are resourceful weapons yet the profundity of its (womb) power lies in the physical capability of the male thus the female is always incomplete, and in order to realise her worth; she needs to comply with the male. Misogyny and a typical vibe of malevolence are integral to the female experience and consequently, the male dominating scholastic world permits no space for the female authors and their belief system. Virginia Woolf in her *A Room of One's Own* has communicated how she was precluded from entering the university library and it demonstrates the transcendence of the male logos.

Female writers have long been treated as sentiment-ridden bodies with no qualities of mind and women writers are located in a total impasse because of the belief in the matchless masculine qualities in craftsmanship and writing. The female perspective has always been overlooked. Elaine Showalter's emphasis on the term gynocriticism displays enthusiasm in analysing the direct, raw, and real encounters of the women writers for the clarification that women writers received no acclamation for their literary contribution in portraying the experiences connected to the female subjectivity.

Both the writers under study extensively mulled over the direct experiences of the female and represent the female as intellectual, thoughtful, and independent individuals. The theory of gynocriticism is structured on four pillars and these pillars provide a solid premise to the logic of female literary tradition. These four pillars consist of body, language, psychology, and culture. There is an open and free space for showcasing the experiences of the female that originate from the personal experiences of the female writers. The physicians of the Victorian era experimented and precluded on the basis of their assumptions that the female bodies are susceptible to deformation more than the male for the reason that females remain mindfully occupied with their bodies. They proclaimed that the frontal projections of the male cerebrum were heavier than the female and subsequently the female is mentally inferior to the male. Nonetheless, these Victorian convictions are dismissed by the feminists who disavow all biological differences between the two genders.

Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood's books deal with a comprehensive analysis of the female lives and what makes their work unique is its substantial focus on the direct and unimpeded revelation of female psychology. Their female

protagonists have not been portrayed as extraterritorial bodies rather they are ordinary women who act extraordinarily and gradually transcend the edifices riveting their body and mind. Through the deployment of their psychic energies, these female figures are skilled at eschewing away from the most insidious influence of male dominance and create a space of their own. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, women like Offred learn the usefulness of their bodies and weave a plan to materially extract advantage from their wombs whilst Connie connives at making plans to frequently visit the fictive land of Mattapoissett and additionally is capable of exiting at any point of time. Like Gynocriticism, speculative fiction received stringent criticism from the supporters of western metaphysics of knowledge who believe in the customary prevalence of male autonomy. The demand of the hour conveys that the women writers should pen down their innermost feminine yearnings so that the male society gets acclimated to this side of her personality. Instead of denying the dualities of body and mind; an acknowledgement of the multifarious female culture needs to be sought. Piercy and Atwood portrayed the complete freedom of articulation through their radical female characters and succeeded in creating a space for themselves through the utilisation of language.

Both writers understand the gravity of the situation and affirm that the female should not tacitly accept the recommendations of essential femininity offered to them by the male society. The corpus of Piercy and Atwood's writing falls under the spell of the second wave of feminism. Both demonstrate the historical backdrop of the imprisonment and restrictions endured by the females in a chauvinist society. Interestingly their novels deal with the maturation or ripening of female consciousness which results from the acknowledgement of the impact of power in the lives of both genders. The females must realise that they are as vulnerable as the males subsequently they should not feel culpable or remorseful for their bodily existence. The writer understands the noteworthiness of the author's influence on a character's identity; therefore, both writers reclassify the personality of their female characters through their personal encounters as women. Due to the negative propagation of the female personality, the female remains situated at the focal point of contention in society and even our religious scriptures nourish and promulgate the disparities between the two genders. All analysis about the female is based on the textual and

formal understanding of the female as a body. Piercy maps out an elective vision of female personality by empowering her female characters to converse, not only with the external image of the male but also with their inner reflections of animus, and in some instances like in her novel *Vida*, the animus projection dominates over the anima. Piercy and Atwood delineate the characters of powerful women who have full control over their impulses.

There occurs a mediating version of utopia and dystopia; a place which can neither be characterised as a totally hopeless domain like that of dystopia nor does it promise land of complete harmony and prosperity like utopia. Foucault is well aware that it would be unrealistic to envision a complete utopian or dystopian space in modern society. Thus, he envisioned a new place of existence; an intervening ground, i.e., the *heterotopias*:

Underlining the relational and functional nature of space, Foucault proposes other spaces as an alternative to reality, recalling the potential of utopia through the mirroring mechanism, and at the same time, investigating the structure of what exists, through the ‘system of opening and closing’ which is actuated by heterotopias (Palladino 14).

Michel Foucault firmly believed that power and knowledge can never exist in dissociation from one another and consequently the verifiable, topographical, anthropological, and political knowledge about women is directly linked to the politics of power. The ideological constructions, sets of rules, binaries all are designed in a way that the rights and privileges of the elite or the dominating class are preserved. Gramsci defined power relations as “strategic clashes”; artificially manipulated clashes constructed to gain precedence over the other. Power relations do not exist in a haphazard manner rather these are planned and consciously structured to gain dominance. Power relations can well be described as “coherent reflective techniques with definite goals” (18). Foucault is intensely critical of utopian and absolute tragic vision of life since both these realms are unrealistic and static to the degree that nothing happens in this socio-geographical space whilst heterotopias is a space wherein lives are ever-changing and temporal. “Hegemony in this spatial variation is endowed with heterotopic potential meaning that it cannot exist in the



absence of territories and relative geographical conditions where these social changes can occur” (23).

Notwithstanding, Foucault’s induction of a mediating space is progressive in the sense that it relinquishes all the accusations of believing in otherworldliness. Piercy’s world in her novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* can well be analysed in light of the heterotopic vision of life wherein all are related without the intrigue of engendering the other. The projection may seem pernicious and even unrealistic to those who firmly believe in the conventional order of things and wish to continue believing in the same pattern of thought that guarantees power to the one class. Likewise, Connie feels grounded and is astonished to witness the seemingly immoral mothering ethics in Mattapoisett and questions Bee “How can men be mothers! How can some kid who isn’t related to you be your child?” She broke free and twisted again in irritation” (Piercy, “Woman on the Edge of Time” 99). In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, all residents of Gilead are conscious of the ongoing trading of female bodies but this system is justified by the Puritans with the reason that Gilead, in order to procure freedom and security to the female, must increase the populace. It is not difficult for the powerful people or communities to persuade the subjugated class and furnish them with a purpose behind their subjection; the subjugation is tacitly received by the common people as happens in Atwood’s tale. “We are dealing with a process of masochist subjection (*assujettissement*) and (*objectivation*) which intervenes directly on the bodies of those whose subjection is assured, imposing a ‘relation of docility-usefulness’ upon them” (Palladino 24).

Piercy and Atwood legitimately stand up against the characteristics which society has considered intrinsic to the meaning of women's identity, and both comprehend that the formation of identity through various phases of improvement is an ever-going procedure and one needs to figure out how to create a cognisant balance between the individual desires and social commitments. As prominent contemporary writers of second wave feminism their novels *Summer People*, *Braided Lives*, *Vida*, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *Surfacing*, *The Edible Woman*, and *The Longings of Women*, primarily deal with the political objectives and ensemble the purpose of consolidating both the futuristic and progressive accounts of the female characters.

Piercy's utopian vision is based on the premise that if women are deprived of the main current of social life, then at that point rather than grieve over and implicitly accepting the prescribed roles, they must dichotomise their own binaries and constructively utilise their mystic desires to satisfy their hankering for endless ecstasy, here Piercy's theme can well be contrasted with Lacanian *jouissance* through which the female becomes independent of the male desire. Connie constructs her own reality and finds solace in the idyllic land of Mattapoisett. Such awareness heralds when women investigate their sexuality, comprehend and modify their connections to other people, and achieve new learning through their independent idea of selfhood. Connie ponders over a bright future in Mattapoisett:

She herself could be such a person here. Yes, she would study how to fix the looted landscape, heal rivers choke with filth ... Then she would be useful. She would like herself ... People would respect her ... Her children would be proud of her. Her lovers would not turn from her, would not die in prison, would not be cut down in the streets like Martin (Piercy, "Woman on the Edge of Time" 209).

The traditional conventions impede the development chances for the female with the clarification that conventions have been schematised by the most-learned people for the constant advancement of society and it has likewise been engraved profound into the psychology of the entire human race that the woman is and will always remain inferior to the male. The tragic flaw is committed by Adam and the detestable influence is associated with the female. The female is considered to be an instigator of vicious desire, bodily pleasure, which a man has to tame through his willpower and dominance. This is the reason that the narrative of the female body is all-pervasive and is targeted by the male-centric societies in order to eschew its enchantment spell. Piercy broadens the scope of female rejuvenation by recognising her female characters and their elective responses to society.

Piercy's adolescent characters challenge male standards and dismiss the assertion that gender differences are intrinsic and natural. She endows her female characters with the capacity to recognise their personal traits and construct their persona or self-image through social encounters. Piercy and Atwood's female characters tirelessly re-evaluate themselves as obstinate women except for some

female characters like Marian from *The Edible Woman* who censures body nourishment and becomes anorexic. The theme of the struggle for identity and freedom from a misogynist world is common to the fiction of Piercy and Atwood.

Piercy's *Braided Lives* is a book that was written after the second world war and it portrays the broad advancement of her female juvenile characters from dimness to light. Jill, the protagonist from *Braided Lives* can be compared to *Surfacing*'s unnamed character decisively planning to stay away from the shadow of the ill-fated life of her mother. She fights back endeavouring against the benchmarks of her family that has raised her to accept that women are raised to suffer and do not possess the right to choose. After Jill chooses to make the voyage into an area totally unfamiliar to her folks, like the narrator from *Surfacing*, she discovers her lone wellspring of solace in her association with Donna, her cousin, who accompanies Jill in creating new social and political realities for one another. Nonetheless, the two juveniles discover that to work inside the laws of society and to practice their individual flexibility frequently yields hazardous results; legally the females never get any equity against social divergence and even their bodies are constrained by the masculine gaze. Judith Butler in her book *Undoing Gender* (2004) opines:

The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence. The body can be the agency and instrument of all these as well, or the site where “doing” and “being done to” become equivocal. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine (21).

The victimisation of bodies is neutral in the sense that both male and female experience this exploitation in an indistinct manner it is just the conviction framework which is liable for the belief that the female body is more vulnerable than the male. The declaration of legitimised heterosexuality depends on this conviction framework since the patriarchal society lurks under the constant threat of the rebellious female body. The theme of homosexuality that constantly streams in Piercy's book is an indication of this vindication of female rights. The involvement of women in any relationship is counted illicit due to their vulnerable body and moreover, the practices

such as foetus removal and abortions bring social disgrace to her kin. Throughout their books, both writers endeavour to ease the tension between the personal and the collective consciousness of individuals and society respectively.

In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Connie is not only bothered about the achievement of financial equity for the female rather she is extensively concerned about the disparity between the two sexes in every field of life. She intends to achieve a renewed kind of freedom for the woman that has till now never been envisioned by the female herself. For example, Connie's fundamental repugnance for a genderless society that is possessed by the nonpartisan genders or bisexuals like Luciente is brought about by her standard knowledge about the sharp distinction between the male and the female. The socio-political culture of Mattapoissett rotates around their transformations in the role of genders in society. The obsession with issues like gender and sexuality and most significantly parenting plays an important role instilling her two major characters: Connie and Luciente.

The concept of motherhood particularly is of specific significance to Connie, due to the fact that the social esteem of the female is reliant on her role as a mother. Interestingly there is a sharp contrast between Mattapoissett and Gilead in the matter of the fact that the former works on the principles of equity in birth undertakings, or put it simply, both males and females are free to experience the becoming of a mother or a father. Male is physically equipped with the capacity to carry a child inside his body whilst in Gilead male is the possessor of a superpower who is completely furnished with the power of utilising the female bodies and increment the populace of their community. Connie at first feels profoundly startled by the unnatural and directionless conventions prevalent in the Mattapoissettian culture and demonstrates hesitancy in understanding Luciente's order of things. Once the veil of extraordinariness lifts, Connie acknowledges Mattapoissettian culture as desirable over the contemporary American hyper-man-centric male culture. She observes "Really, this could be a dining room in a madhouse, the way people sat naked with their emotions pouring out, but there was a strong energy level here" (Piercy 1976: 70). It is quite pertinent to mention Foucault's investigation imbued in his hypothesis on heterotopias:

Since Foucault claims to consider a geography as a ‘condizione di possibilita’ [condition of possibility] for other forms of knowledge, heterotopias still remain anchored to Newton’s vision of space, and as such, are situated at the threshold between the possibility and impossibility that a spatial change may effectively come to pass (Palladino 28).

Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* can be viewed as a heterotopic space where there are several conditions of the possibility of existence or survival. Similarly, Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* proffers an existence dangling between the choices of possibility and impossibility. Atwood’s female character Moira’s sudden disappearance or one may rightly call a planned escape from the tormenting governance of the community to the Jezebel (prostitution centre) is also an indication of the open possibility of choice. Actually, Foucault disapproves of the notion of free identities and for him, identities are self-imprisoning:

Foucault’s consideration of space goes hand in hand with deconstruction, which underlines how identity, playing on a principle of inclusion/exclusion, is not only created on the basis of the definition of the Other, but also tends to impose a cage on equals, from which it is then very difficult to escape (28).

The historically defined polarities of social and political practices for the pursuit of an idealistic land are recurrent themes of postmodern studies. The expansion of free entrepreneurial practices to which Marx signifies the expression "cash nexus" (28) has prodded the collective interest of all the societies existing at any point in time. Aditya Nigam comments:

The corrupting influence of capitalist consumption, the naked “cash nexus,” as Marx called it, has spurred the radical imagination for a very long time, and the more commodity relations envelop us, the stronger the desire to escape into a place that is nowhere, or at least not yet. Utopia is “equally “unchronia”- a time that does not exist but will undoubtedly come (Gordin et al, 250).

Offred and the other women are apparently waiting for an unchronia; an indefinite and non-existent time and this wait or longing provides certain solace to their otherwise bleak lives. Aditya further attests that “The Politics of the oppressed- especially as articulated in the intellectual domain- has thus often been a search for a pure space outside the profanity of capitalist commodity relations” (250). An analysis

of Atwood's novel endorses the previously mentioned idea as the Handmaids incessantly keep looking for a "pure space" in which their bodies will no more be treated as commodities used for expanding the populace of fast receding Gilead populace.

A comparative yearning is found in Connie's time travel or mental adventures to the alien land that she creates an unchronia (250); a non-chronic time and space to which Piercy attributes a name: Mattapoissett. Connie's dissatisfaction with her earthly and mundane existence lures her to look into eternity, extraterritorial bodies. Her extraordinary worry for flawless and divine maternity exasperates her anxiety. She has been charged for mistreating her only child and therefore is constrained to meet her daughter. As a single mother, she finds the stun more agonising than even a projectile shot. She criticises herself for being an awful mother and only after her interaction with Mattapoissett's sight of motherhood, her misdirection in regards to maternity change. She is astonished to notice that the divine image of the omnipresent mother is absent in Mattapoissett and furthermore the Mattapoissettian accentuation of mothering is continuously valuable to both the child and the parents in the sense that the burden of child-rearing is equally distributed between parents and mother is not overlaid with the burden of parenthood. Luciente reveals to Connie that in Mattapoissett, each child is mothered by at least three mothers, including male and female. She informs Connie "I'm what they call a kidbinder, meaning I mother everybody's kids" (Piercy, "Woman on the Edge of Time" 69).

Piercy's novel highlights the flaws and insufficiencies of contemporary society and evokes the conscience of the society to deliberate on the anomalies that impede the growth of the female status as a free individual. The structure of Mattapoissett evidences how gender differences can be eliminated and how human beings can live together, in an equal relationship with one another. In my perspective, Piercy and Atwood's writing, by all accounts, work on an agenda of consciousness-raising strategy and through their fictive characters, they try to establish how a female is equipped for accomplishing her valued dream of freedom and gender equality by freeing herself against male reconnaissance.

In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Marge Piercy envisions the unchronic society; records of which are found nowhere in the history of human experience or the real

world yet it is not as unrealistic as utopia. The term unchronic comes from Charles Renouvier, a French philosopher and writer who used this term to entitle his novel *Unchronie* (1876). The unchronia is distinguished from a utopia because the latter refers to a fictional time whereas the former refers to a fictive time. Through Connie's hyper consciousness we come across an idealistic vision of society in which history is reconstructed in a way, it takes place in the unchronia. By all means, the contemporary social order is plagued by the stereotypical channelling and methodised governance of gender roles in society henceforth this examination is an endeavour to reveal the ever-continuing struggle of the female to fit in or accommodate to the standards of patriarchal society since there is by all accounts no relief or remuneration for the female thought of freedom.

Simone de Beauvoir's central attestation of becoming a woman is pertinently comprehended from Connie and Offred's maturation process. Piercy appears to introduce her contention in regard to the formation of identities through a trio comprising of Connie, Luciente, and the social order. Identities are formed socially therefore Connie's interaction with the other world, i.e., Mattapoisett, structures a unique idea of identity for Connie that she had never experienced in her real-time, yet is conceivable in the unchronic setting of Mattapoisett. "Indeed, they were like children, all in unisex rompers, sitting at their long kindergarten tables eating big plates of food and making jokes ... Someone-slender, young-leaped up and hugged Luciente, held out his?/ her? arms to her..." (71).

Foucault divides the heterotopic vision of society into two parts: "*crisis heterotopias*" and "*heterotopias of deviation*" (Gordin et al. 258). Offred's reality can be deciphered as "*crisis heterotopias*"; inhabited by the female who does not have control even over their bodies and they work as coded machines who know no other language than the non-verbal gaze of the master: the patriarch whilst Connie's short stay in a mental asylum is comparable to Foucault's "*heterotopias of deviation*": Foucault talks especially of two types of heterotopias. The first is in primitive societies, a particular form that he calls "*crisis heterotopias*" (italics in the original)-privileged, sacred, or forbidden places, reserved for individuals, who in the context of those particular societies are considered to be in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, and so on. These places, writes

Foucault, are now disappearing in contemporary Western societies and are being replaced by the second type, those he calls “*heterotopias of deviation*”. These places are for those whose behaviour is considered deviant in relation to the norm and include rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, and prisons (258).

Foucault decodes the mystery of the two subtypes of *heterotopias* by using two terms: “*illusion*” and “*compensation*” (258). For Foucault, both terms are spaces not merely ordinary words. Offred’s is the utopia of illusion “As an instance of the heterotopias of illusion, he mentions, in passing, “those famous brothels,” about which we are given no further elaboration”. Atwood’s depiction of Jazabel fits in Foucault’s fictive space of illusion:

The range of spaces that Foucault identifies under the rubric of heterotopias, then, are still in some way related to an unstated notion of utopia, a utopia propelled by a desire for some kind of normalcy or perfection either by segregating the deviant or the crisis-ridden or by replicating some idea of perfection in some other place presumably uncontaminated by history (258-9).

Progressing further, we come across another term enunciated by Foucault concerning his discussion on heterotopias: “heterochronies” (259). Noticeably, Foucault presents different sorts of spatial encounters through his delineation of heterotopias. Hence it is evident from the stated discussion that heterotopias are multifarious in the sense that these include spaces within spaces to which Foucault denotes the global term: “*heterotopias of difference*” (259). Foucault expands the excess of utopian/ dystopian and unchronic space through his use of the single term ‘heterotopias’. “All of these spaces are reserved for those who are simply marked as different in order to produce a different kind of normality within the main body of society” (259).

Likewise, Piercy’s Mattapoisett can be signified as a branch of “heterotopias of differences”. Identities are formulated in context and relation to various structures of society subsequently Mattapoisett can be viewed as an alternate reality. Similarly, Atwood’s Gilead represents the different shades of heterotopias. To begin with, it is unrealistic for Connie to fathom the multifaceted profile of Luciente. The fixed persona of an enslaved woman in Connie’s psyche discourages her affirmation of Luciente as a freewheeling character and her mind is equipped with the ideas of



concession and self-denial to such a degree, that the possibility of the powerful feminine image shows up simply a fabrication for her. Piercy's seems to assert that both genders can build up their maximum capacity by perceiving and grasping all characteristics of their personality. Rather than seeing the female and the male as total inverse, Piercy wires them inside every resident of Mattapoissett. Henceforth, for Piercy, the masculine and feminine become the yin and the yang of the self that can collaterally work in a positive relationship for not only mutual development but also for social welfare. In Mattapoissett the ideas of the individual and social are indistinguishable and individuals intuitively acknowledge accountability and collective duty to keep up the wellbeing of the society. This intentional commitment to social prosperity joined with help and regard for distinction and uniqueness encourages a type of social association between the two genders.

