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LANGUAGE AS A POLITICAL INSTRUMENT IMPOSED IN TOTALITARIAN REGIME OF
REPUBLIC OF GILEAD, AN INQUIRY OF MARGARET ATWOOD'S DYSTOPIAN FICTION
'THE HANDMAID'S TALE'

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ABSTRACT

The totalitarian nations establish a dystopian dominion where a citizen is powerless to lead a healthy, peaceful and honorable life. The ruler of such countries invariably reveals himself as a feigning benevolent and supreme leader of the world. He amasses power through the production of missiles and atomic bombs. This despot of a dystopian government never furnishes a relaxed atmosphere to the inhabitants. In the history of the world, we discover such rulers like Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler and Italo Mussolini. At present time, Kim's regime in North Korea and Mao Jadong's People's Republic of China, are evident specimens of totalitarian rule. These despotic regimes employ various methods to remain in force. The political leaders attempt to dissipate ideology among citizens. They employ the media to cover their feigned actions in favour of citizens. They resort to language to administer the territory. They misappropriate words with symbols, beliefs and sentiments. The existing research article seeks to investigate the language in the totalitarian rule of the Republic of Gilead illustrated in Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel 'The Handmaid's Tale'.

Keywords: Gilead, Guardians of the Faith, Particution, Unwomen, Econowives, Unbaby.

Introduction

A language is "what makes us human"(Guy Deutscher)

As an Israeli linguist, Guy Deutscher in his book, seminal work, "The Unfolding of Language: An Evolutionary Tour of Mankind's Greatest Invention," establishes the language as a bounty that grants us human portrayal. However, with the expansion of language and mankind, man is bent on his terrible ways to seek power. He has turned the gift of language into a bane with the ambition of controlling his fellows.

As aforementioned, the annals of mankind are replenished with such despots like Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler who misappropriate the language to persist in sovereignty. They shifted the humanitarian administrations into totalitarian states.

'A totalitarian state is a government that subordinates the individual to the state and strictly controls all aspects of life by coercive measures'(NP). As per the definition, the citizen has no individuality and he lives at the mercy of administrators in this kind of regime. The totalitarian regimes are examined in the dystopian novels in literature. Novels like 'Animal Farm' by George Orwell, 'We' by Yevgeny Zamyatin exhibit the totalitarian regime of Joseph Stalin. This article introduces the fictional totalitarian rule of the Republic of Gilead demonstrated in dystopian Margaret Atwood's novel The Handmaid's Tale.

The book The Handmaid's Tale exhibits the autocratic rule established on Christian ideology governing the people with repressive tools. Among the repressive tools, the language is manipulated as per the directions of the ruler.

Method

This research article is established on both primary and secondary data. Primary data has been collected from the original work of Margaret Atwood and Secondary data have been collected from different books, articles, research journals, internet, etc.

Discussion

The language is being employed as a political tool to harmonise the citizens of Gilead. The language is a part of ideological state apparatuses as described by marxist political philosopher Louis Althusser. He mentions two state apparatuses as follows :

Repressive state apparatuses

Ideological State Apparatuses

Repressive state apparatuses contains the government , the administration, the army, the courts, the prisons that 'functions by violence'(p.137)

Ideological State apparatuses comprises institutes such as education, churches, family, media and language that is used to transmit the values among citizens.

In The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood, ideology works in a discursive way. Language is exploited as the most important tool to instil the ruler's ideology into characters. Ideology contains the images and ideas, discourses that are all around all the time. From the outset of the novel, the reader learns that the aunts perform a duty to inculcate the ideology in the handmaids' minds. The reader learns about it when Aunt Lydia delivers a speech to the maids, "Where I am not a prison but a privilege(p.4). That means the maids are privileged that they can bear children for the Gilead Republic. Thus, the nation of Gilead is given narratives and discourses in favour of the new establishment of the Gilead government.

Language in Gilead is male dominant supported by a comprehensive patriarchy rule. Before the origin of Gilead, there was a successful movement of feminism and as a result, women were entitled to every privilege that males had. After the siege of democratic government, the oligarchy form of hegemony came into supremacy. This administration has revoked all the rights of women and they have come again under the dominance of patriarchy under the veil of Gileadean Christianity.

Females do not serve as executive officers because most female classes are outlawed to read and write. Therefore, language and literacy is no longer a part of female rights. The aunts are the only literate women in Gilead who can read and write just to serve the Gilead government. Consequently, the thought process has stopped because of the inaccessibility of language. Women are now colonised subjects of the Gilead government. The high official, a commander, says to Offred, "I like you to play a game of scrabble with me"(p.41). Offred does not reply to this order of commander because a game of reading like scrabble is illegal in Gilead. Though it is played in a hidden room, Offred hesitatingly takes part in it. She is afraid of being amputated one finger or two or even her entire hand because it is the sentence for reading and writing in the Gilead Republic.

The language in the form of biblical terminology is wielded as an ideological state apparatus to create harmony among the citizens of the Republic of Gilead. The Christian terms are misappropriated to make a system of governance in Gilead.

The name of this nation 'Gilead' is itself brought from the Bible so that the folk of this state approve it as bestowed by God. It is translated as 'hill of testimony'. Thus it is also recognized as 'Divine Republic' though the goodness of Christianity does not prevail in this regime.

The biblical terms are borrowed for distinct authoritarian ranks with denominations 'Angels', 'Guardians of the Faith', 'Commanders of the Faith' and 'Eyes of God'.

