

The Power of Female Bonding in Resisting Patriarchal Oppression: An Analysis of Shirley's *The Keepers of the House* through Radical Feminist Theory

Ramesh Prasad Adhikary*

Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Mahendra Multiple Campus, Nepalgunj

*Corresponding author: rameshadhikary29@gmail.com

Abstract: The main objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of female bonding as a means of both survival and protest against patriarchal domination. Specifically, this research aims to explore the role of female bonding in changing the existing pattern of social structure, as portrayed in the novel under consideration. This study takes a qualitative approach, with a focus on literary analysis. The novel under consideration is analyzed using radical feminist theory, with a particular emphasis on the feminist criticism of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Other feminist critics, including Bell Hooks, Simon de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Emile Zola, are also considered. The data for this study is collected through a close reading and analysis of the novel under consideration. Relevant literature on feminist theory and criticism is also reviewed. The data collected for this study is analyzed using thematic analysis. The themes that emerge from the analysis are examined in relation to the research objectives. The findings of this study suggest that female bonding can be a powerful mechanism for both survival and protest against patriarchal domination. In the novel under consideration, female bonding plays a crucial role in enabling the protagonist to resist patriarchal oppression and challenge the traditional notions of female powerlessness. The results of this study support the assertion that female bonding can be an effective means of mounting protest against patriarchal domination. The study highlights the need for greater recognition of the role of female bonding in challenging existing social structures and promoting gender equality. The findings of this study have implications for feminist theory and practice, as well as for wider social and political movements aimed at challenging patriarchal norms.

Keywords: female bonding, patriarchal oppression, radical feminism, gender equality, feminist practice

1. Introduction

The notion that women in patriarchal societies should form bonds to resist patriarchy is widely acknowledged, and such bonding is influenced by various factors, including class, gender, and societal structure. Within the context of the novel under examination, the working class is scarcely represented, except through depictions of gypsies and rural laborers, as well as the discrete influence of servants on their masters. Although the lower classes are not often discussed, there is some interaction between the upper class and the poor. The significance of connections in the upper classes is exemplified by the female protagonist, who highlights the distinction between the "old" and "new" upper classes.

Most female characters in the novel have had access to education and belong to the upper middle class, which makes them assertive and tactful, in contrast to their seemingly diffident and powerless counterparts. The benefits of prosperity for the upper middle and middle classes are evident. The female voice is an important means of expressing inner feelings and conveying the stories of women's suffering, discrimination, injustice, and violence inflicted upon them by society in the name of tradition. The radical approach to challenging patriarchal society can be explored through Radical feminist criticism.

Shirley Ann Grau's novel, *The Keepers of the House*, explores the female characters and their quest for female identity through collective efforts. Set in the racially segregated American South in the 1950s, the novel tells the story of a wealthy and historic family, weaving together the experiences of

women from different backgrounds to highlight their shared struggles. The male domination in the novel strategically undermines female bonding, hindering their efforts to secure their place in society.

Abigail's desire for motherhood of Margaret represents her longing for female bonding, which is not understood by the patriarchal society. Despite their social, economic, and political differences, the women share a common "female experience," which blurs other boundaries but is not recognized by men.

The novel focuses on various levels, including a historical account of a Southern family, a love story, and a woman's struggle to manage threatening forces without destroying herself and others. Abigail, the main female character, has an omniscient perspective and feels the pressure of past generations. William's section chronicles the generations of Howlands, highlighting the family's history and traditions.

The female characters in the novel are portrayed as powerless, suffering from unequal treatment due to their socio-political and economic exploitation. Female bonding is necessary to challenge the existing social structure and empower women, as male-female bonding is impossible in a patriarchal society. The novel's unmatched female voices resist oppression and emotionally prepare other women for resistance. Margaret, a mulatto character, is presented in a submissive role, challenging the racist atmosphere of the South, and seeking to convey her motherhood to someone who can understand her.

1.1 Research Objectives

1) To examine the portrayal of female characters in Shirley Ann Grau's *The Keepers of the House* and their search for female identity through collective efforts.

2) To explore the significance of female bonding as a means of resistance against patriarchal society, and how it is depicted in the novel.

3) To analyze the impact of social, economic, and political factors on the experiences of female characters in the racially segregated American Southern setting of the 1950s, as presented in the novel.

