CHAPTER V

SUPPRESSION AND INTELLECTUAL DEPRIVATION: AN ANALYSIS OF
BRADBURY’S FAHRENHEIT 451

5.1. Introduction: Socio-Cultural Matrix of the Novel

_Fahrenheit 451_ (1953) by Bradbury is an attack on the intellectual deprivation, and the suppression of human elements in a hedonistic society. In this novel, Bradbury reprimands the people of the modern American society who are greatly influenced by the television programmes, at the cost of human interaction. Published in 1953, _Fahrenheit 431_ is based on the socio-cultural matrix of the post-World War II America. The developments in technology vastly improved living conditions, and enhanced the quality of life of man, leading him to become materialistic. This phenomenal growth transformed the agrarian scene of America. Clarenson explains that within a single generation

- the development of the telephone, the electric light, the wireless radio, the phonograph, the airplane, the automobile, and the skyscraper established the basic foundations from which twentieth century contemporary society has grown exponentially. (10)

Rapid political developments gave a fillip to Communism, which was already a predominant force in Russia, North Korea, and China causing ripples in the American administration. The possibility of a Nuclear warfare with devastating impact on world community, led to panic and neurotic – behaviour among the people. Tremendous advances in modern technology and the high speed computing machines crucial for the development of the fusion bombs transformed attitudes to
The remarkable surge in technological development witnessed during the post-war years was reflected in the American lifestyle.

Further, the economic collapse caused by the two World Wars led to a materialistic attitude to life among the Americans. Success in business became their motto, and the American Dream caused the people to take to entertainment to escape from reality, often, at the expense of moral principles and ethical conduct. In England, too, the living conditions of the people changed for the worse. After the Second World War, the Labour Party assumed office in Great Britain, and laid the foundations for social security, free and universal national health and education systems. Efforts were also taken by the government to nationalise industries such as railways, iron and steel, and coal. But soon the workers in the nationalised industries found that the condition had become worse. The relationship between the government and trade unions was severely strained because of rising prices and stagnant wages. The World Bank, and International Monetary Fund were established to help the countries whose economies were seriously affected. The growing strength of German and Japanese economies resulted in ending the American dominance which was pronounced earlier.

The threat of Communism to democratic ideals of America, particularly liberty, freedom and peaceful cooperation was felt by the American government. In his speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, on February 9, 1950, U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy, a virulent critic of Communism, announced that he had a list of two hundred and five Communists in the State Department.

Preaching a crude but effective doctrine of ‘Better dead than red’, the government began a series of purges of communist sympathizers (real and
imagined) within the country. Senator McCarthy playing the role of Witchfinder-General drew a direct parallel to the paranoid purging of witches in sixteenth century New England. (Sinfield 15)

The rather vigorous, and staunch opposition to Communism soon became a hot topic for discussion in the media, and American politics, and generally recognized as McCarthyism.

The common people hoped that a totalitarian government under an able leader might provide stability and power. However, critical thinkers, like Bradbury, were rather skeptical about it, and explored to seek solution elsewhere. Fahrenheit 451 is a satire written in response to the American cold war atmosphere after World War II. The novel’s sarcasm is directed not at specific government institutions but at anti-intellectualism and cramped materialism posing as social philosophy, justifying book burning as the service of a democratic idea. Fahrenheit 451 depicts a world in which the American Dream has turned nightmare because it has been superficially understood. (Mogen 105)

However, this materialistic culture is not created without a purpose; by creating a seemingly democratic materialistic society, the rulers stand to benefit. Education, entertainment, and distortion of family values are systematically programmed by the rulers to create a popular culture in which people are deprived of intellectual ideas which would question the policies of the government. But, in Fahrenheit 451, the role of the government is not discussed in detail. Faber’s (an old professor in the novel) assertion “Those who don’t build must burn” (F 451 89) presents the political attitude of America.
5.2. Destruction of Books and the Reading Habit

The application of Marxist and Neo-Marxist criticism illustrates the social, political, and cultural climate in which a work of art is produced. The fear of American government due to the rise of Communism, and the resultant efforts taken by the government to censure the views of the people criticising the status quo are condemned by Bradbury by redefining the role of firemen destroying books.

Bradbury, in *Fahrenheit 451*, expresses his concern for the lack of interest in reading books in general, in the modern society. The story is about Guy Montag, a fireman who lives in a society where books are illegal. His job is not to extinguish fire, but to ignite it, burn, and destroy books to ensure that they do not corrupt people’s minds. In this process, he sets fire even to houses which secretly preserve books. The intensity of the administration’s hatred for books is signified by all the firemen wearing the number 451 on their helmets and uniforms – 451° F being the temperature at which books are burnt to ashes. The official slogan of the nation is “Monday burn Millay, Wednesday Whitman, Friday Faulkner, burn ‘em to ashes, then burn the ashes” (F 451 8). It sums up the attitude of the government towards books, especially books that make the readers think. Bradbury, thus, criticises the American government for preventing people from having access to information which, in turn, will lead to critical thinking.

“It was a pleasure to burn … to see things blackened and changed” (F 451 1) – the very beginning of the novel indicates the wicked pleasure in destroying things. Guy Montag, the protagonist, with his symbolic helmet showing number 451, flickered the igniter, and burnt a house where books were
stored secretly, and so it faced the fiery consequence. The smile in the face of Montag showed that he actually derived sardonic pleasure of destroying houses that kept books, by burning them down. After all, he only performed his duty in a world where books were prohibited. He was under an illusion that he actually derived pleasure in what he did. However, later, his meeting with a girl, Clarisse, his neighbour, convinced him that he was wrong in his assumption that he derived pleasure from destroying books.

In *Fahrenheit 451*, Bradbury explains how people are conditioned to abide by law which is a vital tool for spreading the ideology of the people in power. When Clarisse, the teenaged neighbour of Montag, asked him whether he had read any book he burnt, he replied that it was against the law. The girl asked another question, whether it was the duty of the firemen of yesteryears to extinguish fire, and protect houses instead of setting them on fire, and burning them down. Montag replied that the houses were always fire proof. Montag, being conditioned to accept the rules of the government without questioning, appeared to love his job. But a level headed Clarisse raised basic questions about the social relevance of his job. Her questions made him stop laughing and remember his meeting with an old man in the park a year before, who also had the same attitude as Clarisse.

On the whole, the people of Bradbury’s imaginary society appear happy and contented. But, the visible signs of happiness in watching television, and driving cars at a brake-neck speed are actually the expressions of the unhappiness which lies hidden. In the novel, both Montag and Mildred appear happy and satisfied. Montag seems to like his job of a fireman, and Mildred spends most of her time in the TV parlour happily. But Montag is afraid of the Mechanical Hound in his office that is
set to kill the people who are against the government. Mildred, too, is unhappy with her life, and tries several times to commit suicide.

The Mechanical Hound is an emotionless, eight-legged killing machine programmed to seek out, and destroy free thinkers by hunting them down by scent. It can remember as many as 10,000 scents of people it is tracking down. The machine is blind to anything but the destruction for which it is programmed. It kills people by injecting lethal morphine or procaine. When Montag says that it does not like him, his chief, Beatty, clarifies that the machine has no likes or dislikes: “It has a trajectory we decide on for it. It follows through. It targets itself, homes itself, and cuts off. It’s only copper wire, storage batteries and electricity…” (F 451 26).