In *the Bible*, the reader catches a glimpse of angels performing different duties to serve God in Heaven, likewise, the 'Gilead angels' are in fact soldiers fighting on the frontlines to serve the nation. 'There is a heavy contingent of guards special-detail Angels' (p.78). They don blue costumes with heavy guns. They are high-rank soldiers. Though the biblical angels perform their duties to serve almighty God, here in Gilead, these blue-costumed soldiers kill the people to please the despot of the nation.

The biblical term 'Guardian angel' refers to 'intelligent spiritual creatures divinely deputed to care for and protect men on this earth and assist them in their attainment of salvation'(NP). Whereas, The Republic of Gilead's 'Guardian of the Faith' or 'Guardian Angels' is uniformed guards who protect murderous commanders of faith, the distinguished administrators. Their rank is lower than angels.

'The Commanders of the armies' in the Bible were combatants in the protection of faith, however, the commanders of the Gilead army are not to safeguard Christianity but their authority. These Gilead commanders are brothel house going perverts. In his private room, Commander calls Offred, I want you to kiss me (p.40). It shows that the commanders who are obliged to have the virtue of temperance, are wanton lecherous individuals. The commanders are a social class of influential men in Gileadean society. They operate as lawmakers and military leaders in Gilead's government. In the early days of Gilead, they endorsed the rise of this totalitarian regime. There are many commanders namely Commander Fred, Commander Warren etc. The major commander in the novel, Commander Fred has a responsibility of reproducing children like other commanders, though his wife is unable to bear them, therefore, Offred, the handmaid, is assigned to bear children for the commander. The day of consummation is said to be a 'Ceremony' whereby the commander mechanically copulates with Offred. He has had multiple affairs with his handmaids too.

'The eyes of Lord' in the Bible, is a phrase that implies the apertures of God scans humanity. However this phrase is used by the Gileadean government for their undercover police. This authority spies on the uprising citizens who capture and kill the rebels. This policy is the most fearful element of the Republic of Gilead. This police inscription 'Eyes of the Lord' has been given sanctity by the biblical prayer viz. 'for the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth.'(p.28)

The central figure of the novel Offred is also surrounded by nomenclature given by the Gileadean government. Her real name has lost its existence. Not only the name of the leading character but also the name of the citizens have now no relevance. Thus the common people have now evolved into a digit working in varied types of machinery of administration. The names 'Offred' and 'Ofglen' embodies the female characters, satisfying Commander Fred and Commander Glen. The titles given to these handmaids of commanders whose wives being infertile, cannot bear children thus, the handmaids are entrusted to intercourse with commanders and bear children for commanders' families.

Different types of vehicles exist in the real world i.e. trucks for goods; ambulances for patients etc. However, a new carriage namely 'birthmobile' is procured in the dystopian world of Gilead. The Birthmobile is a small van that transports handmaids to a fellow handmaid's childbirth. Handmaids pray at the time of accouchement in the house of commanders. Handmaids always proclaim 'Blessed be the fruit' to one another to encourage fertility. Thus, an embarrassing spectacle is discerned in the bungalows of commanders of Gilead.

The econowives are wives married to the aforementioned 'Guardians of Faith'. Their regular dresses are in different colours: red, green and blue to depict the roles of all Gileadean women. The title 'Econo-wives' is a derogatory term for women in the patriarchal society of the Republic of Gilead. The prefix 'Econo' means cheap. By terming Gilead women as 'econowives', it is rather explicit that women will never be correlated with men because they are servile to their husbands and devoid of education. Their only duty is to comfort husbands and bear children.

The two further jargons are constructed to serve the purpose of the Gileadean oligarchy.

These two terms are "ugly and inaccurate" created by political leaders of Gilead to serve their purpose. These newly coined terms are creating impurity in the English language.

First, the 'unbaby' is a premature or deformed newborn and is speculated to be not a part of the Gilead government. The 'unbaby' recalls brutalities of the Adolf Hitler era of dictatorship. History prompts the reader that Adolf Hitler decreed the invalid babies on the day of their parturition. The authority reckons that the invalid population do not contribute to the economy of the state and they are a smudge on the mightiness of the regime.

The next jargon is 'unwomen'. An Unwoman is somebody who has been specified to be meaningless for the Republic's requirements. This newly coined term is manipulated to characterize infertile, widow, feminist, nun or lesbian. These 'unwomen' are unable to bear children and are sent to colonies or killed. Thus they are the lowest social class of women in this dictatorial government. The females of Gilead are put to work, the limited available time they have is normally wasted by unwomen. It is noticed in following lines:

'The Unwomen were always wasting time. They were encouraged to do it. The government gave them money to do that very thing.'(p.35)

An additional newly constructed word 'Particutions' is provided to a form of execution on the rape charge of a female. This word 'Particution' is formed out of the blending process of the words 'participation' and 'execution'. In this crime, the male culprit is battered, pounded and exterminated by a crowd of Handmaids. "You know the rules for a Particution," Aunt Lydia says. "You will wait until I blow the whistle. After that, what you do is up to you, until I blow the whistle again. Understood? ". This said by Aunt Lydia exhibits the process of execution. The handmaids encircle the rapist and beat him to death.

Conclusion

The research article has proved that the totalitarian administration goes beyond limits to spread its ideology among citizens. Not only Gilead's commanders have manipulated the sacred religion but also they have debased the language to serve their purpose. Their sole objective is to remain in power. The tool of language has always been a tool that has been useful for historical totalitarian regimes. The illiterate environment manipulated biblical terms and newly coined terms are fulfilling the desire of governing by an oligarchy in the Republic of Gilead.

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