2. Literature Review

The novel *The Keepers of the House* by Shirley Ann Grau has garnered significant attention from various scholars. Margaret Fletcher asserts that the novel exposes the challenges faced by women in the Southern setting. She draws a comparison to Elizabeth Oleksy's view of the novel's setting, which she considers to be similar to that of *Gone with the Wind* in its geographical imagination of the South. Fletcher's perspective on the representation of women in the novel is ambiguous due to the complex subtleties of marriage, particularly in the legal and social arrangements of interracial and intra-racial marriages that challenge motherhood and property inheritance. The binding factor of these female problems could be the philosophy of humanism, which values respect for all humans regardless of race or gender. McLeod (2001), another renowned critic, examines the novel from this perspective:

It treats of the emotional extremes of deep love for humanity and of deep hate for individuals, both within the context of miscegenation in a past generation. Abigail Howland, the object of her community's censure, is one of the more carefully drawn characters in modern fiction, though we at times wonder whether her reactions to her environmental pressures would, in fact, be common. The community wishes to tear down her life. (21)

The lack of humanistic comprehension in men results in the rejection and oppression of female autonomy. Resistance and destruction serve as the means to combat this rejection and violence.

The female lead utilizes these means to attain liberation from male oppression and to eradicate racial discrimination in order to establish social unity. The subsequent passage illustrates how the themes of racial and female unity converge to form the overarching motif of the novel from various angles:

She had always thought of her body as solid, one piece. Now she knew it was otherwise. She was black outside, but inside was her father's blood. She thought about this carefully. And her body seemed to expand, to swell, growing like a balloon. She thought of all the distance between the two parts of her, the white and the black. And it seemed to her that those two halves would pull away and separate and leave her there in the open, popped out like a kernel from its husk. (37)

Abigail's perception of Margaret's inner qualities reflects a challenging aspect of the identity of mixed-race individuals who struggle with their sense of self. The fragmented sense of self experienced by mixed-race female characters is shaped by the dominance of white males and their culture. Patriarchal ideology has also oppressed white women, as well as people of other races in America.

Seed (2004) observes that the memoir has a reflective quality, where the narrator shares her perspective on various topics including religion, culture, political context, and a life-affirming outlook. Seed expresses her thoughts on the memoir in the following passage:

Besides being a personal memoir and a portrait of a family that includes the world's three major monotheistic religion, *The Keepers of the House* is a meditation on how our individual memories inevitably slip away, either into oblivion or into that dull collective consciousness we call history. But southerners have the nerve to be fascinated by the events that occurred in their own country that year, the public history that overlaps, vividly, with their personal memories. (15)

Smith (2001) suggests that Shirley Ann Grau's *The Keepers of the House* reflects the author's dissatisfaction with the notion of a singular and distinctive identity. Smith implies that in today's globalized world, obtaining a unique identity is nearly impossible, and those who strive to do so are bound to fail. Smith subtly suggests a preference for a fluid and plural hybrid identity.

Despite the predominance of the meditative aspect in the novel, Smith (2001) argues that other elements in the narrative are equally important, and their significance should not be ignored. Smith (2001) makes the following assertions about *The Keepers of the House*:

Most of the characters in the novel grew up first in Denver, then Chestnut Hill, Mass., in what she considered to be a wonderful and normal life with three terrific adults: her American dad, a tall, rangy, white Protestant; her beautiful Muslim mother, who was born and raised in an affluent home in Karachi, the first capital of Pakistan; and her sweet maternal grandmother, who raised the kids and kept the house while the adult couple ran an architectural firm. (31)

People often become so enamored with the modernity and luxury of their current lives that they forget their roots and racial identity. However, when faced with a crisis of conscience, they are forced to delve into their cultural and religious background to make sense of their situation. Religion is often forgotten in this process, and it is only when confronted with the urgency of the moment that people begin to consider their origins and beliefs.

Buchanan (2004) analyzes *The Keeper of the Houses* and highlights the appealing nature of the narrator's meditative tone after achieving self-awareness. In her analysis, Buchanan (2004) explores how the public self-awareness of hybrid individuals is portrayed in the text. She provides a concise overview of her perspective on this particular element.