But Montag is sceptical “as all of those chemical balances and percentages on all of us here in the House are recorded in the master file downstairs. It would be easy for someone to set up a partial combination on the Hound’s ‘memory’” (26). The chief assures that the technicians will check the hound the next day.

Montag’s fear is the result of his act against the rules of the government. He has done something which other firemen dare not do. Behind the ventilator grill in the hall of his house, he has hidden books secretly. Montag hears in the firehouse that a fireman, for an identical crime, in Seattle deliberately set a Mechanical Hound to his own chemical complex and let it loose. Montag’s fears are enhanced by this horrible suicide. He is also alarmed by the news of imminent war. Again, he is shocked to hear that the man whose library was set ablaze by the firemen recently was sent to an asylum though he was not insane. Captain Beatty, the fire chief, explains that any man is insane who thinks he can fool the government.
Beatty thinks that the people are expected to be happy, and this is easily achieved by having minorities. By catering to the needs of all these people, and by making them feel happy, controversies are averted. The government does not do it through coercive methods as we find in most of the Communist countries. However, the government is not solely responsible for destroying critical thinking. The people who prefer happiness over critical thinking are equally responsible for it:

It didn’t come from the Government down. There was no dictum, no declaration, no censorship to start with, no! Technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressure carried the trick, thank God. Today, thanks to them, you can stay happy all the time, you are allowed to read comics, the good old confessions or trade journals. (58)

The firemen in the novel play a crucial role in establishing a society without critical thinking. They are the instruments of the government that control the society forbidding knowledge and critical inquiry. The rule book of the firemen containing the brief history of the Firemen of America explains their duty, in a nutshell:

Established, 1970, to burn English-influenced books in the Colonies.

First Fireman: Benjamin Franklin.

Rule

1. Answer the alarm swiftly.
2. Start the fire swiftly.
3. Burn everything.
4. Report back to the firehouse immediately.
5. Stand alert for other alarms. (35)
By ridiculing the duty of firemen of *Fahrenheit 451*, Bradbury emphasizes the need for freedom of expression in America, where it was denied during the height of the McCarthy era. At that time, those who raised their voice against the functioning of governments were viewed with suspicion.

### 5.3. Entertainment and Popular Culture

The society portrayed by Bradbury in his work is not conditioned by fear, and suspicion alone. It has banished books in favour of mindless entertainment. Captain Beatty argues that happiness of people lies not in *diversity* but in *like mindedness*. By reducing the thought process, people will be made alike enabling the government to control them without fuss. Such society does not require the implementation of coercive methods to condition people; the illusion that everybody is equal, and happy will make them willingly subjugate themselves to the designs of the government.

In the novel, thought–reduction becomes the motto of the government. All the classics are condensed to a few page pamphlets, and then cut to fifteen-minute radio shows then cut again to fill a two-minute book column, “winding up at last as a ten or twelve-line dictionary resume” (54). Even schools are shortened, and disciplines are relaxed. Philosophies, histories, and languages are dropped. English spelling is gradually neglected, and is finally completely ignored. Life is immediate, the job counts, pleasure lies all about after work. Why learn anything save pressing buttons, pulling switches, fitting nuts and bolts … The zipper replaces button and a man lacks just that much time to think while dressing at dawn, a philosophical hour, and thus a melancholy hour. (55-56)
Dhal, a critic of Bradbury, observes that “Beatty’s manipulative rhetoric (about thought-reduction) is demonstrative of the way popular culture works through the media, and how this negatively impacts, literature, and the mobility of ideas that literature promotes” Bradbury criticizes the change in the attitude of the American people through this novel. Marx considered religion as “opium of the people” that sedates people to forget their everyday problems. In America, television makes the people forget their problems by showing meaningless drivel and divert their attention from social and political problems.

Adorno, a Marxist critic, insists that popular media such as radio and movies can not pretend to be art because “they have become business made into an ideology to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce.” In our contemporary society too, media is controlled by businessmen who do the bidding of the State. Entertainment, today, is dominated by reality TV shows that aims at sedating people, making them accept ‘reality’ presented by people in power. In Fahrenheit 451, Bradbury warns the American public of his times that their mindless entertainment will make them insensitive to social issues:

You can’t build a house without nails and wood. If you don’t want a house built, hide the nails and wood. If you don’t want a man unhappy politically, don’t give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him one. Better give him none. Let him forget there is such a thing as war. If the government is inefficient, topheavy, and tax-mad, better it be all those than the people worry over it. (F 451 60-61)

These words of Beatty, according to Dhal, suggest that
by withholding the knowledge from the people in their society, the leaders of said society are given full control over it … By emphasizing the media and popular culture, and deemphasizing the importance of literature thought reduction is easily achieved. Bradbury, through characters, is illustrating how the media is feeding us a constant flow of popular culture.

The government of Fahrenheit 451 abolishes the very existence of the past in the minds of the people by conditioning them effectively, by the use of entertainment.

In the novel, the people of Elm city, apparently live happily through some mindless entertainment. The culture of the new world is designed to suit the needs of the rulers. Relationship between individuals is strained by the people’s obsession with pleasure and entertainment. While machines and mechanical gadgets are given importance, human beings are ignored. Each individual is made to like his or her association with machines and electronic equipment, and the relationship among human beings is considerably affected by this tendency. Fredric Jameson remarks that the concept of reification (transformation of human relationships into relationship between traded objects) is more relevant in today’s world where “human relations are metamorphosized by the reliance on commodities to express human emotions” (Roberts, Fredric 39). Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451 illustrates the effect of reification and commodification in modern life. Mildred, Montag’s wife, pesters her husband for owning fourth wall-television, and communicates with the characters of a television serial ignoring love and affection between human beings. Similarly, Bradbury’s Martian Chronicles (1950), according to Mogen, “portrays the entrapment in memory, the difficulty of accepting and adapting to an alien environment” (105). But Fahrenheit 451 dramatises “entrapment in a sterile and
poisonous culture cut off from its cultural heritage and imaginative life, vigilantly preserving a barren present without past or future” (105).

In a totalitarian regime, the anger of people can be turned against the government. The mounting hatred of people against the government which exploits them has led to their fall in many countries. By altering the values of the culture of a society, the people in power can remain in power, because people no longer think about anything else except pleasure. In *Fahrenheit 451* human values are redefined, and people have become pleasure mongers. It is made possible by systematic reshaping of culture.

Dibbell observes that in the modern era, “our lives are getting faster every minute, and people do not have time to read books.” Rather, the technological progress creates a popular culture that dehumanises people. In *Fahrenheit 451*, as Captain Beatty explains to Montag, destruction of books becomes easy when people’s minds are set on popular culture. To quote him: “The fact is we didn’t get along well until photography came into its own. Then – motion pictures in the early twentieth century. Television. Things began to have mass” (54). Beatty continues his argument insisting the need for keeping the minority happy for ever. “People want to be happy … That’s all we live for, isn’t it? For pleasure, for titillation? And you must admit our culture provides plenty of these” (59).