The idealistic picture of society remains in logical inconsistency with the noxious system of life in Connie's real world. She meditatively compares the two worlds "What could a man of this ridiculous Podunk future, when babies were born from machines and people negotiated diplomatically with cows, know about how it had been to grow up in America black or brown?" (Piercy, "Woman on the Edge of Time" 99). Connie realises that rationality and insanity are the primary characteristics of every human being and acknowledgement of this duality eases out her tension to a greater degree. The Mattapossetian residents are urged to recognise infrequent deterioration of the self as a natural phenomenon and they receive it as a chance to investigate their hidden personality traits and they consolidate the rational as well as insane as intrinsic parts of their psyche.

Marge Piercy's text ultimately suggests that a decentralised world of cooperation and reciprocity offers a richer reality than a world of hierarchies and polar oppositions. The repression of the subordinated sectors of society and the suppressed aspects of the self is a tendency that has a damaging and impoverishing impact on Connie's world. Through the fusion of binary oppositions, Mattapoissett eliminates the possibility of restrictive hierarchies and thereby generates an environment in which diversity can flourish. Rather than shunning the female, the homosexual, the homeless and the poor, Mattapoissettian society celebrates them. Piercy seems to believe that by embracing these traditionally marginalised forces we may enrich each other's lives.

The topography of the two novels under study, i.e., *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *The Handmaid's Tale* is based on the relations between space, time, and genders, and the conflict of gender hierarchies is portrayed through the struggle for obtaining individuality. The asylum for psychically unfit people wherein Connie is persuasively conceded and is tormented to accept that she is a hysteric and the Gilead society in *The Handmaid's Tale* where the women are explicitly tormented and their sexuality is used as an instrument for increasing the populace and a preference for a male child, are tragic realities of the modern society and can be interpreted as Foucault's "*crisis heterotopias*" (Gordin et al. 258).

The male experts systematically create a trap of binaries for the female and through these dualities, women are oppressed and confined to spaces located outside the civilised arena of society as happens with infertile wombs in *The Handmaid's Tale*. To begin with, women are indoctrinated not to raise their voice, and gradually there occurs depletion in their activities which is the result of feelings of indifference and terror caused by the patriarchal society. This restlessness culminates and reaches its pinnacle as the women start loathing their bodies and revile themselves for their overt vulnerability. An aura of divine silence in women is cherished by the Gilead men and if they somehow find even hidden traces of ignition and antagonism in any of the females, they immediately cut her off from the household life and such loud women are transported either to the Colonies or are sexually utilised for business transactions. Silence is considered to be the chief moral attribute of a pious female. Offred reminds "They used to have dolls, for little girls, that would talk if you pulled a string at the back; I thought I was sounding like that, voice of a monotone, voice of a dill" (Atwood, "The Handmaid's Tale" 19).

The central contention of this chapter spins around comparative records of difficulties offered to women across the states and boundaries. Space is deliberately used by the two scholars in practically the entirety of their books with immense enthusiasm. The Gilead space and the extraterritorial space of Mattapoissett remain in sharp differentiation to one another. The common plight of persecution of the female is employed with astute wisdom by the two writers whether it is Connie who is bullied physically and mentally yet later manages to escape from her debilitating state to the alien land or women like Offred and her mother who are sent to the colonies

wherein all infertile wombs are stacked to deteriorate till death. Financial dependence is another obstacle for the female and the perfect example comes from Atwood's *The Edible Woman* in which Marian strives to keep her physically intact in order to protect her job and whines at the prejudiced temperament of the male employers toward the female employees.

Generally, the two novels remain in sharp differentiation for the explanation that there is by all accounts no possibility of freedom for the female in *The Handmaid's Tale* while Connie virtually creates an idealistic world for herself and envisions a similar sort of spatial reality for the future generations. Despite pertinent contrasts, the two books have been picked in light of the fact that they splendidly depict substances where women are psychophysically abused, segregated, and commodified by men, and it is demonstrated by associating the topics of power, space, and gender.

The profound relationship of interlinked topics like sexuality, maternity, assault, and homosexuality obviously drives the discussion around topics like gendered viciousness, outrageous commodification, the annihilation of the female body, and male superhuman fantasies. By putting to contrast two spatial settings, i.e., Mattapoisett and the transient natural presence of Connie, Piercy in *Woman on the Edge of Time* presents a continuous crisis in the contemporary American culture and spotlights the potential outcomes of survival. Assaulting Western logocentric theory, *The Handmaid's Tale* talks about the Republic of Gilead, a system administered by Christian fundamentalism and controlled by the Commanders who represent the permanence of masculine hegemony. Similar to the vein of *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Atwood focuses on the culture that is emptied of human values, marred by religious bigotry, and sexual disparity, female suffering from curses like embryo evacuation and abortion, and an increase in capitalism for stifling the voices supporting homosexual rights and equality of status.

The structured hierarchal pattern is reminiscent of the economic and social categorisation of administrative bodies like that of an establishment. Subsequently, it is obvious that the female is viewed as just a non-living, latent body, and her self-esteem is distinctly based on her physical delights. Handmaids are rearing slaves who are normally assaulted, compelled to incubate, and afterward sacrifice their new-

borns to the Commanders' families. There are various entitlements to the female belonging to different levels of hierarchal structure: Wives, Marthas (workers), Jezebels (whores), Aunts (the Handmaids' ruthless instructors), Econowives (spouses hireling mothers for the lower-class men), and the Unwomen (female nonconformists who are ousted to the Colonies-sullied antisocial nature regions).

According to women's activist speculations, beginning from the earliest starting point of time, the androcentric vision of society basically has pushed women to the outskirts of society. The underlying foundations of the androcentric metaphysics represent masculine logic as a profound, irresistible prototype and the subtype of the same are to be found in the female silhouette accommodating a natural role so as to help manly fantasies to prosper.

It is intriguing to see that there is a doubtlessly self-evident relationship between political force and male sexuality, particularly in extremist, moderate, or potentially male-centric cultures. The rigid demarcation of sexuality, the expert reactionary, the defined network of power, and experiment with sexual differences anticipates a dreadful, alienated, and dark space for the female. Dystopian fiction has profoundly interiorised this connection between space and power, demonstrating substances in which tragic dreams are socio-politically and geologically built. The urban space is solicitously assigned to men, and women are coercively consigned to the local territories or ghettos. The agony, dread, and dismissal that women suffer throughout their lives are significantly undermined by the spots wherein they are bound and from where they cannot get away.

The crisis heterotopic spaces like that of Gilead add to the production of oppressive measures in which the subjugated class is tortured psychophysically by detaining characters to the outskirts and infecting their social and individual growth. The banishment of the female from active social life is legitimised by accusing her of mental debilitation while the space vacuumed by the detained female is filled by the domineering male. However, female bodies become sites of pleasure, a storehouse of unconscious longings, and above all a fertile, malleable, and raw land wherein all sensuous, morbid male desires may be planted. The female becomes an alien to her own body as if it is no more her personal property rather a pleasure deriving site for the onlookers. The female becomes a second-rate commodity exploitable and

pioneering at the same time. In *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, viciousness is overwhelmingly coordinated towards the females, is identified with their sexuality, and upheld by sex jobs and natural determinism.

Speaking dictatorially, heterosexuality is isolated from delight and love, and females are exploited, blindfolded, and mishandled. In Connie's the United States, women, particularly black, poor, and the underestimated ones, are tied to generalisations of divine maternity and social inadequacy, while, in Gildina's future, numerous women are mistresses, and maternity is commonly excluded in their connections' agreements. In Atwood's Gilead, the only business of the female is to conceive an offspring and thereafter to fortify their bodies for another conception. Nevertheless, the population of Gilead is receding due to the massive eradication of the Jewish community so women's bodies are required for reproduction and they cannot escape their predestined future. Their identities are severely ravaged and natural characteristics are assuaged to the degree that occasionally they do not believe they truly exist.

Women are made to believe that they are just bodies procured for serving the male however they feel appeased to think that the prime rationale behind their existence is not male sexual pleasure but motherhood and survival of their community. "Treacherous ground, My own territory ... I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of my will. I could use it to run, push buttons, of one sort or another, make things happen. There were limits but my body was nevertheless lithe, single, solid, one with me" (60). Appallingly in *The Handmaid's Tale*, women are stale without any possibilities for endurance, and additionally, they don't feel they really exist. They remain undetectable, anonymous, and Atwood through Offred's soliloquies strives to establish that the Handmaids like Offred have even forgotten their real names. The real issue with these passive female figures is that they would prefer not to fight back and do not have any desire to grasp their potential characteristics and this state of contentment is indeed horrific. Offred gratifies herself by assuming "We were the people who were not in the papers. We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print. It gave us more freedom" (49).

The acceptance of physical suffering, barren wombs, and disrespectful treatment not only provide solace but also renders them some amount of freedom from the burden of being a female. In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Connie and a significant number of different characters attempt to discover their place in a world that does not valorise or bolster them, and these dejected bodies try to wind up as broken subjects, remain separated from society, and affirm that their pitiful plight is exacted by the lopsided attitude and dismissal. Through Connie's staggering, detaching and degraded background, Piercy studies the treatment of psychological instability during the 1970s, for which one prime example is the medicalisation of social issues. The females in Piercy's books are dismissed and manhandled in view of their subordinate place in society, and additionally for being non-white, poor, vagrant, illiterate, and above all powerless creatures.

A large number of different characters portrayed in the novel demonstrate a comparable forsaken destiny as Connie's. Dolly (Connie's niece) is a dependent whore pummelled by her pimp Geraldo, who is likewise in charge of her body and soul. Mariana (Connie's mother) had a pointless hysterectomy after a troublesome pregnancy and was relentlessly forsaken by her husband, who thought of herself as an un-woman, an empty vessel, and her plight is comparable to the ill fate of evacuated barren womb-like Offred's mother in *The Handmaid's Tale*. In the shelter, Connie meets delicate and juvenile patients, tormented for their dissension, like Sybil, Alice, and Skip. Rebellious Peppy and Alice feel anguished over their seemingly non-existent status and thus plan to experiment with their bodies and this action subsequently proves disastrous. Skip is a homosexual guy and his deviation from normal sexuality is awfully detested by his parents and the indifference combined with lack of support instigates him to commit suicide and consequently, he dies. Sybil presents an antagonistic image of an unrestrained and aggressive woman who supports women's freedom showing them the ways to obtain freedom by proposing to leave their men. Sybil's anarchic characteristics can be compared with Ainsley from *The Edible Woman* who discloses her plan of conceiving a child without tying her in the bond of marriage and thereafter leaves the man involved! Sybil rejects sex since she translates intercourse as an attack: she perceives a kind of geometric and calculated powerlessness of women seeing someone, declining to be simply a sex toy.

The male-centric culture characterises such females as brutes and the male forces the female to consider them as hysterics, hostile to social components so as to discourage their engaged spirits and to humiliatingly evidence them as the disseminators of incomprehensible, blasphemous, and not-reconciliatory motivation.

Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood seem to insist that the female routinely encounters maltreatment in the name of sexuality. Apparently, the female cannot straightforwardly acknowledge and use her sexuality and is dependent upon male needs and pays an expense for the intercourse, and in Connie's case she has to abort her child from Chuck who relinquishes her and she is also dismissed by her family and drove away from college without analgesic during aborting the child. New York City is full of such instances as Gildina's who encapsulates a hyper-sexualised oppressed world. A fragile woman, Gildina, is the resident of a society in which misanthropy is the governing principle of the land and sexual subjugation is imposed through transitory contracts like marriage, and the female is pulverised and is bound to the rigid standards of femininity. Heavily built and fleshly bosomed Gildina is a typical sex toy and her profile is finely shaped to fulfil masculine libidinal drives but she is so physically imbalanced that she can scarcely walk. Since she has no close to the home character, Gildina doesn't perceive the trivialisation and the adjustment of her body as a type of savagery. The commodification is socially acknowledged and there are presumably no options for the acquisition of bodily freedom for women. One of Gildina's qualities is her fleshy skin, a supremacist standard forced on the epidermis, suggesting that this future understanding of the body is callously perverted.

This polarity, that envisions the division among Handmaids and Jezebels in *The Handmaid's Tale* and Wives and Concubines in Louise O'Neill's *Only Ever Yours* (2014), echoes an overwhelming twofold standard that for the most part forces apertition between maternal image and the uncensored free world. The central dispute for Margaret Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale* is that the body of the woman is devout as long as it is served in administration to the standards of male-controlled society which underwrites the set standards of heterosexuality and not just this the prime business of the female is to serve their locale through the satisfaction of the interest of the administration like that of Gilead. Atwood represents a highly callous and

narcissistic picture of society in which the relationship between mother and the child is conceived only in material terms and ruthlessly after conception, the new-borns are separated from their mothers.

Atwood is exceptionally skilful in perusing the colour psychology as the Handmaids wear red articles of clothing and the red colour symbolises productivity, development yet likewise is alarming, in the sense that Handmaids are sacrificial women and should be treated respectfully by other males. The red colour is additionally the image of the menstrual cycle along these lines it shows dissatisfaction for the Handmaids since it postpones their excitement to declare their pregnancy at any rate for a month. "Each month I watch for blood, fearfully, for when it comes it means failure" (60). Serena Joy is barren and her dealing with nursery demonstrates that it is the only way she can make up for her disappointment. The administration of Gilead does not follow conventional thoughts regarding child-rearing and family. Maternity is the only source of survival for the female in the Gilead system and if any woman denies commitment, she either needs to confront the death penalty or is suspended to the Colonies. Consequently, Gilead eviscerates the female by snatching their prized possession, i.e., their infant, and thus amputates their sense of existence.

Nancy Chodorow brings up the distinction between the tasks of mothering and fathering. She questions the idea of mothering as an errand that should work out easily for all women race. Women participate in the mothering roles as occupants of an inherent tendency to do the child-rearing since they need to comply in accordance with their social image and on the grounds that endorse them the capacities of divine mothering. She clarifies that the transformation in all spheres of life impacts the notion of mothering. Her book *The Reproduction of Mothering* aims at defining new roles for parenthood, and she cautiously clarifies women should discredit the false notion of divine maternity. She renounces the idea of the ideal mother and criticises the dependence of a female on their maternal image. According to Nancy Chodorow:

...a mother also participates in her family and in the rest of the community and society. She experiences herself as a socialized adult member of this society and knows the meanings of family, child-rearing, and mothering within it. She usually participates in a marriage with a deep sexual division of labor, in which she is financially dependent, and she expects her husband to be



dominant. Her mothering, then, is informed by her relationship to her husband, her experience of financial dependence, her expectations of marital inequality, and her expectations about gender roles (86).

Female acknowledges that much of the esteem, power of the divine maternity prompts glorification to her social profile that the common notion of femininity can never help her to achieve. This nervousness accompanied by the compulsive need for motherhood brings about unreasonable desires that have astutely been figured out in a significant number of Piercy and Atwood's novels. Examples of grieved mother-child connections and eminent mother-figures recur in the fiction of the two writers. The two ideas of maternity clash in Atwood's book *The Edible Woman* in which the idol image is represented by Clara, whilst the materialistic femininity, is projected through Ainsley, and to some extent by Marian. *Surfacing* (1972) highlights a dream subplot that narrates the story of the unnamed protagonist, who hands over her child to her spouse at the point of separation.

Adrienne Rich looks at *Surfacing* and finds that the principal message of the novel demonstrates that the quest for the father prompts an authentic search for the inherent mother figure in the protagonist and that the journey liberates the storyteller from man-controlled society and changes her life significantly. The principal character in *Lady Oracle* (1976) was abused by her mother and that experience appears to have had an enduring negative impact on her life. She has supporting and defensive mother figures throughout her life, yet they don't affect her life so much as her own horrible mother. The goals of the affection and triangular strife in *Life Before Man* (1979) revolves around a woman who discards her contraceptives and prevails with regards to winning the sole consideration of the man by surrendering her activity and giving herself to the task of a mother. *Cat's Eye* (1988) relates the account of a woman reflecting on her pre-adulthood; her association with her mother and her present devastating plight. It is obvious that Atwood's books spin around the topic of maternity and she depicts the challenge of becoming a mother and presents her female characters as trapped maternal bodies as is contended in Simone de Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex* where she intensely disentangles the mystery of celestial maternity.

Michel Foucault focuses on the significance of power and also hypothesises that spatial setting plays a prominent role in determining power relations. Power is

ever-moving energy and flows in social discourses at all levels. He affirms that “different strategies produce different spaces, clearly implying different consequences” (Palladino 13). Gilead is demonstrated as a very powerful topographical space in terms of its identification with social interests:

...knowledge is the instrument of powers even in geographical perspectives ... the circulation of knowledge comes about through the actions of intellectuals, who can be identified within a system strategically directed at a clear goal; different groups of intellectuals in different periods build the hegemony under a form of intellectual and moral leadership, within which consent and persuasion make for the re-elaboration of a ‘conception of the world’ to be adopted as the dominating vision inside certain spatial temporal circumstances (22-3).

The identities are ever-changing and flexible as Beauvoir once articulated that woman is what she is forced to become. The nexus of power politics does not spare anyone whether male or female; everyone has to participate in the process of becoming. “Seen thus, “becoming” is a way in which “subjectivation” takes place-the subject emerges, leaping outside assigned history, calling forth local memories and forming new historical knowledges” (Gordin et al.269). In Atwood and Piercy’s books, a common problem of sexual identity seems to emerge. However, we still are in the doldrums regarding the distinction between the two terms: sexuality and gender. If sexuality is natural and gender is social, then the problem can be easily resolved as has since now been affirmed through understanding the existence of dualities. Nonetheless, this duality of existence is significantly complex because we feel a need to comprehend the essential reality of ourselves. And it is evident from the above discussion that the female does not seem to have authority over her sexuality and is utilised by the male to serve his purposes and subordinate the female within the biological confinements. Thus, the female plight is really controversial and critical and Judith Butler expresses her distrust in the free nature of sexuality and it is apparent from her stated argument in the book *Undoing Gender* (2004) “If I claim to “have” a sexuality, then it would seem that a sexu-ality is there for me to call my own, to possess as an attribute. But what if sexuality is the means by which I am

dispossessed? What if it is invested and animated from elsewhere even as it is precisely mine?" (16).

The fundamental logic is based on the assumption that the sexuality of an individual regardless of the sex or gender difference is formed and identified in relation to the other and especially one in the power. Struggles in all spheres of life are generated around the motive to acquire power and this may be called relational power politics. "If I am struggling for autonomy, do I not need to be struggling for something else as well, a conception of myself as invariably in community, impressed upon by others, impressing them as well..." (21).

Unequivocally, it seems unrealistic to envision the two extreme spaces of existence, i.e., utopia and dystopia, and most likely we too as purported discerning creatures may scrutinise the possibility of a theoretical land with vast prospects. Moreover, the elimination of identities and the construction of fluid identities can prove dangerous and baseless. It may completely confuse our idea of existence and land us somewhere in the abstract idea of life. We are called by our names and how would we define ourselves in case we do not claim a name? And what would be the purpose of our existence without an identity? Here Foucault mediates between the two extremes of spatial existence by introducing his concept of heterotopias which is further subdivided into various forms of identifiable spatial existences and most importantly the Foucauldian heterotopias are not fixed or static realms of existence rather these are shifting realities that transform according to the context. The enigma of contrast between Atwood's dystopia in *The Handmaid's Tale* and Piercy's utopian dystopia in *The Woman on the Edge of Time* can be resolved through the intercession of heterotopias.