While Grau's original language is partially lost in translation from an oral to a written text, what remains is an authorial voice that fuses the public self-consciousness with the private self-consciousness of the narrator. The central focus of her narrative is hybridity as a lived historical reality. Shepard is as much the subject of her memoir. Shepard is no neutral passive recorder but rather a creative active shaper of her life story. (12)

In Grau's writing, cultural blending is depicted as a tangible part of history. To prevent readers of Grau's time from becoming disengaged, this historical reality is emphasized. The author's bold and confident voice coexists with language that conveys empathy. Boog (2003) is a literary critic who offers a formalistic perspective on Grau's work, and he makes the following comments:

Grau writes in a new style of English prose, while juxtaposes and merges distinctly American motifs and diction with such traditional Indian theme as love, death and the self. Shirley's fiction frequently alludes to commercial brand names and cultural icons of the United States. His work has been noted for its surreal qualities, blending bizarre plots twists and unique narration. (19)

According to Boog, Grau's writing style involves the use of contrasting ideas. Boog observes that Grau focuses on themes such as love, death, and self, with particular emphasis on the self. Boog notes that Grau's works often contain surreal elements, indicating a blend of magical and realistic aspects. The plot twists are often bizarre, and the narration style is unique, which contributes to the vibrant quality of Grau's works.

On the other hand, Brown (2004) views Grau's novel as a rich tapestry where various elements are woven together to form a cohesive narrative. Brown believes that Grau skillfully reconciles different aspects of the story to create a unified whole. Brown's concise statement suggests that Grau's work is

intricately structured and carefully crafted to create a cohesive and engaging narrative:

This novel is a gorgeous, honest tribute to her departed maternal grandmother, Nana, whose unlikely history propels the search. The stories are compelling, the writing is clear, and the entire book feels like an act of love and courage. As documentary filmmaker and photographer, Grau knows how to move through scenes, pack them with dialogue, focus on key details, and capture the juxtaposition of opposites that will fascinate us outsiders. (28)

The extract discusses the memoir writing style of Grau, which is characterized by a versatile talent that ranges from sensuous imageries to the ironic and meditative tone. The author employs various writing strategies such as expository, descriptive, and narrative to tackle the issue at hand.

Ellis (2002) opines that Grau's memoir portrays the longing to belong to more than one culture, and it is commendable how Grau tries to understand her grandmother's doubts and work through her own. While the memoir is primarily a love story, multiculturalism is also a powerful thematic ingredient, among others, that carries equal significance.

The critics who have analyzed the novel have failed to focus on the representation and voice of women, who face various forms of oppression based on circumstance and ideology. The issue of female representation has led to attempts to give freedom to oppressed women, particularly those from lower backward regions of South America. Immigrants facing challenges and crises are forced to reconstruct their imaginary homeland. The definition and display of female bonding within human relationships can be influenced by age, sexual orientation, culture, race, and marital status. Research has shown that strong female bonding exists, particularly in positive mother-daughter relationships that provide emotional, financial, and instrumental support. Equality is essential for these relationships, and the work of Chodorow (2012) is crucial in understanding the role of patriarchal society in limiting women's self-reclamation. Women can only acquire self and agency when free from discrimination and domination, as patriarchal society relegates women to the "other" and limits their ability to form a stable and recognizable self. Gender in the modern West typically divides human beings into two categories, with social practices similarly divided.

3. Methodology

The research has used qualitative approach to analyze the representation and voice of women in the novel. The study has used a literature review as a theoretical tool for interpretation of the novel. The research is based on primary and secondary sources of data to provide an in-depth analysis of the issue. The study will use a feminist perspective to understand the role of patriarchal society in limiting women's self-reclamation.

3.1 Sources of Data

The primary sources of data for this study is the novel and other literary works related to the representation and voice of women. The secondary sources of data include scholarly articles, journals, and books that provide insights into the issue.

3.2 Methods of Data Collection

The study has used a purposive sampling method to select relevant literature for analysis. The data collection process involves reading and analyzing the literature, taking notes, and identifying relevant themes and patterns.

3.3 Methods of Data Analysis

The study has used a thematic analysis method to analyze the data. The process included identifying and analyzing patterns, themes, and concepts related to the representation and voice of women in the novel.

3.4 Theoretical Tool for Analyzing of the Novel

This study has applied radical feminism to analyze the story and characters in the text. The research has incorporated concepts related to female rights, racial identity, dignity, protest, and feminist

criticism as a whole. The feminist criticism of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar has been given particular attention, along with the works of other well-known feminist critics such as Bell Hooks, Simon de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Emile Zola. The study has drawn on the work of Chodorow (2012) to understand the role of patriarchal society in limiting women's self-reclamation.