Perpetuation of power is the fulcrum of mass conditioning. Unlike the World State in Huxley’s *Brave New World*, the government in *Fahrenheit 451* does not enjoy the privilege of manufacturing human beings in hatcheries as per its requirement. We do not, also, find any strict class regimentation in *Fahrenheit 451*. It, thus, projects a seemingly democratic society devoid of critical thinking.
In this novel too, people are conditioned like foetus being conditioned in *Brave New World* to enable them to accept mass exploitation without any dissent. However, unlike Huxley’s *Brave New World*, which highlights the responsibility of World State in conditioning its citizens to establish stability, the population of Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* tries to condition itself to happiness. The people believe that, despite the murders and suicides, they are really happy. If they express their unhappiness, and prove to be different from other citizens, they are likely to be monitored by the government, and marked for death. Further, the minds of the people are filled with some non-essential stuff which will keep them occupied with trivial things:

Give the people contests they win by remembering the words of more popular songs or the names of state capitals or how much corn Iowa grew last year. Cram them full of noncombustible data, chock them so damned full of ‘facts’ they feel stuffed, but absolutely ‘brilliant’ with information. Then they’ll they’re thinking, they’ll get a sense of motion without moving. And they’ll be happy, because facts of that sort don’t change. Don’t give them any slippery stuff like philosophy or sociology to tie things up with. That way lies melancholy. (F 451 61)

*Entertainment* is mainly used as a tool to engage people’s attention in *Fahrenheit 451*. In the futuristic society presented in the novel, people do not even know how to express their sadness. When Montag tells Mildred that he wants to smash, and kill things to show his frustration, she advises him to drive fast. “You get it up around ninety-five and you feel wonderful … It’s fun out in the country. You hit rabbits, sometimes you hit dogs” (64). Their anguish, disappointment, and
frustration are expressed only in this fashion. That’s why many people commit suicide unable to bear the burden of frustration.

Mildred is a symbol of the modern women influenced by the looks of the models they find in television. LaBrie asserts that it is paradoxical to think that reality T.V. is a multi billion dollar industry, yet causing teens worry about their physique. The modern women aspire to resemble the television stars. “In 2009, Anorexia Nervosa (a disease caused by dieting) was proclaimed as the third most common chronic illness among adolescents … All of these symptoms are highly influenced by the media, pop-culture, and the role of society’s pressure on teens.”

A popular culture is created, in the novel, to make the people feel happy always. Advancement of technology is used by the government to achieve this purpose. For example, Mildred, the typical citizen of the pleasure mongering society, spends her time sitting before wall-television, and interacting with characters in television serials.

In today’s world we do not have two hundred-feet-long billboards as we find in Fahrenheit 451, but our cities are filled with billboards enticing people, and creating a consumerist culture. We crave for buying things even if they are not useful to us. We become addicts to the products we create. Dibbel observes that the interpersonal relationship among people is affected by the misuse of technology:

Cell phones, pagers, PDA’s, laptops, iPods, video games … Take a walk on campus and count the number of students with headphones plugging their ears, or the number of people talking on the cell phones. The technology is not bringing us closer, but rather distancing us from the people that are close by.
The government of *Fahrenheit 451* ensures that the attention of the people is diverted so that they accept its ideology without questioning it. Book burnings always take place at night as a spectacular show for people. Even the mechanical hound chasing Montag is used as a device to arrest the attention of people.

Granger is clever enough to understand the real purpose of the chase. “They’re faking you threw them off at the river. They can’t admit it. They know they can hold their audience only so long …. they’re sniffing for a scapegoat to end things with a hang” (F 451 148). An innocent man who has come out for walking is bewildered on seeing the Mechanical Hound. The television announces that it is Montag, and the search operation is done. The Hound leaps up into the air and shoots out its needle. The poor victim is killed by the Hound, and it is reported in the television that Montag is killed, and a crime against society has been avenged.

### 5.4. Counterpoint: Seeds of Thought Preservation

Bradbury is not altogether pessimistic about the future of modern society. In his view, the prevention of critical thinking using mindless entertainment can be avoided by preserving the knowledge of the past, and making the people understand its importance. In *Fahrenheit 451*, it is the people in the jungle who make continuous efforts to preserve the knowledge of the past. After escaping from the Mechanical Hound, Montag reaches the jungle, and meets Granger. Granger introduces Fred Clement, former occupant of the Thomas Hardy chair at Cambridge before it became an Atomic Engineering School, Dr. Simmons, a specialist in Ortega y Gasset, Professor West, who taught ethics, considered an ancient study now, and Reverand Padover. Granger also has written a book called *The Fingers in*
the Glove; the Proper Relationship between the Individual and Society for which he was thrown out of the university.

Montag feels shy as he does not belong to this scholarly group. But Granger asserts that all of them have made the right kind of mistakes, otherwise they will not be there. Once all of them were angry with the government’s efforts to deprive people the knowledge of the past. Granger struck a fireman when he came to burn his library. But now they are not angry with anyone. They understand their importance in carrying the knowledge of the past to posterity.

Each of them has memorized a book, so that they can reproduce it whenever it is required. All of them have photographic memories, and spend a lifetime learning “how to block off the things that are really in there” (F 451 151). They have worked on it for twenty years, and now they have got a method to recall anything that’s been stored in mind once. Great classics like Plato’s Republic, Guillian’s Travels, and the works of Charles Darwin, Schopenhauer, Einstein, Aristophanes, Mahatma Gandhi, Gautama Buddha, Confucius and others are preserved in the brains of humans. Montag says that he has memorized part of the Book of Ecclesiastes but has forgotten it. But Granger, as a scholar, knows how to recall things from memory.

The scholars also used to burn the books after reading it for fear of being caught; micro-films are of no value or use because of their constant travels. They appear ordinary human beings only outwardly. Each one has a book in his memory. The Marxian concept of reification i.e., transformation of a person, or a concept, into a thing, is considered to be the reason for the ills of the society without human consideration. However, it is interesting to note that Granger, and his friends in the
forest transform themselves into things that is, books for the sake of creating a new society based on value system. In the words of Granger,

   The most important single thing we had to pound into ourselves is that we were not important, we mustn’t be pedants; we were not to feel superior to anyone else in the world. We’re nothing more than dust jackets for books, of no significance otherwise. (F 451 153)

   Some of them live in small towns, and some others are wandering. They believe that when the war is over, someday or some year, the books can be written again. The people will be called to recite what they know, and it will be typed “until another Dark Age, when we might have to do the whole damn thing over again” (153).

   People in the city do not care for them anymore. The police know that “a few crackpots with verse in their heads can’t touch them” (154). The government also believes that so long as the vast population is kept under control, and they never question the ways they are governed, everything is all right. But Granger and his friends live in forest, and move around like tramps, without enjoying any material comfort. They, actually, wait for the conducive time to teach the modern society about the need for critical thinking that emanates for the habit of reading.

   Granger comments that they never weep for dead people, but only for all their works, now destroyed. His uncle, a sculptor, was a kind man who had a lot of love to give to the world. When he passed away Granger realized that he did not weep for him, but wept only for the things done by him. He cried because his uncle was not there to do them again.
Often I think what wonderful carvings never came to birth because he died. How many jokes are missing from the world, and how many homing pigeons untouched by his hands. He shaped the world. He did the things to the world. The world was bankrupted of ten million fine actions the night he passed on. (156)

Bradbury has not used the phrase ‘passed away’ when he writes about the death of Granger’s uncle, instead has used ‘passed on’. Granger’s uncle might have been dead. Still he lives in the memory of others. This quality is conspicuously absent in the modern society of Bradbury. People do not even consider that they have to leave something for posterity, making this world a better place to live in.