## Chapter- 7

### **Undoing the Feminine/Masculine Dualities: An Analysis of *Vida* and *Surfacing***

Generally, power has a symbolic signification with respect to its effectiveness in interceding and shaping our lives. It is an abstract characteristic owned by one and lacking in the other at a particular point in time. Arguably, power delimits the freedom of the individuals by allocating them subjective positions. It needs to assert its impact only through differences and inequity. To ensure its authenticity, it must deliver its own assortments of information and its constructed realities. Foucault theorises that power cannot function in isolation and the association between the powerful and the powerless is non-symmetrical and the former can jeopardize the sense of freedom of the latter. Power essentially is capacitated to seize and delimit the choices, possibilities, and growth of the subject. It can control the chronology, temporality, and future of the communities. Customarily, power functions through its logic of domination and control. Foucault postulates that power exerts its impact in various ways and is all-pervasive. Whether mother-daughter, husband-wife, father-son, or mother-son; all relations are governed through power politics. A household is a miniature form of global power politics. In order to understand the matrix of power, it is mandatory to investigate not only the surface structures but also the hidden mechanisms localised at the marginalised groups and peripheral spaces:

Against the traditional understanding of power, Foucault demonstrates that relations of power are not homogenous commodities that one either simply has or lacks; on the contrary, power pulses and reverberates through all areas of life; he who is *dominant* in one situation (as perhaps a father over his children) is, in a different situation, subject (as employee and citizen) ... power flows through the lives of human beings, constituting the individuals themselves (Cisney 11).

Michel Foucault and Judith Butler have much to say about sexual politics which is an integral part of an umbrella term, i.e., power politics. If relations are based on the structure of power and power is permeable and flexible then the equilibrium of the binary structural politics is exposed to a threat of deconstruction. Foucault revised the traditional concept of power through his use of the term *biopower*. In his book, *The History of Sexuality* (1978) Foucault defines the term *biopower* as “an explosion of numerous diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations” (140). *Biopower* provides the structural premise for the accomplishment of the task of political subjugation of the minority groups and essentially it exercises its vehemence through bodies. *Biopower* functions underneath the structures of relations and is masked; not effectively traceable. It encapsulates the theoretical idea of power and is palpably utilitarian underneath. It acclimatizes and outperforms the conventional idea of power.

Foucault revised the idea of power because according to him the traditional concept of power is less explanatory and delimited, and the notion of *biopower* is “absolutely incompatible with relations of sovereignty ... This new mechanism of power applies directly to bodies and what they do rather than to the land and what it produces” (Cisney 12). *Biopower* is one step ahead of the customised nature of power which is all the way confiscating, delimiting, threatening, and controlling. *Biopower* may be described as the power that operates through the system of power relations and is shifty by nature. Instead of delimiting and restricting the liberty of the subject; it optimises, reinforces, and expands the scope of the subject. As mentioned above, *biopower* is exercised via bodies and the resistance to the power also originates through bodies. In simple terms, *biopower* is not restrictive and negative, rather it is alternative, liberating, and constructive. Foucault describes two poles of *biopower*: “disciplinary power” (12) and “global mass” (13) of knowledge. Thereference to his mention of disciplinary power is found in his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975). Arguably, the logic of the *biopower* is not simply restricted to “individual living body” but to “species- body” (13), and for Foucault body politics is the “*bio-politics*

*of the population*” (13). Foucault again insists that “...the disciplinary power mechanisms of the body and the regulatory mechanisms of the population, constitute the modern incarnation of power relations, labelled as *biopower*” (13).

The sudden interest in sexuality that emerged in the late 60s evolved through the dialogic relationship between the poles of *biopower*. Sexuality is the link between the two domains of power. And the co-working of these two domains, i.e., the disciplinary and regulatory mechanics is significant from the perspective of sexual politics determining the employment of sexuality as a tool to empower the bodies. The problem of hysteria is thought to be akin to the female body and mind. All complexities of the female body and mind eventually are considered episodic and hysteric occurrences. During the second half of the nineteenth century, birth control, abortions, hysterectomy all became very popular among society, and these practices have been radically condemned by feminists and “...the psychiatric “pathologization” of sexual perversions emerged as the study of sex in the form of a psychological phenomenon, but this brings the individual sexual practices of human beings directly into the domain of abnormality and “corrective” intervention” (14).

In Margaret Atwood’s novel *Surfacing*, the unnamed narrator witnesses the growth of capitalism at the expense of looting the natural resources and vacuuming the resourceful energies of the environment. The commitment of *biopower* towards the advancement of the private enterprise is not just significant yet additionally obligatory for the augmentation of the industrialist networks. The anonymous narrator from *Surfacing* visits her childhood land after numerous years and is flabbergasted to find that she no more feels any feeling of belongingness with the spot and the essential explanation is the transformed landscape and the substitution of provincial land with rows of industries emanating grey smoke. Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (1978) writes “...the development of the great instruments of the state, as *institutions* of power, ensured the maintenance of production relations, the rudiments of anatomy and biopolitics, created in the eighteenth

century as *techniques* of power present at every level of the social body and utilized by very diverse institution... (141).

The term "*techniques*" (141) utilised by Foucault is a significant segment of his hypothesis identifying with power relations. The word *techniques* decode the political techniques that are utilised to synchronise power and knowledge and present them as political techniques that are employed in a coalition to obtain predominance. Marge Piercy in her novel *Vida* posits an open challenge to the masculine network of framed identities; similarly, she did in her other novel *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Vida, the female protagonist sets out on a never-ending struggle to establish peace and harmony in the world and is a diehard follower of the Red Wagon Network devoted to the similar tasks of the establishment of universal peace and hostile to war projects. She intently screens the inordinate weight of her fragility as a woman and consequently, she prefers to indulge in same-sex relations which is symbolical of her progressive motivations to reclaim her independence from manly reliance. She promotes her step-sister Natalie to get involved with her homosexual fancies but meets a stringent disavowal.

Judith Butler propagates the expansion of homosexuality as an open challenge to the patriarchal dominance and condemns the notion of universal heteronormativity. Judith Butler's examination of performance or performativity and critique of identity politics has greatly attracted the attention of contenders of body politics and feminists at the same time. Butler accounts for a transgression from the body politics, in view of equivalence and the policing of limits, to that of politics of identification that is based on the minute scrutiny of the power play of exclusion and inclusion; the decisive practices of identity formation and domination. Butler's exposition on identity politics derives the motivation from the Foucauldian critique of identity. Her insistence on the social acknowledgement of homosexual and transgender identities is based on an interest in the material significance of the body whether a male, female, or transgender body. Her account of the transgender bodies posits a threat to the heterosexually trained bodies and underpin feminist longings for the imaginary or utopian bodies like that of Luciente in

Piercy's novel *Woman on the Edge of Time*. For a poststructuralist critic, the crucial question arises whether it is plausible to envision a sexless body or a body lacking connection between the binary configurations of differences like that of sexuality and gender, gender and biology, etc.? All endeavours for anarchic, anti-patriarchal, radical feminists, and transgender races work on the principle of freedom from oppression in the name of gendered identity:

...whilst gender ambiguities, cross-dressing and other forms of politically strategic transgenering are seen as one step on the road towards ridding the world of 'gender oppression' by those who advocate it, for many trans individuals, the goal is not so much to rid the world of gender oppression as to find a space for themselves in which their gender identity matches the sex of their biological body. The aim is not to stand out and transgress, but to fit in and belong, to be 'normal'. Trans sex in this sense becomes a matter of assimilation rather than resistance and, far from undermining the binary system of sex and gender, would seem to reinforce it (Jagger 138).

The postmodern identity politics is an exceptionally pivotal area of concern from a contemporary point of view. There is a progressing struggle between the socio/political and fluid state of identities. The contrast between these two delineates the issue of sexual distinction that is accountable for the development of gender stereotypes. Poststructuralist feminism develops its argumentative narrative through the depiction of minimised, underestimated, and categorised subjectivities.

Marge Piercy's novel *Vida* is one of her most critical works elucidating the political setting of the second half of the twentieth century; it is simultaneously a sensuous and moving romantic tale. Piercy's novel *Vida* is brimming with delights and agonies, the examinations, catastrophes, and triumphs of an uncommon band of people. Davida Whippletree, popularly known as Vida is the pivotal character. She is introduced as a hidden agent of some mysterious group who has lived underground for about ten years. A political star of the '60s she worked covertly for the Red Wagon Group committed to the errand of the foundation of worldwide harmony. In the first



place, Vida is introduced as a vigorous, optimistic woman brimming with self-assurance and enthusiasm. Presently, after a decade, Vida is on the run, her star-quality supplanted by sheer mental fortitude. In an endeavour to escape she stays to a halt in a sheltered house on Cape Cod. Awkwardly, she meets another vagabond hiding in the house, a convicted guy, Joel who is ten years more youthful than she and was left abandoned as a child. During their temporary and short stay together, they warm up and feel affectionate for each other. Post its publication in 1979, *Los Angeles Times* hailed the book *Vida* as one of the splendid works of the '80s. The 1960s was the time when female issues were seen obviously as superfluous and anti-political even certain female gatherings thought about the female issues as optional. Marge Piercy embodies this irregularity through the depiction of a staggering and fragile eponymous character, Vida Asch.

Incontrast to Marge Piercy, who was profoundly drawn in with the understudy political development of the '60s, however, proceeded to devote herself to the female issues in the next decades, Vida Asch parts from the standard development to establish an aggressive, anti-radical community called the Little Red Wagon that, contrary to its preamble statement, does many corporate bombings and acquires primal spot on the FBI's most-wanted list. The account is less centred around these aggressor activities than on their outcome during the 1970s when the bomb smoke has settled and the network's residual individuals are political outlaws, reliant on a trap of sympathisers and companions named-the Network. Through Vida Asch, we see what it was to be a women's activist especially through her struggle to stay a pioneer in a situation of machismo and generalisation. She epitomises political and sexual force. She channels both manly and feminine power when they suit her motivation and utilise her sexuality as a device. Undoubtedly, Vida functions as a representative of the political battle that focuses on the liberation of the downtrodden, war afflicted, and weaker sections of society by exposing threats to the aristocratic class.

David or Vida, an underground woman is known by multiple names. As a general rule, she has just one name which she feels startled to absolute

David Whippletree. Vida shares an exceptional bond with practically all the females she comes across in her life. She is profoundly appended to her stepsister Natalie and fancies sexual intimacy with her and this longing leaves a permanent impact on her brain and heart to the degree that she requests an untainted, unceasing ecstasy from this commitment, however, Natalie appears to apologise for the surreptitious association with her stepsister. In the opening of the book, we get the information that Vida has come back to New York after partition from her husband, and enormously feels bothered by the malignant weight of society. She meets Hank who is additionally a co-accomplice and a member of the hostile to war organisation. Making due under a constant risk of being brought down, detained, and harassed opposes her free movement and she attempts to persuade Hank to go with her to the market and feels dumbfounded at the preferential and malignant disposition of Hank when he says “If you can’t take care of yourself, then who can? He raised his eyebrows, shrugging with an exaggerated heaviness. Wasp imitating Jewish mannerisms. Sitting in the plush armchair, he raised his feet onto a matching hassock to demonstrate his rootedness” (Piercy, “Vida” 13).

As indicated by manly reasoning, the possibility of neutrality between the genders is unrealistic, as it can never exist in its actual sense, it resembles an outlandish system. Hence the acknowledgement of a genuine contrast between the two genders must be kept up to maintain a strategic distance from the overextending and the hopeful expansion of the possibility of female neutrality with the male. Vida wonders about Hank's smug and masculine charged characteristics and contemplates over the solidness of his masculinity. Marge Piercy's main female character from the novel *Vida* brings into exchange Luce Irigaray's thoughts regarding power relations. As per Irigaray, the sexual relations between males and females must be treated with a component of marvel to keep it from expecting explicit jobs by the assignment of classifications of contrast. Consequently, the free-drifting real imaginaries for both genders will present new potential outcomes for the two genders.

Irigaray charges the non-devotees or western mysticism guaranteeing that the thoughts of lack of bias between the two genders are incomprehensible. “Everything is constructed in such a way that these realities remain separate, even opposed to one another. So that they neither mix, marry or, nor form an alliance. Their wedding is always being put off to a beyond, a future life, or else devalued...” (Irigaray15). As indicated by Irigaray, the ideological discourse is organised in such a way that both male and female surreptitiously weave an imperceptible or one may state oblivious ideological structure for one another and turn hostile to one's partner. Dull and stale presuppositions around one and other circles and characterises the status of both genders and leave no space with the expectation of complimentary drifting development of the un-gendered subjectivity. Irigaray states:

The passions have been repressed, stifled, or reduced, and reserved for good. Sometimes a space of wonder is left to works of art. But it is never found to reside in this locus: between man and woman. Into this place came attraction, greed, possession, consummation, disgust, and so on. But not that wonder which beholds what it sees always as it for the first time, never taking hold of the other as its object. It does not try to seize, possess, or reduce this object, but leaves its subjective, still free (13).

Piercy through the depiction of her anarchist female protagonist Vida Asch tries to decrease the theoretical and fake basic abstract thoughts intended for both genders. Vida significantly shows her enthusiasm for homosexual undertakings and continues firm confidence in the satisfaction of psyche and soul through extravagance in free-streaming sexual relations and fixes the sex legislative issues. Thus, Piercy is near the rationale advanced by Luce Irigaray centring on her expressed theory about the investigation of the feeling of wonder inside the genders.

The Red Wagon community capacities on the standards of value, equity, opportunity, and harmony, and that is the reason Vida hence refuses to outfit her body with fatal weapons. The security of the female has remained the main worry through the '60s and even 80s when violence against the

children and the females had reached its pinnacle, leaving the past records out of sight. Vida reacts to Hank's aloof misery in female delicacy. "Violence against women is a fact I have to take into account, just like any other woman. I don't carry a gun, Hank" (Piercy, "Vida" 13).

Marge Piercy has wittingly delineated the web of relations of power existing between the two genders. Vasos Kalakopoulos, Vida's first Greek spouse, and her sister Natalie's husband Daniel Brooks are the exemplifications of ceaseless confrontation between females and males. Both sisters are despondently hitched and Vida appears to bandit and challenges the organisation of marriage that reflects from her non-submitted inclusion in practically any of her marriages and also in the current one with Leigh. She abhors her step-sister Natalie's false anticipations and non-dignified submission to her spouse and blames her for voluntarily bearing the scourge of the constrained wedded relationship with her husband Daniel.

The aches of unconsolidated life inconvenience Vida who feels as though she has dried out her feminine powers and questions her womanliness. She understands that she has turned out to be contentious and denies her womanliness under the attire of progressive soul. She ponders over her decisions for inadequately moulding her character and reflects upon the predicament of other women and also of females below her age. "She had felt a failure at twenty-three: a botched marriage, not even a degree, a false start, older than the college students around her" (17).

Vida remains clashed about her decision of a male accomplice and repents over the absence of a true and authentic relationship with a male companion. However, she attempts to unite confidence in her ongoing husband Leigh and stays irritated over the absence of integration and truthfulness in him that, according to her, is the essential characteristic of a dignified mate. Vida never ambushes his sense of freedom by attempting to remain standoffish from his private mongering and yearns to win his confidence by giving space to their relationship. Nonetheless, Leigh also appears to acknowledge and advances Davida's undertakings when he admits "We won't box each other," Leigh said. "I don't expect to own you." And

don't you expect to own me!" (18). Vida feels exhilarated in Leigh's company and realises that her relationship with Leigh has some artificiality about it just like the loss of natural beauty of the environment. Vida seems to compare the plight of fast degrading ecological balance with her relationship with Leigh:

The pines dripped, the sea faded into a fogbank, but the air smelled freshly laundered. No one was in the other side of the duplex, through the knotty-pine wall. They had a big room with a double bed, a couple of pleasant chairs at the table, a modern bathroom with tub and shower and an outside counter lit up like a theatrical make-up table, with bulbs all around the mirror (24).

The mechanical process of lovemaking jolts Vida from inside and she pines for a natural soulful connection with Leigh. Mrs. Pfeiffer, Vida's mother-in-law conjures her for plain affectability towards the flawlessness and holiness of her name and she addresses Vida's emphasis on keeping her unique name and precluding the acknowledgment from securing Leigh's surname and to this Vida rebukes her suppositions and answers "I'm keeping my name because it's my name. Leigh can have it if he wants" (18).

While identity is generally estimated as being an agency by nature, the idea of identity itself stays in dispute as it does not catch the ease of the collaboration between the individual and their condition, especially if the social relations are dominated exclusively by one section of society. Judith Butler features the significance of social equity and reveres the assorted variety and pride as well as worth of every individual in her record of the nuclear subjects, which I find especially relevant to the underestimated populaces of Marge Piercy as her novels feature the potential effects of working inside a harsh and overwhelming setting. Through her female character delineation, one can speculate about the potential underlying foundations of the issues central to identity formation. Vida's obstinate emphasis on denying a cemented, perpetual, and curbed association with all-male that crosses her direction proposes her yearning to remain free. Social norms discipline the freewheeling nature of human beings and tame their unleashed psychic yearnings of an uninhibited clairvoyant space. Judith

Butler in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997) comments upon individual desires to stand in complete antagonism to cultural commitments:

Social discourses wield the power to form and regulate a subject through the imposition of its own terms. Those terms, however, are not simply accepted or internalized; they become psychic only through the movement by which they are dissimulated and “turned”. In the absence of explicit regulation, the subject emerges as one for whom power has become voice, and voice, the regulatory instrument of the psyche (197).

Judith Butler’s concept of regulatory power is closely linked with Foucault’s theory of the disciplinary force or power. “...power no longer acts unilaterally on its subject. Rather, the subject is produced, paradoxically, through thus withdrawal of power” (198) According to Butler, the discipline is maintained due to the impact of the regulatory force on the subject. The subjectivity is produced by the withdrawal of the power to resist and this withdrawal further leads to the emergence of melancholia and consequently, the complex of melancholia gives rise to a lack thus widening the gap between the social order and individual freedom. Foucault’s hypothesis of the pervasiveness of power is forwarded by Butler’s use of the term “ambivalence” (198). She opines that power is ambivalent and no one is spared from its impact. “The power imposed upon one is the power that animates one’s emergence, and there appears to be no escaping this ambivalence. Indeed, there appears to be no “one” without ambivalence...” (198). And our speculative desires, utopian longings, the extramarital and homosexual affairs are all defence mechanisms to deal with the harsh reality of life.

Both Piercy and Atwood present the obscure, unidentified, unknown females through the eponymous protagonist from *Vida* and the un-named storyteller from *Surfacing*. If Vida embraces the existence of a drifter, a privateer, or a rover, the unknown female figure from *Surfacing* embarks to discover the pith of her real existence through her solitary moorings and ambushed revelries. The author of *Surfacing* presents different impediments including defilement, communalism, ecological emergency, and the

decimation of human resources to think about the destruction of human and natural assets. Margaret Atwood's novel speaks of the challenge encountered by the Canadian sense of identity that is paralleled with the state of female consciousness. Both human and natural worlds crave a serene and uncorrupted social setting, however, the mechanical headway and surge of settler practices have added to decimating the sociological and common harmony. The storyteller grieves the loss of the untamed life and grand magnificence of the Canadian scene and laments. "The trees will never be allowed to grow that tall again, they're killed as soon as they're valuable, big-trees are scarce as whales" (Atwood, "Surfacing" 39).

Arguably, identity and the aligned issue of identity crisis have remained focal topics of discussion for centuries. Judith Butler is reproachful of how social norms, pressures, and ideological frameworks have endangered the idea of individual identity. For Butler, identity is a reiteration of exhibitions, rehearsal of social practices and we come to perform certain actions following the standardising norms that are administered by society. In this vein, Butler's idea of performativity helps to reveal that gender is not a naturally built phenomenon rather it is constructed by means of language, emblematic connections, and socialisation that takes place inside a standardising worldview supporting heterosexuality and social classifications. Performativity, as per Butler is the reiteration of acts in time, which are administered by the dominating discourses about commonality. Thus, the subject comes to perform and repeat certain acts while depending on the discourse that controls it.