The concept of female bonding and solidarity among women is explored in different feminist theories. Greiner (2006) argues that single women see each other as lifelong confidants due to the absence of a lifelong commitment to a spouse. Female bonding can also be seen within positive mother-daughter relationships. The importance of woman to woman relations is emphasized by Beardsley (2010), who suggests that it is imperative to strengthen such relations in order to reshape the man-woman relationship. Andolsen (2011) argues that the problems of women should be viewed in a broader category as a social grouping in society. Ouzgame (2008) emphasizes the importance of strategic approaches to create solidarity among women in the patriarchal discourse. Gender difference feminism aims to revalue the feminine not for the sake of revaluation but for intended strategic purposes.

Therefore, it can be inferred that the foundation for enhancing female activism, which seeks to achieve various feminist claims and demands, lies in the emergence of female solidarity. Authentic transformation in the historical dynamics between men and women can be achieved through the bonding and solidarity among women.

4. Textual Analysis

This research probes how the increasing understanding and solidarity amidst female beings enable them to cope with frightening and lethal atmosphere. This idea is tested and then endorsed in this research by conducting thorough analysis of Shirley's *The Keepers of the House*. Shirley digs deep into various forms of love including the oppressive closeness between both them.

The first William Howland did not return home to Tennessee on his way back from the War of 1812. Instead, he settled on a hill in rural Mississippi, overlooking a small river. He was later killed in an Indian raid, but since then, a descendant of William Howland, most often a male named William, lived in the house and dominated affairs in Madison City and Wade County, which sprang up around Howland's original settlement. The following extract shows how the tough background inflicts the harsh effect in the process of implanting firm consciousness in women:

The fifth William Howland was the last man bearing the name to live in the house. His wife died young, leaving him with a young daughter, Abigail, and an infant son, William, who died just a year after his mother. Abigail married an English professor who abandoned her with a child, also named Abigail, when he went off to fight in World War II. When she died, William Howland was left to take care of his granddaughter Abigail. He also brought Margaret, a new African American housekeeper to the house to live with him. (17)

The woman was commonly known throughout the county as the mistress of William and the mother of his illegitimate children. However, unbeknownst to many, William had secretly married Margaret in order to ensure that their children were considered legitimate. When their children reached adulthood, William and Margaret sent them up north to live as white people.

The secret marriage between William and Margaret remained concealed until their younger daughter, Abigail, married John Tolliver, a politician running for governor. Tolliver aligned himself with the Klan and made racist remarks against Black people, which enraged Robert Howland, the eldest son of William and Margaret who had been living in obscurity in Seattle. Robert then revealed the story of his origins to the press, causing Tolliver's campaign to be destroyed. Tolliver, who saw Abigail as a trophy wife, ended their marriage and returned to his family up north.

Despite the deaths of William and Margaret, a mob gathered to express their anger towards the mixed marriage and attacked Abigail and the Howland house. Although they killed the livestock and set fire to the barn, Abigail successfully drove them away with her grandfather's shotguns. Towards the end of the book, Abigail seeks revenge against the people of Madison City. This passage serves as evidence of how the history of patriarchy provides not only regressive, but also uplifting forces:

Over the past generations, her family had come to own most of the county, making her one of the richest people in the state. Over the course of a single day, she takes revenge on the locals for betraying

her grandfather by shutting down the hotel and bringing most of the local economy to ruin. Once she has done that, she places a call to Robert, with the intention of informing his new family that his mother was Black. (47)

This research has a dual purpose: firstly, it aims to provide a historical explanation for the attack on the Howland barn and the subsequent threat to the Howland household; secondly, it presents a mythic romance that recounts a love story set in a corrupted Eden. The research also explores the theme of managing threatening forces without causing destruction to either the attackers or the attacked, which is essential in a modern apocalypse.