Everyone must leave something behind when he dies … A child or a book or a painting or a house or a wall built or a pair of shoes made. Or a garden planted. Something your hand touched some way so your soul has somewhere to go when you die, and when people look at that tree or that flower you planted, you’re there. It doesn’t matter what you do … so long as you change something from the way it was before you touched it into something that’s like you after you take your hands away. The difference between the man who just cuts lawns and a real gardener is in the touching … The lawn cutter might just as well not have been there at all; the gardener will be there a lifetime. (156-157)

Once Granger’s grandfather showed him the V-2 rocket film about the atom-bomb mushroom which would remind the people that “we’re allotted a little space on earth and that we survive in the wilderness that can take back what it has given, as easily blowing its breath on us or sending the sea to tell us we are not so big” (157).
Granger’s grandfather also told him to live life with passion. “Stuff your eyes with wonder…live as if you’d drop dead in ten seconds See the world. It’s more fantastic than any dream made or paid for in factories” (157).

Books enable the readers to look into themselves, and love this world with all its contradictions. They are banned in the society portrayed by Bradbury to avoid critical thinking. The idea of memorising a text is not new to Bradbury. When we look at the inspiration for the events in the novel, we find where the climax came from. He used to memorize books. LaBrie quotes the words of Bradbury to prove that he used to memorise texts in his childhood. “I suppose that’s where the ending of Fahrenheit 451 comes from-- where the book people wander through the wilderness and each of them is a book. That was me when I was ten. I was Tarzen of the Apes.”

In the “Afterword” of this novel Bradbury recalls the days he typed this novel in the University of California in Los Angeles. He had to rent out Remington or an Underwood typewriter at a dime for half an hour. Whenever there was a mechanical problem, he used to stroll down the corridors, and browse through the books. He, thus, had developed a penchant for writers like Melville, Emily Dickenson, Hawthorne, Poe etc. It enabled him to understand the power of reading. Pained by the attitude of the contemporary Americans, he projects the diminishing nature of reading habit in this novel.

Knowledge of the past gives people a chance to analyze the preset set up, and compare it with the past one. If the people understand the futility of the present, it will be detrimental to the existence of the status quo. The principles of Marxism and Neo-Marxism enable the critic to interpret a work of art, considering the role of
power and money in shaping the culture of a society. The analysis of *Fahrenheit 451* in the light of Marxist and Neo-Marxist principles illustrate the role of government in controlling the society, making them despise history, and enjoy the present.

### 5.5. Impersonal Society

Bradbury, in *Fahrenheit 451*, criticizes the consumerist culture of American society, and a lack of human interaction caused by the rapid advancement of technology in the middle of the twentieth century. In the novel, citizens are encouraged by the government to indulge in meaningless activities like driving cars at a break-neck speed for cheap thrill, and without a love of nature. As love of nature is a personal feeling, it is considered a potential threat to the government’s policy of creating stereotypes. There are many instances in the novel to prove the government’s theory of anti-individualism.

For example, Clarisse’s uncle was, once, imprisoned for driving his car slowly. He was arrested because he did not comply with the herd-like mentality of the citizens of Elm city, and showed his individuality by driving his car slowly, enjoying the beauty of nature. Love of nature discourages conformity among the citizens, and so it is considered a social vice. However, the government allows the erection of two hundred-feet-long bill boards near the highways, so that no one fails to notice it though they drive fast. No personal feeling is encouraged by the government. So, people are encouraged to spend their time in groups. But there is no real friendship among them. The loss of comraderie and sympathy is expressed by the men who attended Mildred when she tried to commit suicide. They were
impersonal, and carried out their duty of cleaning her stomach as if they are working on another machine. “The woman (Mildred) on the bed was no more than a hard stratum of marble they had reached” (F 451 14). There is no room for true relationship or personal bonds among people, and they are replaced by mindless entertainment that results in feigned happiness.

The impersonal approach of the orderlies of the Emergency Hospital indicates the inhuman attitude of the whole community. This impersonal and cold attitude is the result of the neurosis of the community fed only on false values. People are unable to understand the purpose of their lives in this world devoid of real camaraderie and curiosity. Everyday many people try to commit suicide as they can not find the real purpose of their living. The orderlies of the Emergency Hospital tell Montag that they have been attending many suicide cases everyday, as the result of which it appear to be insignificant for them:

Hell … We get these cases nine or ten a night. Got so many, starting a few years ago, we had the special machines built … You don’t need an M.D., for a case like this; all you need is two handymen, clean up the problem in half an hour … We gotta go. Just another call on the old ear thimble. Ten blocks from here. Someone else just jumped off the cap of a pillbox. (F 451 15-16)

But Clarisse is the perfect foil for such impersonal society. She doesn’t consider people as mere objects, and likes their company:

I like to watch people. Sometimes I ride the subway all day and look at them and listen to them. I just want to figure out who they are and what they want and where they’re going. Sometimes I even go to the Fun Parks and ride in the jet cars when they race on the edge of town at midnight and the police
don’t care as long as they’re insured. As long as everyone has ten thousand insurance everyone’s happy. (30)

Clarisse’s words make Montag think of the woman who has immolated herself refusing to leave her books when they are burnt. For the first time he realised the power of books and the relationship between books and human beings:

Last night I thought about all the kerosene I’ve used in the past ten years. And I thought about books. And for the first time I realized that a man was behind each one of the books. A man had to think them up. A man had to take a long time to put them down on paper. And I’d never even thought before. (50-52)

However, Mildred is not interested in it, and wants to spend her time with the ‘family’, a television serial. She epitomises the modern society that lives without intellectual pursuits. On the contrary, people like Montag, Fabaer, Clarisse, Granger and his companions strive to infuse life to the corpse of the futile humanity with a view to facilitating human interaction and critical thinking. Montag’s realization that mankind needs to express its ideas, and should live life with all its inadequacies is expressed in the following lines:

Let you alone! That’s very well, but how can I leave myself alone? We need not to be let alone. We need to be really bothered once a while. How long is it since you were really bothered? About something important, about something real? (52)

People are made to live under the illusion that they are happy. This, however, can not happen without proper planning. For several decades they are exposed to false values. They are made to feel happy with trivial things, so that they
can’t think about life in the past. While most of the people, like Mildred, are happy with what they are, a few individuals like Montag, Faber, and Clarisse do not find any meaning in leading such a life.

When Montag shows the books he has hidden behind the grille of the air conditioning system in his house, Mildred backs away as if “she were suddenly confronted by a pack of mice that had come up out of the floor” (66). Montag pleads with Mildred that they have to figure out why they are in such a mess. “… you and the medicine nights, and the car, and me and my work. We are heading right for the cliff, Millie. God, I don’t want to go over. This is not going to be easy” (66). He wants her to put up with him. Baffled by his sudden moral awakening, Mildred, the typical citizen of this futuristic society, is aghast.