In *Surfacing*, Atwood endeavours solidly to build up a discourse concerning the relationships of dominance at the personal, social, and national levels. The narrator's struggle against the extensive imperialistic practices of pseudo rationalists like her companions can be deciphered as an endeavour to safeguard her sense of authentic existence. The incorporation of the issues like private enterprise, biology, patriotism, environmentalism, utopianism, and female bildungsroman analysis enlarges the space for argumentation and imaginative investigation.

In *The Edible Woman*, Atwood extravagantly depicts all the female protagonists entrapped in their sexed bodies whilst in her next novel *Surfacing*, she seems to expand the horizon of her comprehension in understanding the de-sexed bodies and present the unnamed protagonist as the existential seeker. In *The Edible Woman*, Marian was serrated basically for plain extravagance in her narcissistic drives. She is sentenced for shipping disesteem to the divine image of a woman. However, in *Surfacing* Atwood is exonerated for her characters' existential dilemma displaying regret, apology, past sins, and bothered perspective animating the character's lives. A feeling of blame, shame pursues the female protagonist all through the novel. Deliberately, the novel opens up in a genuine picaresque style wherein the storyteller is headed back to the past, her inaccessible adolescence. "I can't believe I'm on this road again, twisting along past the lake where the white birches are dying, the disease is spreading up from the south, and I notice they now have sea-planes for hire" (10) and this abrupt opening goes well with the concluding statement of the protagonist as she exclaims "When I am clean I come up out of the lake, leaving my false body floating on the surface, a cloth decoy..." (140).

Much the same as her (the storyteller's) heart, the Canadian idyllic land appears to have lost its attraction and magnetism. The infertile grounds dried out water assets, termination of marine life symbolise the wretched inward destruction of her heart. Unlike Marian in *The Edible Woman*, the anonymous narrator of *Surfacing* doesn't raise herself to an estranged situation by exposing her sustenance and deceiving herself by tolerating anorexia as a hermit to a bargained female presence rather she experiences the aches of aggregate or racial blame and acknowledges her contribution, as a city inhabitant, in ravaging the natural resources of rich assets of the Canadian rustic life. She reviews her tender years and records the cutting-edge competition of the modern society and holds the imperialistic interests of the Americans answerable for a steady breakdown from an ideal, blameless domain to a colossal, contaminated, and undermined landscape. She is fearful that the untouched natural assets of Canada must not be highlighted to the Americans and hence she warns her friends not to indulge in fishing



adventures. “I warned them not to say anything about the fish: if they do, this part of the lake will be swarming with Americans, they have an uncanny way of passing the word, like ants about sugar or lobsters” (56). Interestingly *Surfacing* prevails with regards to conveying a discourse through three distinct perspectives, i.e., feministic demeanour, postmodern sympathies, and reformative social measures. The gaps, abysses left unattended in *The Edible Woman* are fulfilled in Atwood's second novel *Surfacing*.

The impressions of Canadian patriotism light up the corpus of Atwood's books and she has additionally been acclaimed by Canadian scholars and literary communities as a nationalistic women's activist writer. Contrastingly, the American commentators investigated *Surfacing* as thoroughly suffused with feminist issues. Before Atwood, no other Canadian writer initiated to relate Canadian patriotism with the female consciousness, therefore, Atwood's work essentially enunciated new openings to such ignored issues pertinent to the expansion of the female consciousness. However, Atwood has never felt at ease with naming her composition to an ostensible status, i.e., feminism and she forgoes such institutionalisation and ascribes her composition as an outcome of inherent motivation.

Atwood explained a discourse in the Canadian-American relationship in her 1981 talk in which she examined the nearness between the two related discourses, i.e., woman's rights and Canadian patriotism. Comparative thoughts had just been addressed in *The Edible Woman*, in which Marian struggled, to a great extent subliminally, for Peter's affirmation of her reality as an independent self. A similar confrontation, in *Surfacing*, is stretched out beyond body politics as Atwood delineates the Canadian existential struggle to preserve a fortified and independent status.

On the other hand, Vida oftentimes hurls under the weight of gender difference and detects some measure of frustration inside the system that was comprised to grow the goals of unity, equity, and harmony. The male individuals command the system, famously known as the Red Wagon community, and do not spare zero chance of embarrassing the female on grounds of physical feebleness and enthusiastic vacuity. With the exception

of Joe, her latest lover, all Vida's male suitors like Hank, Leigh, and Kiley attempt to disrupt her inner harmony and cause her to conceive that she is a powerless, vulnerable, and feeble female. She feels that her sexual dependency on male friends like that of Kevin is causing no relief to her aching heart. "When Kevin was thrusting high and hard into her, she stopped thinking, she stopped feeling anything except his weight and his violence and his need and his pleasure. Her coming was more emotional than physical ... The sense of compulsion convinced her" (Piercy, "Vida" 146). Her disillusionment coupled with the fear of domination by the male instils in her an interest in lesbian affairs. Since lesbian sexualities have to a great extent been moulded by quietness and mystery, mistreatment and restraint, unnaturalness and disgust; utilising a mix of multifaceted and interdisciplinary techniques is by all accounts considered the best procedure to approach the unpredictable work of chronicled, socio-cultural and financial conditions that portray the encounters of woman race.

Moving toward the subject of same-sex sexualities from such various epistemological edges, as delineated by the expositions incorporated into these exceptional works, we account for a superior comprehension of the unstable and changing articulations of lesbian and homosexual affairs. Same-sex associations, transgender connections, and legislative issues have not gathered much attention in the arena of feminist investigations of sex issues and to a great extent remain unrepresented in the scholarly works. Piercy's depiction of lesbian characters is not quite the same as the depiction of severely treated lesbians and obscene portrayal of female maltreatment as delineated in the American mainstream society of the 1960s. Her apparently real-life encounters with female characters stir the imagination of the ordinary reader and the literary critic alike. Piercy's female characters are varying with characteristics of body and mind and override their physical existence through the manipulation of intellectual capacities. Sometimes it appears as if Piercy, like an exclusionist, is fancying a futuristic society that is inhabited by females only who are capable to derive pleasure from their own bodies and resources and are quite independent of the reliance on male physical expertise.

Vida is the chief exponent of the lesbian rights who duly charge her stepsister Natalie for her hypocritical approach toward female sexual undertakings “You don’t think relationships between women can be serious? ... Do you deny the importance of orgasm? ... Oh, Natty, Lohania says you and I have a basically incestuous relationship but we’re scared to consummate it. We love each other but we shy off from expressing it”. She further instigates “Do you deny the nature of our relationship? Don’t you want to force through the taboo that divides us?” (127). Piercy opines that inside various lesbian networks, same-sex-adoring females experiment with different utilities on their bodies, incline toward butch–femme organisations, and explore a nearby association with other women.

The poststructuralist feminists have assumed a key job in mapping the changing implications of sex, gender, and fluid gendered roles, and their account tracks how bodies recede the sexual appeal, how sex and sexuality become connected to bodies as they travel through space, how power flows and moves as it sexes and de-sexes. In *Surfacing*, David's incorporating authority over his better half Anna is directed around Anna's body. Atwood comments “Saving the world, everyone wants to; men think they can do it with guns, women with their bodies, love conquers all, conquerors love all, mirages raised by words” (Atwood, “Surfacing” 129).

In *Vida*, Eva, the lesbian mate of Vida, indisputably despises her companion's incorporation with any male and rebukes her for trickiness. Vida communicates her powerlessness in conceding Eva as a substitute for a male friend. “Eva, I tried. But it didn’t become what I want. I’m sorry it isn’t, but I’m telling you, I felt in exile. I wanted to please you, and I tried” (Piercy, “Vida” 250). Thus, it is clear that sexuality and gender play a significant role in both novels. Opposing Vida's ideas, Eva questions her concept of nature of affection and examines Vida for grasping heterosexuality and charges her for deriving pleasure from her male friend “Why is it good with him? Because he is a man and you think that’s real” (250). Piercy envisions a futuristic society offering immense possibilities for the two sexes and her inclination in

exhibiting homosexual relations is a step towards the attainment of sexual freedom, especially for females.

Somehow, Piercy seems to suggest that the female is prosecuted and charged for being a vulnerable body and her indulgence in homosexual relations can reclaim her from the substantial dependence on the male. However, homosexuals have continuously been blamed for devaluing their customary roles and also have been charged vehemently for keeping up the postcolonial patriot plan and prejudiced rhetoric.

Eva investigates Vida's expulsion of a perpetual relationship with her as a sign of heterosexual dominance. Natalie quite stringently disapproves of any lesbian filiations with her stepsister Vida and simply abhors the dream of an idealised society inhabited by unnatural lesbian doles. Lesbians, along these lines, are projected as enemies of a grand patriarchal narrative and may advance the possibility of national defilement and breakdown, underscored by the misguided judgment that homosexual bonding can prompt ethnic eradication. Atwood's epic *The Edible Woman* is loaded with the issues concerning female science that proclaimed and provoked discourse on the female body and welcomed obvious analysis from the scholastic circles for its extraordinary interest in the delicate issues concerning the female body. Immersed by the nervousness to go amiss her consideration from the sexed body, Atwood in her novel *Surfacing* loans a blunt and clever tone to her composition. Her created spotlight on certain various fields of learning including gendered identity can be viewed as an endeavour to shun comfortable digestion and relationship with the women's activist issues. In place of exhibiting the body issues, Atwood in *Surfacing* highlighted the antagonistic image of a masculine woman who is immersed in the process of debunking the constructed roles, and interestingly, this masculine image stands in comparison to Vida's unfeminine demeanour.

Strikingly, the subject of the destruction of natural resources and environmental crisis runs parallel to the portrayal of the two books, i.e., *Vida* and *Surfacing* respectively. Vida consistently contemplates over the progressive industrial undertakings defacing the characteristic existence of her

age and dissidents against the state system and policies for advancing the expansion in the creation of atomic technology. Vida, in one of her powerful speeches on the anti-war campaign addresses the audience against the governmental policies imposing war on the general masses:

Basically, power is power. The same-folks that gave us the military-industrial complex, utilities that charge more and more for less and less, dirty air and rotten cities, a fifty-percent unemployment rate in the ghettos ... Nuclear power involves public safety: What happens to people who live nearby? To their kids? Downstream? Why does it make power cost more? What happens to wastes nobody knows what to do with? How does the government interlock with the industry...? (248).

On the other hand, the anonymous protagonist from *Surfacing* atones over her lost past and honest Canadian scenic beauty; the critical and solid landscape of her youth exposes the American imperialistic practices that are liable for the pulverisation of the Canadian natural and human resources. A quality of revulsion influences through the portrayal since the storyteller detects an enmity between the characteristic environment and the inner human instinct. In the following lines, the narrator comments on the American imperialistic practices and maltreatment of the Canadian innocent landscape:

Straight power, they mainlined it; I imagined the surge of electricity, nerve juice, as they hit it, brought it down, flapping like a crippled plane. The innocents get slaughtered because they exist, I thought, there is nothing inside the happy killers to restrain them, no conscience or piety; for them the only things worthy of life were human, their own kind of human, framed in the proper clothes and the gimmicks, laminated (Atwood, "Surfacing" 101).

Unlike, *The Edible Woman* embodying the identity crisis of a solitary female evidenced through the chief protagonist Marian's existential yearnings showing itself as aching for a free and autonomous presence, *Surfacing* includes the subject of the aggregate awareness, i.e., nationalistic awareness of a country oppressed on account of a prosperous industrialist American

culture. The gasping female heart of Marian from *The Edible Woman* changes into a fantastic Canadian scene of Atwood's subsequent novel *Surfacing*. Marian endures the weight of man-centric culture, whilst the chief character from *Surfacing* communicates her pain brought out by the American misuse of Canadian natural assets.

The expansion of capitalism and recognisable proof of environmental degradation diffuse all through the story and the interrelation of the political issues to the novel amplifies its degree. The narrator is crusading to a place looking for her lost guiltless and innocent charm of the past days. The city life has infringed upon her internal immaculateness and she finds no comfort in any relationship even her buoy, Joe, and neglects to build up a significant association with him. She believes that her separation from the natural course of life, i.e., the rustic domain has reviled her personal life, subsequently, she lost her child in the womb that led to the breakdown of her marital life. The claim of the city life has demolished her aliveness and credulity, and the woman inside her needs to break away from the ingenuity of the engineered presence yet an alternate route to the real may frustrate her from the encasing horror of aloofness.

The narrator's father represents the cause of the common educated masses that fortifies the superimposition of syllogistic thinking over the injudicious assessment of life. He is an even-minded individual whom Atwood represents as a rationalist. From the beginning, the storyteller's mother has a tendency towards nature. She is all around familiar among her relatives for the unexpected vanishings which happen as often as possible and Atwood parallels her whimsical flights to the trip of a winged animal in search of immanent freedom. "Sometimes she would take breadcrumbs or seeds out to the bird feeder tray and wait for the jays, standing quiet as a tree, or she would pull weeds in the garden; but on some days she would simply vanish, walk off by herself into the forest" (42). The anonymous narrator accepts that her mother turned into a casualty of the manipulative techniques invented by the cash monger society henceforth she blames her mother's gullible nature that led her to a disastrous fall. Either you belong to the system or you are

forced to believe that you are a nomad like what happened with the narrator's mother. She is petrified at the idea of meeting her mother's destiny so she starts looking for her lost father to protect her from the extended nothingness haunting deep in her psyche. In order to create equilibrium, she compulsively feels the need to locate her father; an image of rationale, offering a promised assurance for liberation and survival.

Death is the ultimate loss for the human and the vanishing of the narrator's father frustrates her so much that she wants to solve the riddle of her father's sudden disappearance and by the end of the tale; the narrator also wants to disappear like her father. Judith Butler comments in her book *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997) "The "death drive" is thus paradoxically necessary for survival; in mourning, the breaking of attachment inaugurates life. But this "break" is never final or full" (194). Freudian *Thanatos* (58) or the death wish of the narrator presupposes her love for life, i.e., *eros* which is imbued deeply in her futuristic plans and the hope of a bright future ahead. In order to evacuate the pressure of the patriarchal reasoning that, in her case, is embodied in her father; she ambushes, escapes, alienates herself from others. She attempts to gain mastery over her life by renewing her idea of freedom and by distancing her from the influence of her father; the omnipresent patriarch. "The "mastery" of the ego would then be identified as the effect of the death drive, and life, in a Nietzschean sense, would break apart that mastery, initiating a lived mode of becoming that contests the stasis and defensive status of the ego" (194). She wishes to hide underground so that she can be able to protect her authenticity from the evil influence of hypocritical society; Freud would describe it as a wish to vanish, i.e., the death drive.

The search motive is integral to the theme of the novel *Surfacing*. For betraying the male mastery, the narrator undertakes a journey to look for her disappeared father. Here Lacan's attestation might be credited in which he reifies the Freudian picture of the authorised father by broadcasting the death of the father. The wilderness administers the world and the primitive assertion of prioritising the role of the male is in danger since the father is dead. Atwood's tale *Surfacing* comes full circle with a similar problem from where

there is nothing left to be looked at. The protagonist from the novel *Surfacing* manifests her anguish over the governance and monopolising of male culture over the female by crusading through the wilderness and operating against the usual role assigned to a woman, i.e., of a confined entity. She is ceaselessly glared and jeered at by the men around, particularly David, who acts as a spokesperson for male gentility and also represents the image of a narcissistic male.

A profound anguishing dash of distress crosses the narrator as she observes the disintegrating state of the land-space where she had spent her adolescence. The eco women's activists counter males by showcasing them as destructors and the females as the constructors; the progenitors of the earthly existence. Eco women's activists champion the reason for the female predominance by declaring manly society as threatening and contentious. Vandana Shiva, the eminent eco women's activist advances an insight into spiritual feminism and states that women "...rediscovered the interdependence and connectedness of everything, they also discovered what was called the spiritual dimension of life-the realisation of this interconnectedness was itself sometimes called spirituality" (Mies 16). The search motif of Atwood's anonymous narrator symbolises a search for spirituality thus one can clearly locate the impact of eco-feminist yearning in Atwood's fiction. David forcibly strips off his wife's clothes and projects his camera lens on the most vulnerable parts of her body even after meeting resistance from his wife; he bullies her into the act. This hypocritical nature of masculine society is based on the assumption that the body of the woman is meant to suffer and thus male has the power to mould her body, the way he likes.

Despite the fact that the persecution of women depends on the apportionment of their bodies by man centric society, yet one cannot assume that the body is the source of female exploitation because if this idea is allowed to perpetuate then the female will never be able to retrieve an equivalent status in society and will forever be trapped in the network of the sexual politics and the binary logic of sexual disparity will rule the social



order. Contrary to this, stands the logic of the natural body that must be treated as a free-floating and independent source of power and is able to utilise its natural capacities to counter all types of disparities.

To put an end to the gender disparity both writers look forward to a flexible approach that is based on clarifying the difference and relation between sex and gendered identity. Demonstration of homosexuality in the novels of Marge Piercy and the depiction of extra-marital relations in Atwood can be analysed as tools to legitimise the idea of individual freedom. Unequivocally, the distinction between sexed bodies and culturally defined feminine figures is very significant to highlight because this difference accounts for the revelation of the masculine strategies to trap females in their bodies. Thus, by outlining the difference between sex and gender, one may understand that the notion of gender is flexible and not static. Judith Butler in *Bodies That Matter* (2011) argues:

...in order for feminism to proceed as a critical practice, it must ground itself in the sexed specificity of the female body. Even as the category of sex is always reinscribed as gender, that sex must still be presumed as the irreducible point of departure for the various cultural constructions it has come to bear ... I want to ask how and why “materiality” has become a sign of irreducibility, that is, how is it that the materiality of sex is understood as that which only bears cultural constructions and, therefore, cannot be construction? (4).

For Butler gender is a material reality and it is not confined to the body which is essentially non-static. Like materialist feminists, Butler also focuses on the materiality of the sexed body which becomes relevant through the performance of various functions. The two protagonists from *Surfacing* and *Vida* search for their real existence outside the premises of their bodies. Vida in a stunning way plays out all the exercises that are esteemed agnostic and are deemed nihilistic for the female. She is charged by the group members for acting in an adversarial way and is threatened to be excommunicated by the patriarchs of the network. The materiality of the female body is thought to be legitimised only by the patriarchal society and Judith Butler counters this

argument by saying “...prized materiality may well be constituted through an exclusion and degradation of the feminine that is profoundly problematic for feminism” (5). Vida and the unknown narrator’s persistent struggle to engage in anti-patriarchal activities are symbolic of the expanded enthusiasm of the female in the development of her own material identity.

In an epiphanic moment, the narrator compares her premature aborted womb with the crushed state of the Canadian landscape. The subject of the uncommon stripping of the physical scene and the human body runs parallel in the tale. The barren sight of nature, aloofness, and lingering melancholia crush whatever comes its way, in a comparable way, the narrator communicates a powerful urge to annul and slice her association with all men including her buoy Joe, and a previous spouse whom she considers responsible for ravaging her womb. Fair-mindedly, she offers reparations for the transgressions offered by her sibling during their nostalgic days communicated in her recollections when her brother Tom is seen viciously squirming with flying creatures in an enclosure. For her, Tom is not an exception and he similarly took part in carrying shame to the race by defiling the beauty of nature. The consciousness of the collective contribution of the human race in the defilement of nature haunts the narrator all the while.

Piercy's protagonist Vida Asch peers through the horde and feels disheartened by the irate faces looking down at the protestors as the genuine miscreants and marshals of the disorder. She feels frustrated to see that individuals have implicitly acknowledged the severe and disturbance causing strategies including the extension of atomic technology and armed industry, and masses detest the exercises demonstrating the development of harmony and stand hostile to the anti-war patriots. The development of atomic power may cause universal decimation and the mission of Vida Asch and her comrades are fixated on decreasing the enthusiasm for the expansion of the weapon industry and give the world a quiet and idealistic space to exist. As the unnamed narrator from *Surfacing*, Vida Asch is profoundly sensitive to the issues concerning environmental degradation and stands in favour of the development of a solid harmony for a prosperous life on earth. Both

protagonists atone the loss of the natural resources and flourish with an expectation for the re-foundation of all-inclusive harmony and peace.