The novel is structured into four sections and an epilogue, with Abigail as the narrator throughout. Although the two sections named after William and Margaret focus more on their characters than on Abigail, she narrates both of them. The narrator's resilience and determination are evident in the following excerpt:

As narrator, Abigail is gifted with omniscience, entering at will into the minds of the other characters and explaining that her memory goes back before her birth, the people of past generations being like ghosts constantly surrounding her, even at times talking with her. As keeper of the Howland house, she feels the pressure of generations: "It is as if their lives left a weaving of invisible threads in the air of this house, of this town, of this county. (57)

This extract describes the lineage of William Howland and how different generations of the family have managed the house. The first William Howland settled down in Mississippi after returning from fighting alongside Andrew Jackson. He was killed by marauding Indians but left behind six children. A William Howland was killed during the Civil War, but another took his place as keeper of the house. The current William Howland is described as a peaceful man who enjoys the natural world.

The growing understanding and solidarity between Abigail and Margaret, which helps them, cope with the eerie and unsettling atmosphere around them. Margaret's death in the hospital brings unexpected changes in the lives of various characters, including Tolliver, who comes to Abigail's aid. Young Howland finds Tolliver holding onto Abigail's body in the hospital room. Margaret's spirit witnesses the scene from above. The extract highlights how the two sisters supported each other in coping with the unsettling environment of the house.

After Abigail's death, Tolliver holds onto her body in the hospital room, and Margaret's spirit witnesses the scene. The passage also suggests that there is growing unity and homogeneity among women, which even brings males like Tolliver to their aid. The extract implies that the haunting and surreal atmosphere of the house has affected the characters deeply and highlights the emotional connections between them:

Margaret's twin sister lives in the United States. She regularly receives letters from Margaret at a private post office box that only she knows about. Her husband, Jack, grows suspicious of the letters, particularly when he discovers a lighter in his friend's car. Most of the female figures do not smoke; she uses the lighter to burn up Margaret's letters after she reads them. Finally, Jack hires a private detective to follow Margaret and find out more about the letters. She had spotted the detective early on and is annoyed by his presence. (32)

Margaret goes down to the beach to read her latest letter which is brief and confirms her imminent death. In the letter, Margaret informs Abigail that she will not inherit anything because Margaret has Abigail's life, but everything has been left to Abigail's twin daughters. Abigail takes the letter home and shows it to Jack, who is surprised and relieved that the letter is not from a lover, as he thought Margaret and Abigail were not on speaking terms.

When alone, a woman can be overwhelmed by fear and self-doubt, but in unity, she can overcome obstacles. Edie is struck with a sense of loss and unpreparedness after Margaret's departure, despite their long separation. Suddenly, Margaret's twin daughters arrive home from school, and Edie rushes to compose herself in the bathroom. She instructs Tolliver not to tell the girls about their aunt's death, greets the twins, and begins to plan for dinner, maintaining her composure. The passage below emphasizes that all the characters are feeling a sense of urgency because of the increasing uncertainty:

The day of Abigail's funeral, Tolliver is tired and empty. The mourners all go to Highgate Cemetery for the graveside service. Tolliver works at Highgate; the cemetery is an important historic site and people regularly request tours. Today, however, the cemetery and all the people with whom Tolliver works seem different. Everything feels strange since he is here as a mourner, not an employee. (66)

Senior Abigail and Senior Howland are unable to find the right words to comfort the grieving family. They reflect on Margaret's illness that caused her death at the young age of forty-four. They vividly imagine the changes in her body, which is now covered with scars and sores, and her hair has fallen out due to unsuccessful treatments.

If women are considered as a social group and their issues are analyzed within the framework of this group, it is possible to implement effective measures to achieve the goals of feminism that are centered on women. Otherwise, it will be a difficult and impractical task.

The solidarity among women and their supportive male counterparts helps them cope with the dreadful and supernatural situation. Abigail visualizes the decay of Margaret's body in the coffin, and he feels conflicted when he remembers their past intimate moments. The same body that once aroused him now fills him with disgust. The pallbearers struggle to carry the heavy, lead-lined casket into the small family mausoleum. Tolliver finds it difficult to leave after the service is over.

During the burial service, Tolliver finds it challenging to focus and instead fixates on the slushy rain and snow falling around the mourners. He panics at the thought of forgetting things about Margaret, realizing that she now lives on in his memory. The walk back is uncomfortable and silent. Upon returning to the building, important male characters struggle to find the right words to comfort the weakened and exhausted person, who has lost the inspiring connection he once had.