In stark contrast to the character of Mildred, Montag, especially after his moral awakening, understands the need for books. He believes that they can show a way to escape from this world of hypocrisy where people feign happiness, and develop an insensitivity to the happenings around them. Montag, now, believes that books are the only saviours which can prevent dehumanization of people who are insensitive to the happenings around them:

Every hour so many damn things in the sky! How in hell did those bombers get up there every single second of our lives! Why don’t we want to talk about it! We’ve started and won two atomic wars since 1990! Is it because we’re having so much fun at how we’ve forgotten the world? Is it because we’re so rich and the rest of the world’s so poor and we just don’t care if they are? I’ve heard rumours; the world is starving, but we’re well fed. Is it true, the world works hard and we play? Is that why we’re hated so much? I’ve
heard the rumours about hate, too, once in a long while, over the years. Do you know why? I don’t, that’s sure! May be the books can get us half out of the cave. They just might stop us from making the same damn insane mistakes! I don’t hear those idiot bastards in your parlor talking about it. God, Millie, don’t you see? (73-74)

Montag, thus, underscores the differences in this world. Bradbury modelled this futuristic society on the American society that existed during the early and middle of the twentieth century. Marx dreamt of a classless society where people are treated equal. But the prosperity of one country which is the result of exploiting other countries, and its indifferent attitude towards the suffering of others will certainly create inequality globally. People like Montag who are conscious of the global happenings can not be got carried away by frivolities like watching television, and driving cars at a rapid speed.

Bradbury was shocked by the bourgeois American society of his time, and foresaw what kind of future may lie ahead if the same trend continued. He would not have expected that it may happen in a short time. Our own society shares all the characteristics of Bradbury’s imaginary society. The youngsters are tempted to misuse modern electronic gadgets like mobile phones, computers etc. Most of the house wives find solace in watching the television serials which enable them to live in a world of illusion all the time, so that they tend to give more importance to that kind of life. On the whole, we have to admit that technology which is required for improving our standard of living is also capable of being abused, thereby reducing the human beings to the level of morons.
Bertonneau quotes Roger Scruton who distinguishes between imagination and fantasy in his “Intelligent Person’s Guide to Modern Culture.” In his opinion, imagination, expressing itself as an art, permits us to encounter “a world of real, vulnerable, and living people … where we, like they, are on trial.” Art judges the existing social environment, and analyses it. Art arouses passion with a sense of reality. Criticism promotes analysis and comparison. Therefore, totalitarian regimes repress art. However, they encourage fantasy, because fantasy, as Scruton reminds us, aims “to provide a surrogate for that which the subject craves.” Fantasy presents an unreal world, an Utopia. It enables the citizens to escape from reality, and dwell in an imaginary world forgetting the problems prevalent in the society.

Interestingly, in *Fahrenheit 451*, the criticism of the status quo is avoided by making the people dwell in fantasy, forgetting the real problems in the society. Montag believes that reading books will enable the people to find reality in an imaginary situation which leads to analysis. That’s why he approaches Faber for clarifying his doubts, and publishing books secretly. On seeing the Bible in the hands of Montag, Faber is thrilled. Skeptical at first, he wants to make sure that Montag is not a spy of the government. Only after he comes to know that Montag has approached him to understand the Bible, Faber becomes relieved, and admits that he is not a religious man. He laments how even God is used for commercialization in this modern world.

Faber believes that the imminent war will change the mind set of the people. “Let the war turn off the ‘families’.” Our civilization is flinging itself to pieces. Stand back from the centrifuge” (87). Bradbury, through Faber, expresses his concern for the impersonal and detached attitude of the modern society.
5.6. Censorship

Censorship, a mechanism for deliberately preventing information from reaching the public, is used by the State to prevent people from forming an opinion contrary to that of the State. *Fahrenheit 451* portrays how people of Elm city are discouraged from thinking about politics and social problems. The government destroys all information that encourages people to think critically.

Bradbury believes that this world is big enough to accommodate different views. Everybody has got the right to express their own view. But if the ideas are pruned, and censored to please others, nothing will remain. In the *Coda* of *Fahrenheit 451*, he remembers the letter of appreciation he received from a woman for his *Martian Chronicles* (1950). She also suggested to him to rewrite it, and include women characters. Similarly, a publishing house wanted his story ‘The Fog Horn’ to be reprinted in a high school reader, after removing some of the phrases in the text. Earlier, an anthology was produced with some four hundred short stories of writers like Twain, Irving, Poe, and Maupassant, all in one book, unable to showcase their originality. These incidents make Bradbury believe that book burning is not the only method of destroying books.

There is more than one way to burn a book. And the world is full of people running about with lit matches. Every minority … has the will, the right, the duty to douse the kerosene, light the fuse. Every dimwit editor who sees himself as the source of all dreary blanc-mange plain porridge unleavened literature, likes his guillotine, and eyes the neck of any author who dares to speak above a whisper or write above a nursery rhyme. (176-177)
Benjamin, a Marxist critic, highlights the difference between modern and ancient art in ‘The Work of Art in the Mechanical Age of Reproduction’. According to him “when the criterion of authenticity is removed from the modern art, it becomes an instrument of people in power.” Media, a manifestation of art, becomes a superstructure to make the people amenable to the national policies. A close reading of *Fahrenheit 451* will reveal Bradbury’s point of view about media. Dhal condemns the role of media in destroying critical thinking:

Media’s constant discharge of popular culture is having a definite effect on the value of literature in the school systems. With increasing ‘toys’ of the internet such as facebook, myspace, twitter, etc. the internet is definitely used more frequently as a means of entertainment. Although it is undeniable that the internet also provides endless information that are extremely beneficial to students, and people in general, it can also be used for more shallow purposes, thus distracting students from literature.

Ability to think makes the people question the happenings around them. Hence, the policy makers have a tough time to convince people of their policies. Reading books help people to develop the ability to think, making them conscious of their own personality. Therefore, they tend to be different from one another. They have to be conditioned to make sure that they think alike. Banning of books offers a solution to this problem. In Beatty’s view, once books appealed to a few people and make them different from others. Later, the quality of books has been reduced, and it is ensured that they appeal to all types of people. “Films and radios, magazines, books leveled them a sort of pastepudding norm” (F 451 54).
In *Fahrenheit 451*, entertainment is the method used by the rulers to make the minds of the people preoccupied with non-essential things. Before the invention of television, and motion pictures, people devoted their time in reading books which enabled them to think. Modern inventions, however, gained popularity, and provided entertainment. People no longer need to think. Once they stop using their brain, they are trapped in the mire of propaganda, and become its victims. *Leisure* should be used prudently to engage our reasoning ability. In Bradbury’s imaginary society, leisure is filled with non-essential activities:

If you’re not driving a hundred miles an hour, at a clip where you can’t think of anything else but the danger, then you’re playing some game or sitting in some room where you can’t argue with the four-wall television. Why? The television is not ‘real’. It is immediate, it has dimension. It tells you what to think and blasts it in. It *must* be right. It *seems* so right. It rushes you on so quickly to its own conclusions your mind hasn’t time to protest. (84)

Dhal quotes Bradbury’s words in an interview conducted by LA Weekly. Bradbury has expressed his views about television. Television gives you the dates of Napolean, but not who he was … *Fahrenheit’s* not about censorship, it’s about the moronic influence of popular culture through … TV news and the proliferation of giant screens … the bombardment of ‘factoide’, all of popular programmes on TV.

Television plays a crucial role in preventing the thought process of people. In an article in *Time*, Boston University President Dr. Daniel L. Marsh predicted “if the (television) craze continues with the present level of programs, we are destined to have a nation of morons.”
Montag, fed up by the ever-entertaining community, finally understands that reading is an essential activity to thought process. He is dejected by the fact that he has been destroying books for the past ten or twelve years. Faber clarifies that the ideas expressed in books are more important than books. “There is nothing magical in them at all. The magic is only in what books say, how they stitched the patches of the universe together into one garment for us” (F 451 83) According to Faber, books reflect life, and truthfully record details of life. They also reflect the society, in which it is produced with all its ugliness. “They show the pores in the face of life” (83). Such books are hated by the rulers.