In *Surfacing*, the female protagonist considers the American elite and government liable for plundering the environmental assets of Canada; the colonised place that has endured maltreatment in the hands of the American imperialistic practices and this characteristic misuse has astutely been contrasted with the abuse of female by Margaret Atwood and this is identifiable through an occurrence wherein David; a mouthpiece of the American patriarchal society, endeavours to use the body of his wife Anna to increase fiscal advantages. The exhibition of David's remorseless treatment of Anna during a photo-shoot bewilders the latter's sense of affection. David plans to photo-shoot his documentary on the bygone common ancient rarities and to elevate the impact he schematics to include sensuous scenes speaking to the female body from various points along these lines he forces Anna, against her desire, to act as he wishes. The narrator is anguished at Anna's tacit acceptance of her husband's sexual exploitation of his wife's body. Foucault comments in *The History of Sexuality* (1978) that the subject is watchful of the process of subjection and comments:

...we are conscious of defying established power, our tone of voice shows that we know we are being subversive, and we ardently conjure away the present and appeal to the future, whose days will be hastened by the contribution we believe we are making. Something that smacks of revolt, of promised freedom, of the coming of a different law, slips easily into this discourse on sexual oppression (6-7).

The narrator feels blocked to see Anna's situation and presumes the same destiny for her later on. The woman's body turns into a man's property once she acknowledges conjugating herself with a man in a legal pact, i.e., marriage. Although the glaring eye of the camera troubled Anna to an incredible degree yet at the same time she postured for him as a loyal spouse. Later in a scene, the narrator angrily tears up the film containing Anna's recorded pictures and discharges her from the compacted complex indicating disgrace:

I unwind the film, standing full in the sun, and let it spiral into the lake ... The film coils onto the sand under the water, weighed down by its containers; the invisible captured images are swimming away into the lake like tadpoles ...Anna no longer bottled and shelved (Atwood, "Surfacing" 131).

Anna cautions the storyteller against her husband's shrewd character and fears that he may hurt her for pulverising his film. The appropriate dread of mortification and malice envelops the whole women's race. David and the company can hardly tolerate the determined and resilient standing of the narrator and from inside they need to make sure that her father is dead so her undertakings will end in absolute frustration and the female quest for rationale will come up short. Parallel to Anna's account of slavery runs Natalie's case of subversion where she is reproached and objected to by her husband for non-satisfaction with nurturing and wifely obligations. Daniel charges her for keeping an interest in the political issues administered by the network people and he also downgrades the advancement of Natalie's political profession and reprimands her for the negligence of motherly obligations. Natalie is expecting another child and Daniel firmly wish to put a conclusion to her political longing and bellows "If you want to lose this baby, pay a good abortionist. But don't lose it from stupidity in the streets!" (Piercy, "Vida" 90). While Daniel tries to remind Natalie of her motherly duties, she retaliates and replies "What kind of fink do you suppose I'm to sit home while everybody's putting their bodies on the line? Do you think I have some kind of pass out of having to take chances, just because I'm a mother?" (90). Vida intently inspects Natalie's predicament and empathises with her enduring the pains of a mother. She feels alleviated by consoling that she never stacked her life with the extra obligation of a child, a body inside a body. Vida considers over the maternal hardships that her mother Ruby confronted and when the latter hears gossip about Alice's supposed pregnancy, she petitions God for her welfare by wishing rumours to turn out a fabrication. Ruby's tendency toward homosexuality can be deciphered as a procedure to conquer the burden of male autonomy since she is very much aware that she can keep her body

unblemished through indulgence in a homosexual relationship which is non-demanding and unproblematic simultaneously. Butler in her book *Undoing Gender* (2004) states “Indeed, individuals rely on institutions of social support in order to exercise self-determination with respect to what body and what gender to have and maintain, so that self-determination” (7).

Especially in the case of women, this sexual dependence of the body on the structured binary classification is irksome to endure for the fact that it delimits the scope of the female sex to her body. The plundering of the natural resources has insightfully been contrasted with the exploitation of female sexuality for physical and material gratification of the male and this selfish and utilitarian enterprise of deriving sexual and material delight by the male is readily detectable in Piercy's novel *Vida*. Relatively, in Atwood's novel *Surfacing*, the assault of the Canadian idyllic land in the hands of consumerist and the imperialistic American bourgeoisie has co-related with the ardent male figures like Daniel who sexually abuses his wife to fulfil fiscal aspirations. Anna actually appears to be smothered and implicitly complies with his directions however she stands in resilience to her husband's noxious plans after a radical interaction with the narrator. In correlation, the female protagonist from *Vida* remains in opposition to the vindictive disposition of the patriarchal society and has faith in a free-streaming trade of sexual relations independent of gender differences. Vida Asch finds tremendous satisfaction with the body and brain through an extravagant sexual association with her friend Eva. Her intrepid and explicitly guiltless sexual commitment with the female gratifies her and the homosexual act strengthens her faith in the neutrality of sex. Nonchalantly, Vida challenges the idea of undermined female sexuality and derives pleasure from the feeling of self-empowerment that heralds through independence from the male in sexual matters:

The affirmation of a sexuality that has never been more rigorously subjugated than during the age of the hypocritical, bustling, and responsible bourgeoisie is coupled with the grandiloquence of a discourse purporting to reveal the truth about sex, modify its economy

within reality, subverts the law that governs it, and change its future (Foucault, "The History of Sexuality" 8).

The narrator from *Surfacing* detaches her from city life and sets out to rediscover the innocent landscape of her childhood. Similarly, the anonymous narrator is facing an existential crisis and remains in contrast with Vida Asch's longings for an idealistic space that will function on the standards of value, equity, and opportunity for all. In the two novels, it is evident that power operates at both levels, i.e., social and individual. The states, infrastructures, environment, and most importantly, individual lives are governed by power, however, it has been highlighted that the untamed power causes much harm to humanity. Foucault argues in his *Selected Interviews* (1980) writes "Power makes men mad, and those who govern are blind; only those who keep their distance from power, who are in no way implicated in tyranny, shut up in their Cartesian *poele*, their room, their meditations, only they can discover the truth" (51).

It is relevant to say that power and freedom coexist and ultimately all endeavours to accomplish power are procedures to obtain freedom. The two underground women from the novels *Vida* and *Surfacing* respectively struggle against the wave of patriarchal dominance. The narrator from *Surfacing* always remains anonymous, though Vida Asch is known by multiple names. Vida wants others to call her by her real name, i.e., Davida Whippletree, or at least her boyfriend should call her Davida, but in reality, she is terrified of articulating her real name in any event, when alone or with her male friends. She is always haunted by the fear of being recognised and thus feels as if she is a prisoner. However, she is compelled to hide her true identity and howls with disappointment. "She had run out of willpower. She wanted someone to call her Vida; she wanted someone to hold her and love her and coddle her; she wanted to be herself again!" (Piercy, "Vida" 207).

Undeniably, the value of the female body is restricted to her conceptive capacities. Along these lines obliteration of bio-resources and the politics of egotistical commoditisation of the female body is uncovered through the female characters in the two books. The extravagant attention on

the female body and revered status of the mother is the dominating principle on the basis of which the male-centric society intrigues to override female lives. Vida's indulgent enthusiasm for the same-sex affiliations is a defiant assault on the complacent admittance of the heterosexual norms by the female whilst the strange vanishings of the storyteller's mother are emblematic of the yearnings of freedom-seeking female and in addition, homosexuality proffers an immense amount of sexual freedom to the female through which she can defy the masculine logic of the female dependency. Unequivocally, society disapproves of such antagonistic gestures of the female even Vida Asch's sister Natalie abhors the perpetuation of homosexuality while Vida insists on promulgating sexual freedom for both genders. Her recent boyfriend Joe detests her for homosexual relations with Eva, however, Vida responds instantly and charges Joe for his frequent sexual encounters depicting pederasty and questions his idea of freedom. Piercy tries to exhibit her lesbian female characters, not as socially deceived minorities rather they are introduced as constructive, significant, and politically dynamic personalities. Not just female sexualities are featured in Piercy's fiction, yet additionally, the portrayal of pederasty occupies a significant place in her books. Thus, Piercy appears to be a profound supporter of sexual freedom.

Both the writers are aware that the ceaseless development of technology based on the worldwide economy, which is essentially reliant upon the overconsumption of petroleum derivatives, is quickly expanding the extent of ozone-depleting substances in the environment. The development of atomic innovation, control ventures, modern infrastructure is liable for the ascension in the worldwide temperature, that credits to the unpredictable, comprehensive atmospheric designs. The depiction of the loss of eminent homestead, honest, unadulterated, and non-abused landscape of Canada which is molested through cruel plundering off the natural resources and the extension of industry fills the narrator with anger and hostility and she tries to escape from the city life. Likewise, Vida Asch devotes her life, for as long as she can remember, to the cause of national and worldwide welfare. Through taking an interest in different revolutionary exercises, she needs to pass on the

message of harmony and peace yet to her failure she finds that the germs of defilement and restraint have damaged the intensity of so-called progressives.

The obscurity of rage, appetite, untrustworthiness and the will to pick up power and pelf have occupied the consideration of the revolutionaries and henceforth crumbled their energy to the degree of psychological oppression. The sociological examination of the issue of environmental change is profoundly connected with the sociological spaces of class, political economy, and culture and these social relations revolve around the administrative and power politics issues. Atwood recognises the significant issues of contemporary times and identifies the environmental crisis with sexual politics that is based on the relations of power.

The environmental crisis and forecasting risk of huge annihilation and eradication of human life on the earth is portrayed by Atwood's several characters including the unnamed narrator's acculturation with nature in *Surfacing* and Charis' private mumblings in *The Robber's Bride*, to the euphoric delight inferred by Elaine's father in guessing the upcoming fate destined for the whole world during a thoughtful discussion in *Cat's Eye*. The idealistic dream is expressly imagined by Atwood's characters like Fish, a youthful researcher, and Marian's friend from *The Edible Woman* who uncovers his oblong desire to annihilate modern society and herald another age, which is critical in understanding the anguished youth. Atwood's books are replete with occurrences focussing on eco-driven progressivism, and she stays aware of the quest for the reclamation of the idealistic culture. Atwood particularly attempts to set up a proximal proclivity between gender issues and power politics. Her non-fiction works named "*When the Lights Go Out*" (2015) broadly discourses on the grand connection between nature and the female. With the enhancement of the account, the narrator legitimises her position in accepting that the manly society is the ancestor of all destruction that happened on the earth. The male-centric regime communicates through the patriarchal and malevolent language and administers, legitimises, and consumes the presence of both nature and women alike. She is confirmed in her conviction that the male-dominated culture has gotten an awful snare of



unpreventable wretchedness that has ravaged female humility. The fantasy of the all-powerful mother finds a locus in Atwood's books.

The scriptural legend of *Paradise Lost* relates to the theme of an environmental crisis occurring in the form of the transportation of humanity from paradise to damnation. Much the same as Helen of Troy, Eve consistently stays answerable for the removal of humankind from the heavenly domain. Legends are woven around the morals of good and devilish and the female body is held accountable for the damnation. In her novel, *Surfacing* Atwood constructs a parallel approach in studying the expanse of the panorama of nature and the instinctual feminine nature with supreme fervency. The quest for the missing father and contrition over the detachment with the mother symbolises the double dispute drifting the cognisance of the narrator. The mother's freakish solitary moorings and father's self-trained lifestyle leaves the narrator in a state of dilemma.

Lacan addresses the thought centring on the fixed gaze with the most extreme earnestness. Gaze, in its very own right, is a neutral gesture and may, indistinguishably, be facilitated by the male or the female. Nonetheless, the distinctive component between the gaze of the male and the female is that if it is resourced from the former, then it holds a symbolic value and is exceptionally critical; an aberrant signal representing disgust or ill-will and if it originates from the female, it becomes immaterial and loses its noteworthiness. Atwood's narrator contends against the established significance of the male gaze that encases the female and minimises her idea of self-worth and freedom.

In continuation with *Surfacing*, Vida Asch from Piercy's novel searches for something that consistently stays ungraspable. Now and again, she is mind-boggled and feels miserable with dissatisfaction at the absence of a unified relationship with her surroundings. All through the narrative, she keeps on persuading others that she truly exists and is as vulnerable as others are. Neither her first spouse Vasos or the ongoing one Leigh Pfeiffer attempts to provide solace and love to her while she continues longing for a satisfying affiliation and in the course develops a lesbian association with her female

companions. A feeling of purposelessness swarms her entire self and she jumps from one affair to the other and runs over ratty attributes of the male society and makes an assessment that the main business for the male is only a female body. Vida Asch intently examines the quick breaking down measures of the Red Wagon community and predicts an expedient decay of their affiliation. The fundamental principles of the Network meet a setback after the group members move stray from the founding principles and indulge in trivialities concerning sexual difference and racial discrimination. Vida intently monitors the discrepancies and purposelessness germinating among the community members:

Life revolved around the preparing of food, the serving of food, the washing of dishes and interminable laundry, the care and feeding and washing of babies, the heating of the house with its variously cranky and voracious wood stoves, the starting of the cars, the fixing of the cars, the going out with the cars over the icy ruts to the town road, sometimes plowed, and into town and back. When they had a political discussion in the house, it was only a means of displaying and acting out their mutual hostilities (Piercy, "Vida" 200).

Parallel to Vida Asch's story, Margaret Atwood explores the predominant theme of the maturation of the protagonist by deploying the bildungsroman technique that is primarily thought to be a prerogative of the male character. The bildungsroman style of writing has long been utilised by the writers to highlight the inherent capacities and virtues of the male representative society in which the male is proclaimed as the tragic hero endowed with rich faculties of spirit and mind and as a real tragic hero; he not only can establish peace and harmony but also can shape and structure the predeterminations of the future female generations. In an explicit bildungsroman style, the female protagonist from *Surfacing* culminates her campaign by interfacing with the inner and outer contrived reality of life. Subsequent to taking part in the quest for meeting and investigating the concealed truth of life, the storyteller retreats to her ordinary country life. She finds the hints of strange potential inside her

and attests that she has acquired the inconceivable forces of gentility from her mother.

Characteristically in a typical bildungsroman style, the novel *Surfacing* invests its ratiocination in uncovering the journey of the protagonist from childhood to mature age. The nostalgia seeps in the Narrator's mind and exerts its impact on the psychic trail of her mind. Psychologically speaking, nostalgia is the fragmented collage of the repertoire of one's unconscious mind which assumes multifarious shapes and contours and interestingly, it repeats the cycle of emergence and if suppressed, it appears in familiar but distorted forms. However, as a mature person, the protagonist from *Surfacing* realises that nostalgia can never be retained forever but also cannot be eliminated as well.

Psychically the narrator comes back to the Freudian pre-oedipal stage and perceives that the fountainhead of the whole universe exists in the female body and she feels recovered from the strain of assimilation with the current of feminine flow. As far as the idea of maternal identity is concerned, Piercy's protagonist *Vida* is antithetic to the mysterious protagonist of the novel *Surfacing*. If the anonymous narrator prides over the profundity of the conceptive power of the female, *Vida* Asch sustains the faith that motherhood debilitates the female and confines the woman to her body. *Vida* feels frustrated about her stepsister Natalie whose belly is protruding with another child and moreover the sapling shares the blood with the person she unequivocally detests: the patriarch, and overwhelming brother-in-law, and Natalie's husband, Daniel. *Vida* attempts to give some comfort to her sister Natalie "She squeezed Natalie's hand, feeling the unyielding wedding ring. It said, I belong to Daniel, who has just stuck another baby in me" (74). In opposition to the regular style in which a male hero withdraws from a decent and secure place to an unknown destination to re-establish order and reclaim humanity, Atwood's protagonist disrupts the traditionalist pattern of pervasive social discourse. The postmodern anxiety to disunite the seemingly unified order is represented through this novel.

Foucault defies all claims to masculine superiority. He states “Power is no longer substantially identified with an individual who possesses or exercises it by right of birth; it becomes a machinery that no one owns ... power is dissociated from individual might” (Foucault, “Power/ Knowledge and Selected Interviews” 156). In their novels, both writers delineate the female protagonists not as essentially flawed or misguided individuals but as ordinary figures who feel a strong need to break away from the fixed order of things.

The strategic foregrounding of the heterogeneity as an imperative mode of domination is discerned by both feminists and poststructuralists since heterosexuality, in no case, assures intelligible sexuality. The female fills in the vacuum and satisfies the homosexual desire of the male. The female enslavement ascends from her ideational portrayal as an object of pleasure. Contemporary, Neo-Freudian, and poststructuralist feminist theories reverse the claim for a true gender status by revealing the inherent duplicity, dualism, and performance-oriented disposition of the sex. Gender is a garb that clothes the nakedness of sexuality.

Following this contention, we may derive that disruption and relocation of the twofold dualities are conceivable, at that point gender difference is simply a deception controlled and structured solidly by the male society to protect the male dignity. Simone de Beauvoir attacks the ideological system which promulgates the masculine domain as free, independent, and all-inclusive while the female is understood inside the pattern of fundamental bodily subjectivity.

The subject of lesbianism runs profound into the veins of Piercy's novel *Vida*. As a type of all-inclusive harmony and watchman of women's rights, Vida Asch voyages towards a strategic search for the induction into a genderless society wherein the weight of dualities is never so severely sensed. Eva is more radical in her approach toward sexuality and she conceives of any heterosexual relationship as pernicious and self-defeating. She condemns Vida's heterosexual relationship with a couple of male friends and questions Vida's extreme womanliness and male dependence, though Natalie attempts

to pull back Vida's consideration from her female companions and encourages her to concentrate on a cemented and ordinary heterosexual relationship:

Vida! The bedrock is love. I do have taboos getting in bed with you. So we make it together. So tomorrow you have to break taboos and make it with the kids. The next week it's the dog. No, we have to draw the line someplace. No dog shit in the kitchen and no fucking the dog. No fucking children. No fucking sister, sweetie (Piercy, "Vida" 127).

Piercy foregrounds the theme of lesbianism in her books to build up confidence in the female with regards to her independence and the possibility of lesbianism in a manner that challenges the rationale of fundamental heterosexuality that is propounded by western transcendentalism. Vida feels threatened and disappointed at the same time to notice that her community members hold racial and sexual discrepancies and prejudices concerning the status of women and she completely dismisses the attacks of the system agents against the married women particularly her sister Natalie whom the network men propose to expel for the absence of energy and diminished support caused by her enthusiastic involvement in home affairs. Oscar, one of the network colleagues reproves Natalie for the absence of excitement and frequent absentia from the system congregations and he retains the supposition that she be released from her participation right away. "Damn it, she can't sit on the Steering Committee if she can't come to meetings... This isn't an optional activity if you happen to take time off from waxing your floor" (84).

Tara is another repressed female character in *Vida*. She is a battered lady who is physically and rationally tormented by her partner at regular interims and who contacts salvage units hiring two operators, namely Vida and Joel respectively. Tara's husband Dick is a cop who beats his wife and torments his two children. Vida Asch is reminded of her stepfather Tom who used to beat his wife on a customary premise. That is the explanation Vida built up a feeling of hostility towards her stepfather. Vida feels empathetic towards a tormented female like Tara because she had also been assaulted and beaten by numerous men:

It wasn't that Vida had never been beaten: she had, most outstandingly by the Tactical Police Force and by the American Nazi Party. Of the two, she remembered that the TPF had concentrated on her head and shoulders and Nazis on her body. In both cases several men had beaten her together, with obvious pleasure and without her being able to do more than try ineffectually to protect herself (112).

On the other hand, we are reminded of the anonymous storyteller from *Surfacing* who is trapped in the mysterious intrigue of her father's sudden disappearance, and also at the back of her mind, she ponders over her mother's constant struggle to move away from the incorporating weight of her husband's dominating presence. It seems as if she is replaying her mother's role and feels dislocated to find a similar amount of apathy inside her. Her mother's abrupt disappearance to the far-off spots and timberlands is compared to the narrator's mysterious visits to the underground water and deep bushes and can be interpreted as quintessential attempts to find the authentic existence of her life. She appears to have shared the same destiny as her mother. There is a genealogy of misfortune assigned or predestined for the female race and the narrator wants to de-establish the standards accountable for the female acquiescence. In a pre-oedipal style, she reaches back to her native land to bid farewell to her mother complex.