Howland engages in covert activities to exert control over young women, in order to enforce obedience to his will. His return to work after several months since the funeral is an unfamiliar experience for him. The extract explicitly highlights Howland's tumultuous relationship with Jessica, as well as her growing awareness of the danger posed by those she trusts the most:

The junior, Abigail has a particular knack for putting people's talents and interests to use. Noting Howland's historical bent, Jessica quickly put him to work guiding tours of the cemetery. On this particular day, he excuses himself from his colleagues to go to lunch. Instead, he crosses High gate and goes to Klan's mausoleum. He sits on the steps, rests his head against the door, and thinks of her. He reflects back on his helping her make her final arrangements. (84)

Tolliver and Klan have been aware of her impending death for some time, and they are now discussing the practical arrangements for her estate. Elspeth expresses her intention to leave everything to her nieces, but she offers to bequeath her estate to Tolliver, who declines, stating that he is doing well enough without it. Robert is surprised by Elspeth's decision to leave her entire estate to nieces whom she has never met or spoken to.

Certain women who are conscious of the feminist movement embody both rebellious and conformist beliefs. Further examination of their activities and thought processes reveals a deeper understanding. Gender is not merely a socially constructed category that needs to be dismantled. While gender is undoubtedly an outcome of social interactions and practices, the persistent effects of an individual's immersion in gender categories can be shocking and bewildering. The concept of gender as a constructed category requires manipulation to enable women to attain a sense of solidarity.

Margaret observes Tolliver carefully, remaining close to him while being aware that he is unaware of her presence. Tolliver methodically clears Margaret's belongings and toiletries from the bathroom into a bin he has brought with him, with Klan anticipating the next location. Despite their shared goal and cooperative tendencies, the two women still feel uneasy in unfamiliar surroundings, sensing a foreboding atmosphere. The following excerpt serves as an illustration of this point:

The twins arrive in England, standing out from the crowd at Heathrow Airport in their matching all-white outfits. Despite preparing for the move by consuming all kinds of British culture, the twins are still not prepared for the unfamiliarity of their new surroundings, especially Klan. They take a taxi to their new address but initially have trouble finding the building; they finally realize they have to go down an alley to access the entrance. (119)

The day after their arrival, the twins visit Klan's solicitor to learn about the details of the estate, which includes several million pounds. They also review the regulations regarding the flat they now reside in. The twins express their apprehension about their parents not being allowed to visit, but Klan explains that they are only prohibited from entering the apartment. He tries to alleviate their worries by pointing out how common it is for people to make peculiar or inexplicable requests in their wills.

It is important of female bonding and the need for women to support and empathize with each other in their struggles for justice and equality. The author argues that if one group of women is victimized

and the other does not unite to support them, they cannot achieve true freedom. The group identity of women is seen as a crucial factor in guaranteeing justice and freedom for women.

The twins attempt to understand why Klan made them her beneficiaries despite having no previous contact with them. Although Klan may know more, he offers only vague responses and Tolliver remains unsure why he refused to introduce himself to the twins. The twins appear to stand out and are used to people finding them odd or intriguing. However, Tolliver realizes with dismay that their outings mostly consist of visiting tourist attractions.

The narrative then shifts to Klan waking up Abigail due to water leaking from the ceiling. The senior Abigail finds papers stacked outside the flat. Meanwhile, Klan observes the twins' lazy behavior and their unhealthy diet, while they watch television. Margaret, a deceased character, appears onscreen, and Klan laughs at herself for having a crush on an actor despite being dead.

It is argued that the feminine cannot be considered as a subject or theorized in relation to the masculine. The disagreement over the meaning of gender requires a radical rethinking. The sex/gender distinction suggests that gender is a free-floating artifice, independent of sex, and gender is the means by which sex is produced and established as pre-discursive. Gender should not be viewed as a cultural inscription of meaning on a preconceived notion of sex, but rather as a discursive/cultural construction. The consequences of this radical splitting of the gendered subject pose new problems for understanding gender and its relationship to sex and culture.