In Fahrenheit 451 Montag suggests to Faber that they can use the anger of people who are forbidden to read, write or act. Faber cautions that it is not a worthwhile task, as the public have stopped reading on its own accord. In the novel, burning of houses with books at night time is considered a show of entertainment by the public. People who want to rebel are also scared to do so. Instead, they are made to believe that having fun is the sole motto of life. “Can you dance faster than the ‘White Clown’, shout louder than ‘Mr.Gimmick’ and the parlour ‘families’? If you’ll win your way, Montag. In any event, you’re a fool. People are having fun” (87).

Beatty claims that the reason for preventing critical reading to make the people intellectually deprived is only to make them happy:

into the incinerator. Funerals are unhappy and pagan? Eliminate them, too.
Five minutes after a person is dead he’s on his way to be the Big Flue, the
Incinerators serviced by helicopters all over the country. Ten minutes after
death a man’s a speck of black dust. Let’s not quibble over individuals with
memoriums. Forget them. Burn all, burn everything. Fire is bright and fire is
clean. (59-60)

The rulers alone will be benefitted by the intellectual deprivation, and
suppression of individualism. Beatty’s meeting with Montag in his house reveals the
role of government in conditioning people. Till the Civil War, the government
concentrated only on the citizens, and their hedonistic behaviour. After the Civil
War, the government tried to create an ideal society devoid of pain. However, it
understood that this could happen only when people stop thinking. So people had to
be conditioned from their childhood not to think of anything other than pleasure. As
a result, we find that the citizens are more worried about television serials rather than
real life. Beatty says,

heredity and environment are funny things. You can’t rid yourself of all the
odd ducks in just a few years. The home environment can undo a lot you try
to do at school. That’s why we’ve lowered the kindergarten age year after
year until now we’re almost snatching them from the cradle. (60)

Whether burning houses for storing books, or making people interact with the
characters in a television, or even searching for a fugitive, the government ensures
that the people are entertained, so that they never get to know the reality. The police
department has a list of people with odd behaviour such as going out for a walk and
prefer loneliness.
Don’t think that the police don’t know the habits of queer ducks like that, men who walk mornings for the hell of it, or for reasons of insomnia. Anyway, the police have had him charted for months, years. Never know when the sort of information might be handy. (148)

Bradbury’s idea of police monitoring people is not a product of imagination. While walking with his friend one night in a side walk in Los Angeles, he was questioned by a police officer on their actions of walking. LaBrie quotes Bradbury’s response:

We are putting one foot in front of the other. It doesn’t make any sense logically that we would call attention to ourselves by walking … If we were criminals, we would drive up in car, burgle the joint, and run away. That’s the way you do things in our society.

The police officer did not like his logic, and argued with him. This incident prompted Bradbury to write a short story about his encounter. Later, it was written as *Fahrenheit 451*.

The futuristic society of Bradbury believes in merry making. There is, however, no freedom as they are constantly monitored without their knowledge. Krishnamoorthy points out that *Fahrenheit 451* highlights government’s indirect control over the citizens:

The novel, written at the height of Senator McCarthy’s campaign of suspicion against all independent thinkers, is a plea for freedom of thought and expression. Present trends such as the academic preference for cramming of facts instead of inculcating the ability to think for oneself, the mass media’s all-out efforts to entertain with no attempt to enlighten, the
tendency of the mediocre majority to suspect and often bully the intelligent minority, the governments’ direct or indirect control over what a citizen may think, express, or read are all indications of the very real possibility that *Fahrenheit 451* is just round the corner. (55)

5.7. Suppression of Individualism

The society of *Fahrenheit 451*, reflects the American society at the height of the McCarthy era. Suppression of individualism is the sole motto of the government, as any free thinking individual is a potential threat to the existing system. In *Fahrenheit 451*, intellectual thinking, arising out of critical reading, is averted by banning books. People are made to fear the very thought of knowing, and are encouraged to let the television occupy their time. This novel ridicules the American government for acting against the Library Bill of Rights, adopted in 1948. The Bill emphasises that it is the duty of a library to provide information without any bias. Dibbel remarks that libraries should aim at enlightening people.

Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation. But the books criticising the American government were censored contrary to the Library Bill of Rights during the middle of the twentieth century. *Fahrenheit 451* portrays the suppression of individualism in America during the McCarthy era.

In the novel, the meeting between Montag and Clarisse highlights the different value system prevalent in the modern society. Montag represents the
modern society that believes in pleasure being the ultimate purpose of life. By making the people believe that they are happy, the government establishes like-mindedness. Anybody showing signs of individualism is considered abnormal, and dealt with severely. Clarisse represents the old and forgotten value system of the past that encouraged individualism. She questions Montag whether he likes his job truly.

“Kerosene is nothing but perfume to me”, (F 451 6) Montag says. He believes that he is getting pleasure in setting fire to books. The beautiful night, when he met Clarisse, with the faintest breath of fresh apricots is in stark contrast to the smell of kerosene, burning of the house, and the remnants of the ruins. While Montag appears to enjoy setting fire, and burning houses, Clarisse enjoys the beauty of nature.

Montag sees himself in her eyes “dark and tiny … as if her eyes were two miraculous bits of violet amber that might capture and hold him intact” (7). To him, her face is like a fragile milk crystal that has a soft and constant light. It is not the light of electricity – a mechanical one, but the gentle light of a candle.

We find, in this novel, many instances which depict the huge gap between the natural and the artificial. People of the world of Fahrenheit 451 get immersed in artificiality, forgetting the real glory of nature. When people are deprived of aesthetic sensibility, and their minds are filled with consumerism, they willingly subject themselves to the designs of the rulers.

But people need occasions like the meeting between Clarisse and Montag to get a chance to think about the forgotten aesthetic values. The light in the eyes
of the girl reminded him of the light of the last candle lit by his mother once upon a time and the “brief hour of rediscovery” (7) and comfort provided by it.

Clarisse is considered abnormal because she talks about nature and the past. So, she is asked to meet a psychiatrist periodically to fix her problem, and cure it. The psychiatrist wants to know why she “goes out around in the forest and watch the birds and collect butterflies” (23). When he enquires her about what she does with her time, she replies that sometimes she just sits and thinks. Her speech indicates the condition of people with individuality in the modern society:

People don’t talk about anything … They name a lot of cars or clothes or swimming pools mostly and nobody says anything different from anyone else. And most of the time in the caves they have the jokes on and the same jokes most of the time, or the musical wall lit and all the coloured patterns running up and down, but it’s only colour and all abstract. And at the museums … All abstract … My uncle says it was different once. A long time back sometimes pictures said things or even showed people. (31)

Montag can not ignore her speech like the majority of the people of Elm city. He is different from what he appears to be. Though his job is to burn books, he does not do it with pleasure though he thinks otherwise. He was disturbed by her speech about loving nature, and sharing ideas with others. Montag, longing to listen to the conversation in the house of Clarisse, could not get sleep. Hence he took a sleeping pill. Like ‘soma’ in Huxley’s *Brave New World*, the sleeping pill reduced his anxiety, and made him escape from his own longing.