All men in Vida's life like her previous husband Vasos, and the current one Leigh, and network male members torture her whilst Joel, her latest boyfriend, is a committed guy who detests manly persecution of the female and exhibits mental fortitude in criticising Tara for implicitly tolerating her husband Dick. Joel reprimands Tara for her sheepish reticence and unjustified tolerance. "So how come you felt like it was your fault, Tara? That's what I don't see" (113). Joel further says "That's like saying he set you up to fail. Or somebody saying, Watch you don't fall! Watch you don't fall! Till you're so nervous you fall, and then they say, I told you not to fall..." (114). Less is depicted about the past life of the protagonist from *Surfacing* and similarly, Piercy outlines quickly Vida Asch's association with her firstspouse Vasos, whom she has left before the reader is acquainted with her struggle. Leigh is

likewise one of the network members from the Red Wagon community, however; he is less enthusiastic about the radical exercises including the open street processions, crusades, and pickets. Leigh is progressively focused on his opinions and frequently lectures Vida on individual freedom and space.

Atwood's narrator in *Surfacing* holds the consumerist society accountable for her premature abortion. She thinks that the chemically coated eatables and harmful air, and water are liable for her dried womb. Atwood's protagonist recognises an interior vacancy, an abysmal void and she feels cut off from her female core. She envisions that her relationship with her mother is vague, inadequate, and vacillating. She mourns the loss of her innocent childhood as Butler in her article "Psychic Inceptions" from *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997) comments on the double functioning of "Mourning and Melancholia" "...one denies the loss of an object (an other or an ideal) and refuses the task of grief, understood as breaking attachment to the one who is lost. This lost object is magically retained as part of one's psychic life" (167).

The narrator never feels redeemed from the fantasy of her past life and an aberrant sense of mourning conjoined with a strong tinge of melancholia chokes her all the time. Likewise, Vida Asch stays in a condition of transition and apologises constantly for her lost sense of identity. At whatever point she interacts with her mother Ruby, she detects a type of alleviation since she, in any event, imparts a root association with her mother. She truly would not like to step into the shoes of her mother and give up her whole self to the reason for devout motherhood since she has firmly watched the struggle of her mother who was at one time a rebellious woman; chivalrous like her little girl Vida however now lying vulnerable in the emergency ward passing her time with the thought of approaching death, she is falling apart quickly. The binary categorisation is a convenient strategic move for the patriarchal setup to wage an armless war against the female society. Vida's grotesque way of dressing insinuates displeasure among men as her clothes connote to her excessive enthusiasm for freedom from feminine gestures; she wilfully accessorises in manly garments and her motion might be treated as her undertaking to

disregard the distinction and invalidate the supposition that the social identity is a fixed, all-inclusive character for both genders.

Vida Asch's inclusion in different same-sex relations is looked down on as malignant particularly by her current accomplice Joel who irritatingly objects to her relationship with lesbian women and profoundly condemns Eva, her lesbian companion. "Is she the dyke you were lovers with?" and Vida Asch reverts back and blasts "You use that word awfully freely. I'm the dyke she was lovers with. Do you like to be called a faggot because you had sex with Jimmy?" (Piercy, "Vida" 241). Vida Asch reminds Joel that he excessively was associated with a gay undertaking with his beau Jimmy. Thoughtfully, Vida's extravagance in lesbian issues induces Joel's guilt-ridden feeling of homosexuality. He feels irritated to find his very own delicacy, i.e., counter-character (shadow) reflecting through her female accomplice Vida and in addition, Vida's enthusiasm for homosexual issues represents an immediate test to Joel's manliness and proposition of legitimised heterosexuality.

The shadow might be seen as containing unacknowledged or repudiated parts of the self; these abandoned viewpoints are generally anticipated onto others. Instances of shadow projection are found in instances of prejudice, sexism, or homophobia. However, the ideal realities can be constructed to evade the pressures of real life. The search for an authentic existence is channelled by not only a glorified mental self-portrait, depicted by our best photos and gleaming activities but also incorporates the failed attempts and disappointments attached to certain life events. In this way, we are empowered to face our full reality, our blemishes, disappointments, and failures. The clash between the real and the social image of the self brings about an existential crisis for an individual. In the event that the shadow always remains hidden, unacknowledged, and at specific occasions, it surfaces out and wages a direct confrontation with the persona and somehow distorts the social image of the individual and some instances like cyber-bullying, riot projections, and involvement in anarchistic activities are also



anticipated projections of the hidden real self. The recognition of one's troubled side is essential for the social development of life.

Vida's over-identification with her persona makes her more sensitised about her shadow and she dangles between the ethical and non-ethical concepts of selfhood. The over-determination of one's persona or the ego ideal and a strained attempt to eschew from one's shadow may turn problematic as happens in the case of Vida who nonchalantly runs away from all acquaintances including her mother. The shadow is usually condemned to strengthen the personified individuality however, in the case of the female body; the idea of personification becomes more fixed. Anorexia and renunciation of physical needs both involve the ability to override one's instinctual, nutritional needs, and satiation levels. This indicates a disassociation with the body and provides us with an illustration of control and compulsion respectively, both operating at extremes. Atwood's female characters specifically Marian from *The Edible Woman* snubs her hunger in order to represent a chiselled image of femininity. In order to re-establish her independent status woman needs "...nothing less than a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, an interruption of speech, a reinstating of pleasure within reality, and a whole new economy in the mechanisms of power will be required" (Foucault, "The History of Sexuality" 5).

The possibility of free and independent sexuality persistently turns around the story of both books. The idea of sexuality is perplexingly significant; in any case, from Freud to current examinations the concept of sexuality has stayed a famously mainstream subject of discussion as psychoanalysis reasons that the sexual power is accountable for the different edifices thus prompting the fluctuated behavioural patterns. Atwood and Piercy unequivocally have employed the topic of sexuality in their works and even Foucault has remarked much on the noteworthiness of sexual conduct for human life. By sexuality, we take into consideration the sexual discourses incorporating body matters, whereas political discussions on sexuality refer to social practices that are liable for the formation of identities. Foucault brings in the concept of *marvel* which was later discoursed upon by Luce

Irigaray in the context of maternal femininity. Foucault describes how sexuality or desire becomes significant due to the productive power of the body. All things considered, sexuality remains a historically delivered phenomenon that mirrors a particular cultural association and carries forward the lineage of multi-layered sexual discourse.

Foucault plots how sexuality is affected by power relations. The well-established notions of Platonic and benevolent love are hallucinatory and unreal. The materialistic yearnings of the fast-changing world are responsible for the disintegration of moral qualities among the masses. Notwithstanding, both sexes experience sexuality as a characteristic feature, that is fundamental to the social growth and material advancement of their futuristic endeavours. Vida Asch is pressurised by the network members and even her female friends force her to bargain her sexuality by utilising it as an apparatus to win the favour of the potent community member Kevin, who is the operational head of the group, by sleeping with him. Much to Vida's amusement, the offer appears to be crippling and humiliating hence she communicates her anguish towards Jimmy for bursting in with such a deplorable proposition. "I'm not a thing to be given him to keep him happy. I will not fuck him for political reasons" (Piercy, "Vida" 203).

On a similar and profound reflective note, the anonymous protagonist from *Surfacing* supports the vanishings of her mother as a reason for her father's hidden and overpowering strength. The manly society channelises their energies to resist the female from understanding her worth and sense of freedom. Freud asserted that the pre-oedipal drives reflect through the general aura of both genders. By owing the female, the male may assert his control over the pre-oedipal drives of the female.

Foucault re-conceptualised the body from a simple natural structure to an operational structure and for him, the body can also act as a vehicle of social control. Taking a lead on the French women's activists like Irigaray, Wittig, Cixous, and Kristeva for their work on the body which by these scholars has been deciphered as the source of all subjection and also Beauvoir who thinks of the body as a situation, Foucault acknowledges how the body

has truly been trained to accommodate within the socio-political setup. Foucault's progressively postmodern thoughts regarding gender disparities and sexuality address the divided and unsteady growth of contemporary power relations. He delves deep into the material process through which the bodies are created, dispersed, tamed, and utilised to achieve material gains by society. However, it is equally significant to notice how does the female thinks in terms of her body and how does she relate herself with the social corpus of society? For a postmodern critic, the connection between body and mind is foremost important and is a prerequisite for the establishment of a genderless notion of identity. During the sixties, both Margaret Atwood and Marge Piercy took bludgeons against a predominant male-controlled society and concentrated on the view that the image of the female body was of a socially moulded and verifiably colonised area, not a site of individual self-assurance. Their assertion runs parallel to Foucault's analysis of the body who provides a thoughtful assumption on the relationship between power and the body in the following lines:

...the power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed not to 'appropriation', but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess ... power is exercised rather than possessed; it's not the 'privilege', acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions-an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated (Foucault, "Discipline and Punishment" 26-7).

The outlandish indulgence of the female characters in lesbian relations frames a fundamental piece of Piercy's books and particularly *Vida* in which consistently every second woman is homosexual. Yet, the writer is very much aware of the pompous declaration of lesbian issues and henceforth Piercy through her less provocative characters as Natalie clarifies the distinctions existing inside female circles. *Vida* blames Natalie for the pitiful following of

manly code of behaviours and accuses her of refraining from maintaining her sexual freedom. She tries to challenge and forfeit the impact of the universal treatment of heterosexuality and stands in resilience to the idea of the male as a supreme possessor of sexual power. There is an appeal for collective efforts in the fiction of both the writers and such an effort is woven around the struggle for identification.

The rivalry based on sexual practice is the hallmark of both writers. Like Marian from *The Edible Woman* who is in flux regarding her relationship with domineering Peter; Vida stays consummated with Leigh yet one part of her pines for freedom from sexual servitude from her male accomplice. She detects a psychological, scholarly vacuum and occasionally misses Joel for the insurgence of mental vitality. Vida Asch ponders:

What was she to him? Did it mean anything? A project that assumed Leigh would work with her at all was a fantasy. Somehow the sexual passage in the motel left her feeling handled rather than loved. Bits of their conversation caught in her like barbed hooks. He had still asked her nothing about herself. Nothing. She wanted to be with Joel (Piercy, "Vida" 132).

In *The Subject and Power* (1983) Foucault comments on how power acquires autonomy and consequently, we envision power as the ownership of people or communities as something individuals naturally, especially the male, possess rather than as a dynamic or system of non-concentrated powers. Foucault reveals that power is not arbitrary or queer. The strength of those structures is accomplished, however, not from the authoritative declaration or plan from above but through various forms of experiences directing our actions to which Judith Butler ascribes the term performance. Power is exercised through the enactment of certain actions thus it can never be absolute or concentrated.

The two writers attempt to work upon similar lines and aspire to propagate their etched sentiment that human personality develops its very own logic yet the truth of one's perception is never free from verifiable and external impacts. Both Vida Asch and the un-named storyteller from *Surfacing* set out

looking for a distinguished, and above all a freed existence and in transit both female protagonists confront power in different shapes as in *Surfacing* power is related with the capitalist/manly predominance over nature and in *Vida*, the male strength is stringently exercised through various social/radical practices of the individuals.

Atwood brings in the theme of collective guilt by depicting the slaughter of natural resources at the hands of mankind. The role of the victim and victimiser is no more categorically aligned in her fiction rather she condemns and alarms the whole of mankind against the hovering fear of annihilation of the existence of all kinds of living organisms on earth. The issues related to the nuclear war, environmental degradation, sexual inequality, and nationalism dominate her writing. Piercy likewise scrutinises the mass slaughter of the individuals by the exclusive class who implies the intensity of war so as to increase individual advantages and stretch out disharmony to their territory and individuals over the fringes. Vida Asch feels estranged from the individuals and companions around her. She apologises for the loss of affection and closeness among her network members and recognises a similar kind of impassiveness in the people around her. In a way, as in the novel *Surfacing*, the topic of collective guilt runs across the story of Vida Asch:

When she ran into an old friend, she could think only what skills or contacts they had that were needed, what kind of speaking or fund raising or organizing or liaison work they could do. Yet she had no feeling of accomplishment, because every morning in the fat Times, every evening on television, the war was stronger, and she was closer to exhaustion...It was raining blood outside whether she looked out the window or not; the blood was splattering down... (Piercy, "Vida" 134).

The protagonists from the two stated novels strike against the Big other; the Red Wagon Group in the case of *Vida* and the Canadian elite class for the storyteller from *Surfacing*. The quest motif as a key to the storyline of both the books represents an ongoing struggle for freedom and self-articulation. However, for the poststructuralist hypothesis, the subject is a blank spot that

can neither be signified nor be situated. Hence, the subject cannot be restricted to a set of characteristics or the binary configurations representing the process of subjection.

Vida Asch challenges the propriety of the fixed character of the female by indulgence in lesbian issues. She depicts avidity about her feminine gestures yet she does never abrogate her womanliness and makes parity by portraying enthusiasm for the free revelling in lesbian deeds. Joel counters her for juvenile and unnatural meandering aimlessly in lesbian affairs however she shields herself by reminding Joel about his (Joel's) own uneasiness, i.e., his inclusion in a gay relationship. She sets out upon the view that prejudices based on the hypocrisy between male and female rights must be foiled. "It was so fine to walk attended by that buzz of naughtiness, such a powerful aphrodisiac that sometimes Vida thought she had only to smile in the right way and she could try on just about any man she wanted in New York" (76).

Undoubtedly, the disparity between the male and the female is closely delineated by Marge Piercy in a scene in which Leigh rebuffs his community female members including Vida, Lohania, and Natalie for their extravaganza "...What did you do with the men? Eat them like black widow spiders?" (81). A similar sort of strain exists in the psyche of the male characters from Atwood's tale *Surfacing*. To some extent, both David and Joe feel contained and limbered in the narrator's presence and especially David criticises her stringently for a futile and meaningless endeavour to locate her father and pompously rejects her adventurous gestures as if the adventure-seeking activities come under the ownership of the male realm. She is pronounced as a heretic and insane person.

In the beginning, the storyteller feels restored after her appearance to the place and filled with nostalgic remembrance of her childhood dreams, she looks for a departure from the tormented desires of her injured and infertile womb yet she finds that after her appearance to the natural land, her aching to explore the infinite has multiplied. As a traveller she surges from one spot to the next and interacts with a pioneering male dominance and even her boyfriend Joe neglects to satisfy her craving for freedom and she moves from

him to the obscure patches of land and wishes to converge with the country life of Canada which for her is as yet uncorrupted and pious. "I lean against a tree, I'm a tree leaning ... I am not an animal or a tree, I'm the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I'm a place" (Atwood, "Surfacing" 142).

Both Vida and the anonymous storyteller lead their life as hidden, masked identities. The mask shields them against the outer pressures focused on the pursuit of assimilation of the female into the male culture. The sneaking apprehension of losing freedom over their body and mind heats their nervous system and they keep on running from one place to the other. Atwood's protagonist Marian from *The Edible Woman* is trapped in her body and fails to find the equilibrium between her body and mind or the external and internal reality of her life. However, the narrator, in an undertaking to overcome the body complex, masks herself as an ambushed woman and turns mysterious to her male friends. On the other hand, multiple names of Vida can also be interpreted as a stratagem to counter male dominance. Vida, by the end of the story, becomes so irritated by her fake, masked, and duplicate existence that she yearns to live an authentic life. "She looked around at the room she had laboured to fix up and she wanted to scream, to shut her eyes hard and wake back in her own room ... Enough of this already, enough! ... She wanted to be Vida Asch again" (Piercy, "Vida" 206). However, if we consider Foucault's vindications it comes out that submission to subjection aims at the acquisition of freedom from subjectification. It is very bizarre to notice that the subject is naturally mindful of the process of subjection but still indulges in it to gain control over the process of subjectification. The grid of power is structured like a pyramid; it assures the presence of power at various levels:

Subjection is, literally, the making of a subject, the principle of regulation according to which a subject is formulated or produced. Such subjection is a kind of power that not only unilaterally acts *on* a given individual as a form of domination, but also *activates* or forms the subject. Hence, subjection is neither simply the domination of a subject nor its production, but designates a certain kind of restriction

*in* production, a restriction without which the production of the subject cannot take place, a restriction through which, that production takes place (Butler, “The Psychic Life of Power” 84).

In her novel *Surfacing*, Atwood has amplified the length and expansiveness of the field of her composition by supplanting the struggle motif of one female in *The Edible Woman*, to the larger context of the Canadian struggle for identity safeguarding against the industrialist American culture in her subsequent novel *Surfacing*. The unnamed narrator in *Surfacing* stays mysterious till the end of the novel which is symptomatic of Atwood's purposeful treatment of the struggle motif inspired by an identity crisis. Literature is loaded with occurrences yielding an unceasing existential struggle of an individual captured amidst the threat of the two unique powers, i.e., a dilemma of decision apparently connected with an unremitting motivation to alter.

Naturally, the human being is free and confined at the same time thus all efforts to disunite from the cult of ordinary life are self-defeating but what if the individual remains in a state of flux experiencing alienation as retribution for the acceptance of mundane existence as the organic one? Rhythmically, the two edifices, i.e., guilt and innocence cascade the story of *Surfacing*. Now a question arises in my mind that does *Surfacing* hail a new argument for the feminist scholars to ponder over like how can an alienated individual be part of the whole schemata of the universal values? Notably, if the female is alienated at the outset and, (as discussed by the patriarchal discourse) the subversion is endogenous to the female sect then how far the idea of unimpeded and authentic identities is justified? From the first cry till the last breath, a female is excluded from the mainstream of life. Exclusion prepares a base for further repression, and more accurately, exclusion delimits the scope of the subject to operate freely along the chain of signification. The protagonist mourns over her failure in identification with the real core of her existence; she endeavours to get riddance from parental identification, especially, her mother. Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble and the*



*Subversion of Identity* (1999) quotes Jacqueline Rose who has commented on the problem of identification:

“Being” the phallus and “having” the phallus denote divergent sexual positions, or nonpositions (impossible possible, really), within language. To “be” the phallus is to be the “signifier” of the desire of the Other of a (heterosexualised) masculine desire but also to represent and reflect that desire ... For women to “be” the phallus means, then, to reflect the power of the phallus, to signify that power, to embody the phallus... (56).

Poststructuralism defies the presence of an eternal logic and flouts the possibility of a fixated and rational meaning. However, there can never be a fixed, gendered, and subjective identity. Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble* interprets the process of signification as “dynamics of coalition”. By coalition, she intends to state that like meanings, identities are constructed through contradictions. She quotes:

...coalition needs to acknowledge its contradictions and take action with those contradictions intact”. And for a comprehensive understanding of the individuation process “...acceptance of divergence, breakage, splinter, and fragmentation as part of the often torturous process of democratization... is essential (20).

In order to gain precedence over the female sect, the categorical differentiation is formulated as an intrigued mechanism to maintain the male hegemony. To effectively counter the oppressive powers, Butler maintains that the dynamics of contradiction must be entailed with a positive gesture. The identities are self-contradictory, fragmented and hence should be ensued with legitimate consideration. Wittig the noticeable realist women's activist augments a radical disposition in which a genderless status must be conferred to both sexes. Determinedly, Wittig underpins the propagation of homosexuality and shifts the focus on the uneven and illogical adherence to the norm of heterosexuality in the generic domain of sexual normalcy.

Like Wittig's contention, a strategic categorical differentiation of sexes has been exposed by Michael Foucault. The heterosexual normalcy is said to

be maintained by the expansion of logical and technological advancement the credit of which is exclusively devoted to the male mind and which takes place at the expense of demolition of natural surroundings. The war between nature and culture emblematically hails the connection between the two genders and caricatures both as stacked with individual characteristics of mind and body. In both books, the obliteration of natural harmony is brought out by the expansion of modern innovation and warfare. In *Surfacing*, the Canadian landscape is tormented like the womb of the female by the unreasonable treatment devised by the imperialistic society.