The chief of the village becomes aware of their arrival and requests a meeting with them. The village is under threat from nearby fighting, causing the local mine to close down. An aircraft lands in the village, but it is unclear whether it is a friend or foe. Despite the potential danger, Maureen disregards her family and rushes towards the plane. The following passage describes the growing difficulties and annoyances faced by Maureen's family:

Maureen Smales, the daughter of a mine shift boss, had slept in mud huts before, but only for leisurely family vacations. She expresses her disbelief that Bamford Smales, an architect, and Maureen Smales, born Maureen Hetherington of the Western Gold Mines, now call a mud hut in a village in rural South Africa home. Her three children sleep on seats removed from their car. She lies on the rusted bed covered with a tarp from the car and her memories take her from the present to her childhood. (41)

As Maureen remembers her childhood bedroom, she feels nostalgic and remembers having her school shoes cleaned by their servant, Jim. When July introduces Maureen to his wife, she doesn't say anything and doesn't make any effort to welcome Maureen and her family to the village. Maureen shakes her hand and the hand of July's mother, but neither of them seems very welcoming.

The novel depicts the lives of Maureen and Bam, a white South African couple who flee to the African bush with their former black servant July amidst the chaos of the war-torn Johannesburg. The contrast between their luxurious middle-class life and their new stark reality highlights the economic balance tipped in their favor by the apartheid system. The novel also portrays the cracks in liberal views under pressure during the socio-political transition. Although Maureen and Bam accept the revolution, they struggle to part with their possessions and privilege, leading to a disjuncture between their political and economic views and their inability to understand July's claim on their car.

It is explored that the factors that impact female bonding are age, sexual orientation, culture, race, and marital status. Studies suggest that single women tend to develop strong bonds with other single female friends due to a lack of commitment. However, women often experience subordination and subjugation, which can impede their ability to acquire a stable and recognizable sense of self. This is largely due to the patriarchal nature of society, where men are considered the subject and women the "other." Gender is a social process that divides people along sexed identities and often creates hierarchies. Self and agency can be strengthened when women are free from discrimination and domination.

Sexed identities can be categorized into those that are privileged or devalued, and in contemporary Western societies, gender is typically divided into two. The more that gender differences are reduced, the greater potential for feminism to succeed. If there were no significant differences between men and women, men would naturally defend women's rights and freedoms. The absence of gender differences would facilitate the unity and harmony of women. The achievement of complete freedom and access to rights for women requires the dismantling of patriarchal societal structures. This perspective on feminism, which emphasizes promoting gender unity and harmony, will be cited in this research.

5. Conclusion

This research highlights the impact of patriarchy on the individual freedom and self-esteem of women from lower social classes. The female protagonist in the study mobilizes women towards unity and solidarity, challenging traditional gender roles. However, she faces backlash and denunciation from society, which inflicts emotional pain. Another character in the study chooses to reject traditional gender roles and marriage, but also faces societal disapproval. The rebellious spirit of the female characters is influenced by their own inner struggles as well as societal restrictions. The study emphasizes the importance of strategic and normative approaches to pursuing freedom. The characters' struggles demonstrate the necessity of unity among oppressed women in the fight against patriarchy. The study also discusses the societal impact of the upper classes' detachment from patriarchal culture. Overall, the study highlights the importance of assertiveness, fortitude, sentimentality, adaptability, and flexibility in challenging patriarchy and achieving a moral victory.

References

- [1] Barbara A. (2011). *Struggle for hope. Reflection on Feminism*. Ed. Stephen Alter. New York: Norton; 120-22.
- [2] Beardsley C. (2010). *Gender and Sexuality*. New Delhi: Diamond Publication, 2010.
- [3] Boog J. (2003). *Jubilation of Union*. New York: Norton.
- [4] Brown E. A. (2004). *Eden of Archetype*. London: Harper Collins, 2004.
- [5] Buchanan S. (2004). *Solaces of Womanhood*. New Delhi: The Diamond Publication.
- [6] Chodorow N. (2012). *Dynamics of Referential Self*. New York: Penguin.
- [7] Ellis S. (2002). *Marvel of Union and Separation*. New Delhi: Vivian.
- [8] Greiner D. J. (2006). *Tale of the Torture*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- [9] McLeod A. (2001). *Gender Bonding and Tragic Babble*. New Delhi: Vivian.
- [10] Ouzgame L. (2008). *Reflection on Constructivism*. New York: Penguin.
- [11] Seed C. (2004). *Patriarchy and Power*. London: Harper Collins.
- [12] Shirley A. (2003). *The Keepers of the House*. Vintage.
- [13] Smith P. (2001). *Bonding and Consolidation*. New York: Penguin, 2001.