Because of her attitude, Clarisse does not have any friends, and nobody listens to her. “No one has time any more for anyone else” (23). Montag listens to
her though he pretends to be disinterested. The secret wish of Montag to act against
the government is expressed by hiding books in his house, and the death of the lady
who immolates herself for the sake of the preservation of books, kindles the guilty-
consciousness of Montag.

Before she immolates herself, the lady kneels among the books, touching the
drenched leathers and cardboard, and says that the firemen can’t have her books. But Captain Beatty replies that she should know the law, and none of those books agree with each other. “You’ve been locked up here for years with a regular damned Tower of Babel … The people in those books never lived” (38).

Since the woman refuses to come out Captain Beatty claims that there is no
point in arguing with her. He, also, tells that such fanatics always try suicide. Finally
the woman set fire to herself using a kitchen match. Unable to recover from the
shock, the firemen return to the firehouse. Montag recollects her mention of Master
Ridley. Beatty explains that a man named Latimer said those words to a man named
Nicholas Ridley, as they were being burnt at Oxford, for heresy, on October 16,
1555.

Montag considers his society a ‘cave’, and wants to escape from it to enter
into the jungle of free thinking. In the ‘cave’, thinking is considered a sin, and
people with the ability to think are considered outlaws. After the demise of Clarisse,
Montag needs somebody to help him understand himself. He remembers his meeting
with Faber a year before in a park. Faber is a retired English professor who had been
thrown out forty years ago, when the last liberal arts college was shut for lack of
students, and patronage. He recited poetry for an hour, and then left the place giving
his phone number to Montag without knowing that he was a fireman. Something in
Montag had prevented him from disclosing the secret about Faber to other firemen. He has kept the number safe which indicates that Montag is not a typical citizen of this futuristic society. At the same time, he has not immediately acted against the norms of that society.

The government has taken all measures to curb the instincts of people to think by keeping them engaged in frivolities all the time. Having been brought up in that environment even Montag, a man who can think, is unable to shed his skepticism and become a rebel. Here we find how culture is shaped by a government to suit its needs. In Bertonneau’s view, Bradbury “foresaw with clairvoyance the socio-political phenomenon that goes by the name of political correctness.”

From the middle of the twentieth century, entertainment has assumed a different role. Its function is not to provide respite to the human beings from the dullness and drudgery of life. People become unaware of the evils of society by getting intoxicated in the name of entertainment. In Fahrenheit 451, the function of ‘soma’ in Brave New World is replaced by television and other activities like racing:

Any man who can take a TV wall apart and put it back together again, and most men can, nowadays, is happier than any man who tries to slide-rule, measure, and equate the universe, which just won’t be measured or equated without making man feel bestial and lonely ... So bring on your clubs and parties, your acrobats and magicians, your daredevils, jet cars, motorcycle helicopters, your sex and heroin, more of everything to do with automatic reflex. (F 451 61)

Dibbel asserts that fearing the Russian domination, the American government interferes with freedom of the individuals. On May 26, 1938, the U.S. House of
Representatives set up a committee to investigate ‘un-American’ activities of individuals with Communist sympathies. Anybody who criticised the government were branded as Communists. Creative writers who questioned the status quo were branded as Communists.”

‘Hollywood Hearing’ had three goals in mind: to prove that the Screen Writers’ Guild had communist members; that these writers had inserted subversive propaganda into Hollywood films; and, according to committee head J. Parnell Thomas, that President Roosevelt had encouraged pro-Soviet films during WWII. (www.associatedcontent.com)

Decades of cold war between hostile politics have assimilated the formerly classically liberal societies to the model of their totalitarian rivals until all societies exhibit the characteristics of an ideological dictatorship founded in strict repression of any dissent from the proverbial Party Line. The regime of Fahrenheit 451 manipulates the citizens more subtly than the one in 1984, but with an equal brutality held in spring-loaded reserve. Almost everyone has employment; life for those who are not wage earners, such as the protagonist’s wife, consists in interminable sweetish diversion – like the daily interactive soap opera broadcasts, which audiences view on wall-screens that project a larger than life image into the drawing room. (www.brusselsjournal.com)

5.8. Education

Education should promote critical thinking, but it is viewed as a threat to the existing political system. Governments, throughout the world control education to
propagate their principles and condition the children to accept the ideals of the rulers. Cardan comments on the educational system of the 1950s and 1960s as follows:

Education in itself will solve nothing. Education today, whether in Britain or in Russia, … aims at producing people adapted to the present type of society … It corrupts the human sense of integration into society into a habit of subservient to authority … It accepts a meaningless pattern of work, which separates, dislocates and distorts physical and mental possibilities.

Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451 emphasizes the need for independent thought, and intellectual freedom. They can be achieved only by proper education. In the novel, Captain Beatty, the fire chief and representative of the government, reveals the attitude of the government towards education. Schools aim at making the students believe that they are learning. But, their minds are stuffed with needless information.

In Fahrenheit 451, books are forbidden because they promote intellectual curiosity and rebellious instinct. Dhal observes that this novel highlights the ever-increasing spread of pop culture through the media which “suffocates people’s interest in developing their own ideas by reading and thinking about the ideas of others through literature.” Literature which encourages people to construct their own ideas is a threat to the rulers, and therefore to be banned. Books in the imaginary world of Bradbury, only help in students’ minds being stuffed with useless facts, so that they will be under the illusion that they are learning. In reality, critical reading is discouraged. School children are not aware of the worth of precious life. Clarisse lists out the reasons why she is not interested in school:
Six of my friends have been shot in the last year alone. Ten of them died in car wrecks. I’m afraid of them and they don’t like me because I’m afraid. My uncle says his grandfather remembered when children didn’t kill each other. But that was a long time ago when they had things different. They believed in responsibility. (F 451 30)

Clarisse does not go to school because she is considered anti-social. As a human being who is true to her emotions, she reveals her idea of being social:

Social to me means talking to you about things like this. Or talking about how strange the world is. Being with people is nice. But I don’t think it’s social to get a bunch of people together and then not let them talk, do you? An hour of TV class, an hour of basketball or baseball or running, another hour of transcription history or painting pictures, and more sports, but do you know, we never ask questions, or at the least most don’t; they just run the answers at you, bing, bing, bing, and us sitting there for four more hours of film teacher. That’s not social to me at all. (29)

The school system of the new world produces people who can do all sorts of drudgery which require no thought process. Schools produce more “runners, jumpers, racers, tinkerers, grabbers, snatchers, fliers and swimmers instead of examiners, critics, knowers, and imagined creators, the word ‘intellectual’ became a swear word” (58),

In the society portrayed by Bradbury, intelligence means nothing. A bright boy in a class is hated by others as he is not in conformity with the rest of the class. The age of the children when they are admitted to school is normally determined by the ability of the children to learn new things. But in Bradbury’s imaginary world, it
is lowered systematically to condition children. “We’ve lowered the kindergarten age until now we’re almost snatching them from the cradle” (60). Then it will be easier for the government to mould them to conform with the society.

Reid asserts that the dystopian future of Fahrenheit 451 is mainly created by the government’s control of history and knowledge. It is achieved through the technology of book-burning. To restrict access to information, the government presents a simplified version of history, distorting its original meaning. But, the government is not the only reason for knowledge impoverishment.

The government is not the only cause of this future: Beatty and Faber claim that the American population, in its desire for positive images and simplicity, demanded the suppression of books as complex, contradictory and difficult. (60)

In Fahrenheit 451, people are rendered equal by suppression of knowledge, and education is planned to create conformity among students.