Relatively, in Marge Piercy's novel *Vida*, the natural equilibrium is annihilated by the approaching trepidation of the war and the augmentation of war innovation. Vida Asch ponders over the financially impoverished Vietnamese "Every day Vietnamese were dying in tunnels, in paddy fields and jungles, in their beds thrown from helicopters. Nobody asked them if they wouldn't rather survive. Privilege, being a white American, made her able to quibble" (Piercy, "Vida" 136). *Vida* demonstrates the power struggle between the resourceful and denied which further has been associated with the confrontation between male/female, culture/nature, and dark/white categorical hierarchies. A widening gap between the male and the female is detectable from the female undertakings and involvement in the lower rank professions and the male is conditioned to think about her as naturally less privileged sex.

Similarly, Piercy also brings out the themes of the racial struggle through a portrayal of the American rage against dark-skinned people. Natalie denounces Black men for their haziness of heart and psyche. She sounds biased towards Black people and particularly men for the explanation that she had once been assaulted by a dark man who bullied her for being white. At this Vida Asch fights back and interrogates Natalie for her biased views about the Blacks "My God, Natty, I hope you don't go around saying in your women's group that a Black man raped you! He was probably incredibly oppressed. That's like putting down Blacks because there's high crime ratio in ghetto." To Vida's allegation Natalie answers and statements the attacker's affirmation through the demonstration of crime "When a man rapes a woman, he doesn't

do it to feed his hungry family... He said...What does a white woman go out with a Black man for if she doesn't want sex? (141). In a way, Piercy plans to highlight that customarily Black male is related to the masculine power and most likely the tormenting sexual limits of the Black male entice the white skins to approach.

Nonetheless, the female protagonist from *Surfacing* acts as a bearer of polymorphous basic concerns radiating from different channels including natural issues, expansion of the unethical views, financial irregularity, and above all identity crisis that infuses in the protagonist a strong desire for identification with everything around. A change slowly creeps in inundating that all kinds of dominations, propagated through categorical hierarchal structures are subject to displacement. As a part of the organic earthly existence, she accepts her involvement in the defilement of natural resources. She recognises her edifices, shrouded fears in tolerating her mother's heredity since her mother ran off from her home, and now years after the fact she is meandering in almost the same situation. Just a mention of her father ascertains her about the presence of logic in her life that was somehow absent in her mother. Earlier she had failed to decipher the hidden significance in the obscure moorings of her mother; she barely understood that sudden disappearances were reflections of the rebellion on part of her mother.

Like the storyteller's mother from *Surfacing*, the protagonist from *The Edible Woman*, Marian's whimsical drives including endeavours to move away from her fiancé Peter is characteristic of female protective procedures to counter male strength. However, if we analyse these incidents from Beauvoir's perspective, these actions will be stated as acts of resistance whereas Judith Butler's indictment will associate the female defiance with the perturbed state of the female mind; what she resonantly calls: the gender trouble. The disembodiment of the female consciousness from the masculine subjectivity impinges a tension in the female consciousness. The construction of a free, detached, and univocal body may split the female skin from its essence since the faith in the male dependence is deeply imbued in her psyche. Judith Butler in her (1999) book contests Beauvoir's argument "But "the body" is itself a

construction, as are the myriad “bodies” that constitute the domain of gendered subjects. Bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender ...” (13). However, the protagonists eventually reach an affirmation that the dependence theory is applicable to both sexes in a proportionate manner.

Atwood seems to affirm that the predicted resolution for the problem of non-belongingness can be the acceptance of the dark spots as the awry spaces of one’s life. The writer is aware that no one can restrict the development of technology hence a compromise is what becomes essential. Probably Atwood is inferring to a proposed resolution that is to adopt a middle path that may be conceived as a compromise between technology and the humanitarian outlook toward life.

A noticeable poststructuralist critic Alcorn opines that post-structuralism views all identities as rehearsed identities and subsequently the personality works upon its own destruction and deletes all the potential outcomes for the development of a fixed abstract identity. The subject is rarely free and it works on the standards constrained by the etymological field. The subject, therefore, blurs back, without a build-up, into its constitutive component, i.e., language. Discourse or in simple terms, language has remained extremely significant for the authors proliferating during the 1960s for the explanation that the critics understood that the language is the main field through which the western metaphysics of fixed and contained abstract identities can be tested.

The language also acts as a mask and can be worn in and out to play out specific exercises and fit in the credited set of accepted rules. Language works on the standards of adaptability and is dependent upon interminable interchange of the implications. Both the protagonists from the two novels struggle to search for their authentic selves and utilise the veils of obscurity to combat the external powers of domination. As a stratagem to conceal her real identity, Vida Asch hides her real self by ascribing various names to her social personality and the storyteller from *Surfacing* consistently remains unnamed and unrecognised. In an undertaking to move away from her conventional

existence and to explore the authentic significance of life, she chooses to lose herself and become one in nearness with nature, and before the end of the novel, she is protected as a drifter and muddled woman:

I turn the mirror around: in it there's a creature neither animal nor human, furless, only a dirty blanket, shoulders huddled over into a crouch, eyes staring blue as ice from the deep sockets; the lips move by themselves ... They would never believe it's only a natural woman, state of nature, they think of that as a tanned body on a beach with washed hair waving like scarves; not this, face dirt-caked and streaked skin grimed and scabby, hair like a frayed bath-mat stuck with leaves and twigs. A new kind of centrefold. (Atwood, "Surfacing" 149).

Yet, the disrupted condition of the protagonists from the two books challenges the schematised hierarchal subjective existence of the sexes and messengers an opening of the universal opportunity and freedom for all identities. Modern life dwells on superficial values, which overemphasises the significance of the persona in social life. On the contrary, our pre-oedipal desires and the body culture cherish the unrealistic drives, which prompt a cycle of disappointment, and in this way undermine our feeling of the self. However, such a situation offers ascent to the existential predicament as is experienced by Piercy and Atwood's female characters. Eventually, Vida also accepts her weakness and indifferent attitude toward life as a congregated event of experiences and confesses "My problem is I seem to think I can adjust to anything at all if I have a strong reason. For a political reason, I can talk myself into agreeing to chop my arm off" (Piercy, "Vida" 260). Nonetheless, both protagonists reject the male predominance though they also affirm that the only way to identify with others is plausible through relational or coalitional practices. Both male and female must accept a similar pinnacle of the existential dilemma and struggle for freedom.

The essentialist understanding of gender is facilitated by society, not the heavenly abode. The hierarchies are formed by the dominant class of society and these can be deconstructed by the determined struggle at any point in time. The deployment of categorical constructions is the cherished dream

of the subjected class and the de-establishment of such practices is conceivable through politically dynamic reactionary measures. However, there occurs an apparently perturbed state for the female looking for free space within other females because through the engagement in same-sex relationships one may lapse into another construction of homosexual essentialism. It implies that the determination of meanings and ideas of absolute freedom is elusive. Neither male nor female can live in complete dissociation and contrastingly nor homosexual couples can claim the accomplishment of sexual freedom. Hereby it is evident that freedom is transitory and contextual, and characteristically shifty by nature which is likewise the chief feature of power. Diana Coole in “Butler’s Phenomenological Existentialism” states:

The freedom and experience emphasised by the former now become objects of profound suspicion: freedom was associated with an individual subject capable of reinventing itself at will, while its experience was perceived as an untrustworthy guide in light of the latter’s over-determination and saturation by ideological or discursive forms of power (Carver 11).

Freedom exists in cognisance with its relation to power, subsequently as indicated by Judith Butler our experience is based on our actions, and actions are enacted through the right to perform, thus the experience is the outcome of the actions or performance of the individual. Thus, power and freedom work on the principles of the utility of purpose and are complementary to each other. Unequivocally, there is a correlation between power and freedom but this relation is not absolute:

Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and here is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power; this is just a way of reviving humanism in a utopian guise. It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power (Foucault, “Power/Knowledge and Selected Interviews” 52).

It is evident from the above discussion that both Piercy and Atwood are insightfully motivated writers and their interest in the decentralisation of the hierarchal sections is lined up with the current influx of the poststructuralist comprehension of the dualities and mysticism of power that is obligated for the development and deconstruction of identities. Through their characters, including males and females, Piercy and Atwood endeavour to highlight the impact of power on all types of identifications. The struggle to overcome the powerful and maintain an equal relation with the other is the basis of social relations. The masculine/feminine basis of gender signification is an abstract idea and can be decentralised to achieve freedom from the trap of gender stereotypes. The knowledge of the centralised, configured, nominated, and structured binary system is fundamental to reclaim the subjects from the superficial constrain of fixed identities. The clustered efforts that are represented through agitations, pickets, and campaigns are all supported by the concept of power that is diffusive and can be utilised by all the sections judiciously.

Piercy and Atwood through their protagonists convey the idea that freedom can be accomplished not in confinement rather it can be achieved through association. The masculine and feminine configurations have ruled the collective psychology of societies and any deviation from the denominated positions is treated as illegal, however, the two writers believe that undoing the fixed gender roles can eliminate the prevailing burden of scheduled performance and the two protagonists from the two select novels seem to indulge in non-hierarchal and asocial activities, and their non-regularised demeanour is a challenge to the heteronormal pattern of society.

## Conclusion

This thesis is an undertaking to contemplate the idea of gender relations in consideration of the functioning of power politics in the select novels of Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood. It has principally been investigated in the seven preceding chapters that the working of the politicised power is accountable for the formation of identities. This thesis augments the contentions forwarded by the poststructuralists with respect to their disbelief in the heteronormality, prejudiced, and uneven comprehension of the gendered identity. They feature their scepticism in the coherent and structured notion of the process of identification. The theoretical insights of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, as the central advocates of poststructuralism, have been utilised to investigate the manifestation of power and the governance of power politics in the arena of gender relations. However, the approach of the thesis is oriented around the understanding that through revealing the predicament of debilitating state of the marginalised sections including females, vagrants, Jews, blacks, and aged people, one can understand the one-sided nature of power, which is essentially oppressive. However, through an intervention of the Foucauldian hypothesis of a neutral power, and Butler's idea of individual performance, a renewed image of a neutral or to some extent genderless society (dismissing the corporal) can be accomplished wherein the dispersion of power is not localised at a fixed point rather power shows itself as a free element; open to the conceivable outcomes of suppression and resistance.

Gender portrays how we act, coordinate, and shape our lives, and even our insight and participation in the world are resolved through our gendered identities. Michel Foucault drives our consideration toward the essentialness of historical investigation in contemplating the idea of power relations that are contingent upon the historical context of any given society. As the inhabitants of an acculturated society, our prepping is set apart by the assurance of gender we are born with. Simply speaking, we exist as types, for example, manly or ladylike, hetero or gay, transgendered, or non-gendered in a bewildering assortment of ways across societies. Unequivocally, on the surface level, the



categorisation of gender seems plausible and coherent, and the idea of un-gendered or fluid existence may bewilder our sense of leading a normal life. The overreaching idea of non-categorisation of the gender may even sound thwarting to asocialised existence. The poststructuralist argument is based on the assertion that sex is not replaceable with gender and gender is much more than a mere set of biological traits, and it is a composite whole of our identification but is shifty which means that it cannot be determined or categorised to a set of characteristics and it performs various functions that Judith Butler recognises as gender performativity.

The amalgamation of two words that is gender and politics offers to ascend to the wide field of discussions since power acts as a basis for the political agencies. The anthropologists are significantly concerned about the developments in the field of relations between sexes. Foucault discoursed much on the underlying structure of power that is pertinently connected to the formation and deconstruction of gendered identities through the nexus of power relations. The issues like sexual and domestic violence, conceptive rights, and discriminative practices are all constrained by and resolved through power politics.

The two canonical feminist writers of the contemporary world under study, through the portrayal of both resilient and the subdued female protagonists, stir our imagination toward the developing and transforming notions of identity. Through their resilient and antagonist female characters, the writers bring home the idea that the basis of society or social ideology continues to be the same. i.e., power whilst the individual efforts tend to bring about the transformation in society. Both writers blatantly expose the fixed meta-narratives of the politics of identification that always acts judgemental, and apports a secondary place to the females or the underestimated classes in the order of things.

The two writers seem to challenge the standard meta-narrative of western understanding of gender difference; however, this grand narrative has remained the favoured speculation for the patriarchal society. The origination of radical feminist thought during the 1960s contributed to the transformation

of the belief in the absolutism of heteronormal practices. Notably, during the 1950s the public and private arena of social and personal life were enthralled by the dominating influence of the male society and it led to the superiority and privileging of the male in all sectors of life from property rights to the conceptive rights, etc. Uncontestably, the male logic was treated as a natural possession or a heavenly blessing of the superior self, and as the inheritor, and successor of the generations, male enjoyed the primary place at all therungs of life. The notion of a pervasive male majestic spell is condemned by the supporters of women's rights by calling attention to the issue that hegemonic practices are neither favourable nor logically addressable.

The wide assortment of family structures and methods of social association around the globe have been reported by anthropologists and their research hypothesis resists all claims of naturalised masculine dominance over the marginalised groups. Instead, the researchers caution us against the manipulative practices of the dominant classes who through political and social support try to minimise the participation or performance of the marginalised by concocting anecdotes applauding male control over the institutions of power. The anthropologists and historians like Michel Foucault annihilate all claims proliferating during the 1960s which supported the universal heteronormalcy and naturalised sexuality.

The novels of Atwood and Piercy are overflowed with issues like a feeling of non-belongingness, identity crisis, uprooting, vagrancy, and gender disparity. The topographies have been alluded to as utopian and political, destructing and eradicating, prohibitive and out-worldly, inventive, hidden, and distinct. The white countries like Canada, Australia, and the United States of America have undergone spatial exchange for the reason that the inhabitants from various countries settled in these continents and transformed the culture, traditions of the white countries which prompted the development of a new socio-cultural order, however, the settlers remained aloof from the cultural roots of these nations and consequently formed a new socio-culture space inhabited by the marginalised groups and communities. The blacks, Jews, and other Anglo-Indian people neither could relate nor accomplish a fundamental

relationship with the occupants of the host nations. And an outcome of such an exchange circumscribed in the increased tension of identity crisis among the marginalised classes of society.

Additionally, the onslaught of the two world wars combined with the contention of amalgamation of various cultures, and the popping crisis between the Christian and Jew communities compounded the conditions. The two world wars culminated with complete devastation and claimed not only the lives of several people but also increased the problem of unemployment in the affected countries which ultimately recourse to domestic violence as females were targeted for the financial burden on the families. In the majority of cases, the male members were forcefully recruited in the armies and thus the female achieved an opportunity to work outside their homes as a replacement to the male earning members of the family. However, the females always received partial importance as bread earners of the family and they were loaded with the twofold weight of running the family, and also acting as earning members for the household. Unexpectedly, the females never received the equivalent standing at the workplaces like their partners and were recruited on practically half scales than the males. This scenario is the prime example of the prevalence of gender disparity in the early 1960s. Writers like Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood are the contemporaneous and direct observers of the post-world war period and have too encountered the aches of gender disparity incorporated in occurrences like that of artistic lack of approachability and biased treatment of the female composition. Their novels are replete with instances dealing with the renunciation of orthodox practices.

In the concluding chapter, I seek to consolidate the tentative conclusions drawn at regular intervals throughout the discussion with an endeavour to identify the possible findings in the work. Towards the end, a reconsideration of the focal point, i.e., power and its impact in gender relations has been solicited to progressively identify the contribution and scope of further research in this field. Through the insightful discourse of the poststructuralist critics and the study of select novels through the lens of the poststructuralist feministic approach, new findings have been identified.

From the introduction chapter, it was clear that poststructuralist critics have pursued a war against the structuralist understanding of the two terms: sex and gender. Sex and gender generate our understanding of the collective notion of gendered identity. Firstly, the difference between the two terms, i.e., gender and sex have been identified so that the anxiety of identifying these two terms as one, can be sublimated. Gender is identified as much more than simply a biological identification of an individual because it has a direct relation with one's sexuality. The distinction between sexual identity, as the corporal element, and gender as the ethnic-social framing of an individual supposedly needs to be studied in relation to each other.

Michel Foucault and Judith Butler as the entitled critics of poststructuralist feminism theorised profoundly on the deconstructive understanding of the structured notion of subjectivity. Interestingly, the select novels of Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood are logically nominated to be analysed under the theoretical analysis of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler to bridge the gap between fiction and theory. Both writers remarkably exhibit confidence in rising above the orthodox and delimited implications of the word freedom, and seem to showcase their disavowal in one-sided or extremist attention to the feminist issues, and sustain faith in the transforming and insightful coming-of-age trends in the field of power politics.

However, for being female writers, the entire discourse is oriented around the experiences of the females, not as solitary, but in relation to the male society. A balance is contrived to be sustained through the contrastive portrayal of multifaceted identities ranging from the suppressed to the resilient characters, including males and females. Irrespective of the gender difference, an endeavour has been made to bring out the significance of power in the life of an individual. Deriving information from Foucault and Butler's theorisation, the functions and contribution of power in the construction and deconstruction of the subjectivities have been highlighted. Notably, it is evident that resilience paves a way towards the obtainment of freedom and power is an inevitable part of our life. Power is distributed in our society in multiple forms and exerts its influence in specific contexts thus it is significant for understanding the process

of identification, and the knowledge of the true nature of power poses a threat to the proselytisers of western metaphysics who aim at achieving prominence in the social hierarchy.

The subsequent chapter outlines the comprehensive analysis of the stated theorists, i.e., Michel Foucault and Judith Butler who have been hailed as the chief exponents of the poststructuralist literary criticism. Judith Butler derived much information and knowledge from the master of historiography; Michel Foucault who through his historical analysis of the societies analysed the presence of relations of power in various forms within a society and fundamental to his analysis lies the conviction that power is not a negative phenomenon, rather it is neutral and its use or misuse defines its character. Foucault tries to analyse the process of subjection and identification through a three-way process including subjectivity, resistance, and freedom.

Acquisition of freedom is the cherished goal of all individuals but this freedom is never absolute, it comes with restriction, and accountability which Butler calls performance in her book *Gender Trouble*, however, she also discusses the impact of negative performance in her another book *Bodies That Matter*. This chapter marks the efforts of both critics who defy the claims of feminists on account of the latter's vehemence on depicting power only as a suppressive or oppressive phenomenon. Interestingly, Foucault has duly been targeted by the feminists and structuralists for his notion of the dual and shifty nature of power. Feminists feel dejected and purposeless in accepting that if power is hailed as a neutral force, then their entire argument against absolute dominance of patriarchy will become a farce, and the structuralists accuse Foucault of defaming the value of sexuality by aligning it with the social and ethnic profile of individuality. Specifically, the female protagonists of both writers exhibit how one irrespective of one's sexuality can overcome the challenges of life.

An excavation of the historical roots of the two writers who are deeply imbued in the psychology of second wave feminism was necessary to relate the psychology of the society during the twentieth century with the present scenario. An obvious transformation can be observed through the expansion of much-

informed and working-class women who have realised that their bodies are not merely cauldrons of sexual pleasure for men rather their sexuality is blissful and is also their personal matter. The innovation of reproduction techniques as having been presented by Piercy in *Mattapoissett*, is indeed a move toward the judicial distribution of reproduction obligations between men and women however, quite opposite to this, the maternal obligations were treated as a huge burden on the female section during the twentieth century and Piercy and Atwood retrieved inspiration from the writes like Simone de Beauvoir, and specifically, her book *The Second Sex* has stirred the imagination of the writers across the lands. A parallel has been drawn between the plight of gender relations during the twentieth century with the present times. Especially, Judith Butler has commented with much enthusiasm on the relationships between men and women during the second half of the twentieth century. It is interesting to note how Butler's theory of gender relations coincides with the ideology of the writers who firmly belong to the second wave era.

A comparative analysis between the fiction of the two writers is motivating for the reason that both are akin to the issues central especially to the female cognisance and have close affinities with the shared plight of the female society. The residents of two neighbouring countries, Marge Piercy (American) and Margaret Atwood (Canadian) are the radical female writers of the contemporary period, and they have not compromised their themes to explaining the sorry plight of women during the gone days rather they have come up with resolutions to bring about positive changes in society, and their secular outlook, irrespective of the hovering pressure of being feminists, has remained intact. Nowhere in their writing, we sense that the writer is more inclined toward depicting the ill-fated women. The themes of the devastation of bioresources, vagrancy, extra-marital affairs, homosexuality, and science fiction form the basis of their books.

The issue of body politics has been highlighted through the comparative analysis of the two novels, i.e. *The Edible Woman* and *The Longings of Women*. Sexuality has remained a point of contention especially for the females and Freud's theory of Oedipus and Electra complex institutionalised the notion of

sexuality as pernicious and deeply rooted in the psyche which led to the idea that female is essentially subliminal in the order of things. Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* begins with the depiction of malignant and intensely cruel punishment practices of archaic times and he evidences that the emergence of confession practices was concocted to tame the sexuality or corporal freedom of the individuals. According to psychoanalysis, all complexes are rooted in the sexuality of an individual, however, Foucault denounced the claims of psychoanalysis and argues that individuals are more than corporal selves. The identity of an individual whether male or female is crafted through social interactions and the characteristics are historically specific. The two novelists seem to adhere to this poststructuralist understanding of sexuality and depict their characters asimmanently caught in the nexus of power politics and behave as politicised bodies. However, their protagonists achieve reconciliation by rising above their bodily complexes like Marian in *The Edible Woman* and Leila and Mary from *The Longings of Women*. Through indulgence in homosexual affairs and developing extramarital affairs, the female characters showcase that they too, like their counterparts, are free to choose for their life. The Lacanian term *jouissance* is embraced by the two writers because *jouissance* offers plentiful opportunities to all forms of identities and enables females and males to extract pleasure from their bodies. Thus, for Piercy and Atwood bodies are not repulsive sites rather bodies are blissful and generate a will to perform certain progressive activities.

This thesis also deals with the issue of the unrealistic configuration of the two extreme terms, i.e., utopia and dystopia. I have attempted to use Foucault's concept of heterotopia as a mediating option between the two implausible and far-fetched abstract realms of existence. Logically speaking, we live in a complex world, thus it would be unfair to sustain faith in absolutism of any kind. All claims of absolutely idealistic or dystopian spaces are nothing more than a farce. Connie's fantastic portrayal of the Mattapoissettian spatial existence has been mocked at as the hallucinations of a perturbed female mind whilst the portrayal of Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale* also is an extremist description of a society in which all men and women are a slave to the

unflinching observance of a third eye. Thus, Foucault's description of heterotopic societies befits the investigation. Foucault preferred the term heterotopias over utopia with a clarification that the idealistic spaces tend to be unreal whilst the heterotopic spaces are reclaimed from the anxiety of being idealistic. Therefore, the idea of space forms the basis of the works of the two writers. Unlike, dystopia or utopia, heterotopia is not a fixed realm, rather it is a shifting, temporal, free, but also simultaneously a restrictive space. Through the intervention of heterotopias, a contrastive analysis has been drawn between Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Foucault's description of the panopticon as an agency of reconnaissance befits the narratives and the chief examples are the institutions of power in both novels: Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale* and Rockover in *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Again, we recourse to the same argument that power is everywhere but it is not localised in one group or agency and is distributed. For instance, Moira is forcefully transported to the warehouse for disobedience toward the Gilead system but she utilises this punishment in a positive manner and derives corporal pleasure from her body. Sexual pleasure is denied to all men and women in Gilead. Thus, the theme of power flows in the novels of the two writers. The clashing ideas of the construction of a homogenous space and the longing to create a new heterotopic space vividly dominate the works of the two novelists.

The two novels *Vida* and *Surfacing* by Piercy and Atwood respectively have been compared on the basis of the annihilation of feminine and masculine dualities. The male-like heroine Vida remains in search of her true existence, likewise, the anonymous narrator from *Surfacing* sets out on a journey to locate the true essence of life. In a typical bildungsroman style, the two female protagonists remain busy in search of the purpose of their life. The debilitating condition of nature has been compared with the life of the females as well as the entire community. The two writers have witnessed the mammoth slaughter of the two World Wars thus their novels exhibit their distrust and anguish against the accumulation of warfare technology and nuclear power. The devastation of bio-resources and proclamation of genetic engineering are the



few selected radical experiments undertaken by the two novelists in their works. The expansion of nuclear power leads to the deterioration of natural resources and this issue is compared with the imperialistic practices of the dominating classes and has been criticised by both writers.

Foucault's concept of biopower is employed to highlight the role of power in deciding the destinies of individuals. Piercy's novel *Vida* is replete with homosexual relations not only between females but also males. Vida, the writer's mouthpiece, is extravagantly engaged in homosexual relations and her interest in lesbian affairs has been highlighted as a challenge to the male-dominated society. The anonymous protagonist from *Surfacing* hides in bushes to protect herself from the ensuing influence of the patriarchal society and shows her resilience by tearing off the videotapes of her friend David for the reason that he had forcefully documented the nude pictures of his wife. The parallel idea of the subjection of the female body and the landscape is found in Atwood's novel *Surfacing* wherein the writer portrays the abuse and plundering of the characteristic assets of Canadian country life for fulfilling the imperialistic interests of the Americans. Northrop Frye in *Literary History of Canada* (1965) used the term "garrison mentality" to reveal the evil impact of nature and the herd-belief system on the indigenous communities:

Small and isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological frontier, separated from one another and from their American and British cultural sources: communities that provide all that their members have in the way of distinctively human values, and that are compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that holds them together, yet confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting -- such communities are bound to develop what we may provisionally call a garrison mentality. (Klinck 8-9)

This idea of garrison mentality is accumulating great force and exerting a strong influence in propagating a sense of fear and purposelessness among the females in both countries, i.e., America and Canada. This wayward sense of non-belongingness paved the way for the significance of home and shelter and propelled the anxiety of vagrancy especially in the case of female

consciousness. Furthermore, this dread of displacement, ostracism, and homelessness is portrayed broadly in the novels of the two writers under study. Piercy's *The Longings of Women*, *Vida* and Atwood's *Surfacing*, and *The Handmaid's Tale* are the chief specimen for such an analysis. *Vida* lives a life of a vagabond and lurks under the anxiety of losing her identity, the three female protagonists in *The Longings of Women* constantly struggle against the dominance of the patriarchal power and even endure the aches of extra-conjugal issues of their mates and subsequently, the loss of love and shelter ruin their lives. Thus, we may conclude that power has been depicted in multitudinous forms however it is aligned with resistance.

It is interesting to note how the prevalent discourse and the novelists' consciousness interact and how the two enter into an emblematic relationship and likewise contribute to chiselling the consciousness of one another. The chief argument centres around the idea that how the two contemporary writers of second-wave feminism succeeding in weaving their previous encounters and created or shaped that ancestry into another transformed structure through rethinking the past in conjecture to the contemporary occasions, and moreover, the progressive bent of mind of the two writers have never let their work hidden in the deep recesses of forgotten times. In short, both Atwood and Piercy have resuscitated the history, conveyed forward the genealogy of their (feminist) ancestors, and modernised the history by the introduction of new themes in their writings to sustain the interest of the current generation.

The present study is an attempt to examine how theory and fiction correlate and contribute to the present knowledge related to the themes such as identity crisis, the idea of subjectivity, and issues encircling gender disparity. However, no recommendation is given in the postulation showing the cause-and-effect relationship between the fiction of select writers and contemporary feminist discourse. The proposition centres on the assertion that a common issue of proliferation of gender disparity is easily locatable in the poststructuralist feminist theory and works of the two writers. Interestingly the feminist circles foresee a profitable connection between such radical female writers and the feminist theory.

The preceding chapters contend that a chronological assessment of the fiction of Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood reveals an effective commitment to discourses raised by the feminists. Customarily, Piercy and Atwood tend to intentionally examine and entangle with feminist ideologies over time, and often seem to foresee issues centring on feminist interests. Power politics is simply not confined to the term gender politics rather it has wide repercussions and belief systems. Hence, this proposition is not restricted to the investigation of feminist concerns in the works of the two writers however it can also not be overlooked that the anxiety of influence of belonging to a particular gender may substantiate the discussion more toward feminist matters. The second-wave feminism for its portrayal and commitment to multitudinous disciplines and ideologies draws the consideration of hypothetically and philosophically mindful writers such as Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood. The prevalent ideologies especially the dominance of patriarchal order and gender disparity, have progressively been questioned and investigated throughout the acculturation of second wave feminism that led to the increased interest of the women writers in female issues.

It is precise to state that the two authors restored and re-imagined the importance of global relations of power through the amalgamation of various topics of discussion such as liberalism, topographical crisis, patriotism, and above all worldwide equity. In the novels, each section underlines a subject or distraction that typically reverberates in the second-wave feminist ideology. The preoccupation and the dialogic relationship of Piercy and Atwood's books with second wave feminism are thoughtful, pre-emptive, guiding, and liberating.

Through a comparative analysis of *The Edible Woman* and *The Longings of Women*, it may be reviewed that both writers seem to have retained and used a similar hypothetical connection prior utilised by Betty Freidan in her book *The Feminine Mystique*. The tone of *The Feminine Mystique* is sympathetic and radical at the same time which altogether is perceptible in the novels of both writers under study. The versatility of the female bodies against the abusive acts of man-centric society is the focal point of the authors however this resilience does not compromise or overlook the significance and honour of the opposite

sex. The struggle is not merely competitive that aims at suppressing or replacing their counterparts rather it is constructive.

The contrastive study of the novels from the subsequent chapter, i.e. *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Woman on the Edge of Time* is oriented toward the subjugation of the female on the basis of their constructed faith of biological depravity. Alternately, these two novels reflect the procedures and approaches utilised by the authoritarian systems like Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale* from one viewpoint, and a utopian site like Mattapoissett; heterotopias of liberation on the other. It does not mean that Piercy's novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* presents a bright picture of an absolutely liberated society; Connie, her protagonist dwindles between two realms of existences at the same time and is endowed with the power to clairvoyantly migrate from her present state to another liberated society however her stay remains impermanent and conditional. Especially, *The Handmaid's Tale* offers a reflection on the dominant and unflinching enthusiasm for masculine superiority governed by totalitarian ideologies prevalent in the earlier societies. Interestingly, almost all novels of the two novelists underline a specific purpose of passage into the issues representing power politics. Apparently in the composition of Piercy and Atwood, a social cognisance in widening the collective consciousness of the masses is easily perceptible. Specifically, in this postulation, Atwood's disavowal of the feminist connection is considered as indicative of her vehement denial of set patterns of social order and not as of distrust for the women activists undertaking.

The two writers under investigation are overwhelmingly referred to as radicals on account of their demonstrated enthusiasm in matters central to gender identity and power politics. The exploration of the connection between the inner natures of the female with that of wide panorama outside dominantly streams through various novels, especially, *Vida* and *Surfacing*. The decimation of biological assets resembles the denigration of the female identity. *The Longings of Women* and *The Edible Woman* bring to light the issue of body politics and power relations. Interestingly, the two writers denounce the uneven record of mistreatment of the female bodies and offer possibilities of useful

utilisation of bodies through cases of homosexuality as is outlined in *The Longings of Women* and single parent longing on account of Ainsley in *The Edible Woman*. The novelists' approach is interesting and freeing and the search for heterotopias within two extremerealms of existences, i.e., utopia and dystopia, as portrayed in *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *The Handmaid's Tale* respectively, is indeed encouraging. This thesis highlights Foucault's mediation theory for acquiring temporal freedom that can be achieved not through the unreal spaces like that of utopia and dystopia but through the intercession of heterotopias; a realistic and characteristically logical space.

The study of unprecedented growth in the field of man-woman relationships, female psychology, and the issues of gendered identity over the years is an invaluable contribution of both writers and especially the analysis of feminist psychology illuminated the field as had never been experienced before. The basic idea behind the investigation in the thesis was to highlight the literary contribution of Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood as the proponents and active participants of power politics who are engaged with the idea of the construction and deconstruction of gendered identities, and the theoretical debates of the poststructuralists Michel Foucault and Judith Butler strengthen their proposition. Through a poststructuralist investigation of Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood's works within the historical or genealogical context of second-wave feminism as an evolutionary discourse, I aimed to focus on the political, ideological, and glocal significance of the poststructuralist feminist theory.

Both Atwood and Piercy are the living legends of contemporary times and have witnessed numerous phases of development in the discipline of power politics and gender relations. Notably, Atwood is effectively alive to the worldwide concerns and likes to remain ahead of her times, and accordingly, it is relevant that periodical refreshing of her works should be noticed which I have attempted to accomplish through a vigorous comprehension of the development of gendered identities with an intervention of power politics. I have attempted to make a small commitment by bringing in the study of works of the two closely associated contemporary writers belonging to different

nationalities. The thesis takes assistance from the post-structural understanding of the nexus of power relations that according to Michel Foucault and Judith Butler determine our understanding of the construction of gendered identities.

The progression of feminist discourse toward a shift in time and place is reminiscent of the recurrence of new ideas in the field of gender relations henceforth the mid-twentieth century offers an appropriate setting from which a consideration on the accomplishments in the discipline becomes feasible. Through a comparative and contrastive analysis of the works of the two writers, it becomes evident that feminism is a cultural phenomenon and as Foucault calls it historically contingent, and the hypothetical impediment or gap between theory and practical application needs to be filled. Power politics exerts its influence in all disciplines of knowledge, not excluding feminism. Poststructuralists denounce the fixed, monotonous, and decided comprehension of the status of gendered identities, and this condemnation simultaneously continues filling the vacuum from one viewpoint and exhausts the stack of the accumulated faith on the other.

Identity politics concerns acknowledgment and disavowal and it changes form in accordance with the prevalent ideology of any given society. Such a diversity of thought and the uneven idea of a meaningful, coherent, and natural identity are de-established through the inclusion of instances dealing with homosexuality, and migration to the extra-territorial spaces offering surplus or alternate possibilities of survival in the novels under study. The central idea is to exhibit that socio-cultural discourses, regardless of whether hypothetical or anecdotal, originate from comparable impacts and inspirations; the power relations channelise and manipulate our understanding regarding the structure of society at a given time, and affect the forthcoming generations.

The investigation of select works of the two canonical writers is planned because Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood are theoretically profound writers and have been rooted deep in the soil of the feminist studies, and furthermore are legendary in the sense that both share a strong affiliation with the second wave feminism, however, the two have not limited their analysis to the earlier phase of development and carried forward the heritage of the second wave to

the present time. The impact of counter culture is evidently seen in the fiction of Piercy and Atwood.

In concluding remarks, I would mention that through a hypothetical examination, I aimed at introducing the diverse issues concerning power politics and its impact in the formulation of gender relations, and it was pertinent to examine the literary lineage of the second wave feminism and the selected novels are deeply rooted in the discourse of that phase of development of feminist thought, and additionally, the inclusion of themes like heterotopic domains and science fiction has rejuvenated the fervour of feminist critics. However, Piercy and Atwood's work cannot be circumscribed to the confinements of sheer female struggle to overcome patriarchy as is customarily discernible in the writings of female writers in the form of manifestation of the female maladies like hysteria. A comparative analysis of the two seemingly radical novelists' work promises an immense scope for further deliberations. Rather than simply emphasising the nature of the dual functioning or hypocritical belief system, I have focussed on the scope of redemption through the interplay and intervention of power as a neutral entity that governs the functioning of gender relations. Power is not a one-sided, oppressive, passive, and regularised tool of suppression for the male-centred system rather it is a disciplinary force that functions through performance and that performance is non-prejudiced. Books are the best mode for the minimised communities to communicate the saga of despair that has been conveyed forward as heredity and the portrayal of the persecuted networks like blacks, females, Jews, and homosexuals extend the extent of reflection. A literary analysis of power politics within a given society is pertinent to lend a voice or a platform to speak for the people who for long have been silenced through the techniques of suppression and lack of awareness.

Feminism has a long history concerning social interests that are highlighted by means of the literary analysis, but beyond this simple conjunction, it also has a peculiar connection to fiction by virtue of its reliance on the metanarrative of history which for Foucault is historical discourse or knowledge and this metanarrative can also be called a meta-history. In

Foucault's genealogy, he talks about the significance of historical knowledge to understand contemporary societies likewise the stories of gender relations travel through times as we witness in the encounters confronted by the two prominent writers of second wave feminism, i.e., Marge Piercy and Margaret Atwood. In his book *Metahistory* (1973), Hayden White reflects on the significance of history in the literary survey of any given age. According to White "...one can embrace a *Contextualist* position, which as a theory of truth and explanation represents as "functional" conception of the meaning or significance of events discerned in the historical field" (White 17) and the writer also has the tendency to enact and employ his/her storyline in accordance with the popular contextual order regardless of whether it reserves the priority for the one set of people by deliberately marginalising the other.

Histories are narrated records of the events presenting the dominant class ideology however these events also keep a record of the atrocities and unfair treatment of the people under any given society. Over the years, women's liberation has arisen as an extremist and dynamic hypothesis, and the second wave of woman's rights likewise developed as a metanarrative which is useful in understanding the pervasive standards of the twentieth century society and furthermore educates us about the move in conviction framework that has happened through a change in the aggregate cognisance of the majority. Ultimately, the meta-narration of the second wave feminism connects us to the historical records of the past movements at one point and furthermore interfaces us with the poststructuralist understanding of the term feminine since this term has undergone a complete transformation which has happened due to the occurrence and acceptance of the idea of the emergence of fluid identities that has thwarted the perceived predominance of heterosexuality.

This thesis is woven in a way that it meanders in a symmetrical pattern and follows the expanding consciousness of the female protagonists of the select writers. The comparative analysis of the first two chapters, i.e., *The Edible Woman* and *The Longings of Women* brings home the idea that women, as well as men, are trapped inside the politics of sexuality which has been analysed under M. Foucault and J. Butler's notion of biopolitics. The indulgence of the



protagonists in illicit relationships and homosexual undertakings can be interpreted as the acknowledged attempts of the females to protect their sexuality from the devouring presence of their male counterparts.

In the comparative analysis of the next two chapters, i.e., *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Woman on the Edge of Time*, I have attempted to analyse how the female protagonists struggle to overcome their bodily complex through hankering after the alternate possibilities of existence, however, the portrayal of intervening heterotopias, amidst the two opposite realms of abstract existence, i.e., utopia and dystopia, adds up new clusters of knowledge in the field of speculative fiction. The rationale behind the heterotopic intercession lies in the realistic demeanour of the heterotopic vision of life.

The third and last section of comparative analysis of the two novels, i.e., *Vida* and *Surfacing*, is contrived to annihilate the traditional faith in the binary division of the two sexes and this paired analysis is one step ahead to the mingling of utopian and dystopian realms as both female protagonists from the two novels construct their realities in accordance to their intellectual awareness of social order. To begin with, they remain unidentified with their selfhood but gradually, they discover inner harmony and wear off the mask of pretence and assimilate with their surroundings. This thesis investigates the transforming state of female consciousness as the protagonists progressively make a move from alienation to affirmation.

I propose to highlight that through a genealogical and reflective analysis of societies, the gap between the theorist and the writer can diminish and the endeavour to achieve equal status for all genders can become a common achievable goal and can help widen the cognisance of the readers as well as society. Such an engagement and mutual cooperation can bring about a transformation in our understanding of the term power and its positive relationship to all forms of gendered identities. Writers are the constructors of social order and are endowed with a responsibility to redeem society from the insidious effect of negative powers that are widely prevalent in society.

I conclude with a hopeful note that these two living legends of literature, i.e., Marge Piercy and Margret Atwood will sustain the enthusiasm of writing

for the proliferation of social harmony and their commitment is unflinchingly benevolent. This thesis will help future researchers to augmenting their advantage and information in the field of power politics, women's studies, and the poststructuralist understanding of the term gender and gendered identity. This postulation will in general be critical for creating awareness in society about the idea of the relations of power prompting the acknowledgment of one another as free individuals. It may be asserted that if used wisely, power can contribute to creating potentially free individualities. From this analysis, a wide acknowledgement can be traced that no society can progress without non-biased interpersonal relationships. This thesis will assist the perusers with understanding that the hidden political ramifications animate gender differences and the preview of fixed identities or generalisations is a stratagem of the dominating classes to keep their unravelled position unchallenged. Only through aggregate endeavours, these speculations can be eliminated and we may envision a healthy, safe, and better future for the upcoming generations.

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