5.9. Family Values

Althusser in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus” distinguishes between Repressive State Apparatuses such as the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, and etc., and Ideological State Apparatuses such as religion, law, education, family, and etc. Though family, religion, and education are private institutions “they can perfectly well ‘function’ as Ideological State Apparatuses” (28) to cram citizens with “daily doses of nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism, and etc., by means of the press, the radio and television. The same goes for the cultural apparatus ...” Bradbury
criticizes the deterioration of family values in modern American society in Fahrenheit 451. But it is not a mere handwork of the government. It just gives what people want that is, happiness at the cost of consideration towards other human beings.

In the imaginary world of Bradbury ‘family’ has lost its significance, and is no longer a place of comfort. The anxiety of the society has affected individual relationships. Instead of offering solace, family enhances the existing tension of the society. The impending danger of war is also felt by the people of the futuristic world. The hovering of jet bombers creates panic in the minds of the people. At home, there was no affection between Montag and his wife Mildred. In fact, they seldom even notice each other. Once, Montag discovers Millie has taken an overdose of poison, which is a common occurrence in the town. He calmly calls the suicide orderlies, who are always standing by to come to the rescue of those who attempt to kill themselves. They save Millie's life effortlessly by taking out the poison from her stomach. But the discomforting factor is their mechanical approach in treating her as if she were another machine.

When the two men from the Emergency hospital are working to clean the stomach of Mildred, Montag thinks that even if she dies he will not cry. “For it would be the dying of an unknown, a street face, a newspaper image, and it was suddenly so very wrong that he had begun to cry, not at death but at the thought of not crying at death” (F 451 44). After her treatment Mildred is fresh, and looked relaxed. For a moment Montag thought that “… if only they could have taken her brain and memory. If only they could have taken her mind along to the dry cleaner’s and emptied the pockets and cleansed it …” (F 451 16). The distance between
Mildred, and Montag deepens the next day when he tries to talk to her about her actions. She can not remember what she has done, and returns to her interactive television, totally ignoring him.

Mildred is more interested on her part as a homemaker in a television programme, and does not listen to the words of her husband. She even says that it will be more fun if they can afford to have the fourth wall –TV installed in the parlour which will cost two thousand dollars, one-third of the yearly pay of Montag. Mildred is ecstatic by the idea that once they install the fourth wall their room will never look like theirs but “all kinds of exotic people’s room” (20-21). She insists that they can sacrifice some thing for the sheer happiness of owning wall-television. Montag is pragmatic, and he knows that already they are “doing without a few things to pay for the third wall” (23). Living in a world of illusion Mildred refuses to accept reality, and did not listen to the words of her husband. She does not even want to have children. There is no conjugal bliss between them. Montag often feels that he is living with a stranger. Mildred’s obsession with television, and radio is the real hindrance between the husband and the wife. She can not even remember their first meeting which happened ten years ago.

The relationship between family members is affected severely, and there is no real intimacy between people in Fahrenheit 451. The government ensures that no intimacy or loyalty is established among people so that the possibility of being emotionally hurt is reduced. Family ceases to be a place of love and affection. Instead, family relationships have become mechanical. He remembers the words of Clarisse that once houses did not have flat fronts. Instead they had front porches where people used to sit sometimes at night, talking “when they wanted to talk, or
rocking and not talking when they did not want to talk. Sometimes they just sat there and thought about things, turned things over” (63). However, such private talks and warm relationships among family members are considered to be detrimental to the establishment of conformity among people. As a result, the government discourages, and even, punishes people with individuality and personal feelings.

Clarisse’s uncle represents the old world where human values were present, and appreciated. He was imprisoned for sometime for being anti-social. It is he who has influenced Clarisse. He has told her that the architects got rid of the front porches in the houses, not because they didn’t look well but they make people sit, and do nothing. It provided them with time to think about society:

They didn’t want people sitting like that, doing nothing, rocking, talking; that was the wrong kind of social life. People talked too much. And they had time to think. So they ran off with the porches. And the gardens, too. And look at the furniture. No rocking chairs any more. They’re too comfortable. Get people up and running around. (63)

Though the possibility of having a friendly banter is avoided by the elimination of front porches in the house, a work of art, like a poem, has the ability to make the people experience the warmth of friendship and affection. It is evident, when Montag reads a few lines from a book, and comes to know of the meaning of friendship for the first time in his life, he understands Clarisse’s affection towards him thereby knowing the meaning of “in a series of kindness there is at last one which makes the heart run over.” (71) On the contrary, Mildred believes that “books are not people” (73). She emphasises that her ‘family’ consists of the characters in the wall-television. They are her friends and they tell her things. “My ‘family’ is
people. They tell me things. I laugh, they laugh” (73). She does not want to read because she is concerned more with her wall-televisions. The main reason for her worry when she finds Montag keeping books secretly is the fact that when firemen destroy her house if they come to know of the secret, her wall-televisions will also be destroyed. She will, therefore, be deprived of meeting and interacting with the television characters.

Furthermore, the loss of conjugal bliss between husband and wife is evident by Mrs. Phelps’ (Mildred’s friend) lack of affection for her husband. Once, Mrs. Phelps and Mrs. Bowels visit Mildred when Montag is having his supper. They go to the parlour to watch television programmes. Montag interrupts their conversation asking their opinion about the commencement of the war. But Mrs. Phelps replies that she is not worried about wars though her husband, Pete, a soldier, is called by the Army. That is their third marriage, and there is no family bondage between them. She gives more importance to television than her husband.

When Montag says that he wants to talk to them, Mrs. Phelps and Mrs. Bowels are shocked. He enquires Mrs. Phelps about her children for which she replies that “no one in right mind … would have children” (96). Mrs. Bowels feels that that is not correct as she has got two children by Caesarian operation. “No use going through all that agony for a baby. The world must reproduce, you know, the race must go on. Besides they sometimes like just like you, and that’s nice” (96).

Mrs. Bowles used to push her children into the ‘parlor’, and turn the switch of the television, when they return from school once in three months. “It’s like washing clothes” (96). In the meantime, Mildred has suggested that they can talk
about politics to please Montag. Mrs. Bowels reveals that she has voted for President Nobel as he is one of the nicest-looking men who ever became President. His opponent Hubert Hoag is a short and fat man. Because of his physical stature he is not liked by women, and can not be the President of the country. It is disheartening to note that people do not elect their rulers based on their merits. This is the success of the government as the people are not even aware that they are exploited.

Montag is irritated by their flippant behaviour. Faber instructs him, through an electronic device, to hide his anger, but he is unsuccessful.

Did you hear them, did you hear these monsters talking about monsters? Oh God, the way they jabber about people and their own children and themselves and the way they talk about their husbands… war, dammit, I stand here and I can’t believe it. (98)

Perplexed by his behaviour Mildred wants to know with whom he is talking. But Montag brushes her aside, and reads *Dover Beach*. The following lines are read out by Montag, and it symbolises the futile existence of modern society:

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night. (100)
After listening to the poem, Mrs. Phelps cries, and others are bewildered by her act, as they also don’t know how to express sorrow. Even Mrs. Phelps does not know the reason for her crying. But Mrs. Bowels says that they have to go home, and will not return to the fireman’s house. Montag quietly tells,

go home and think of your first husband divorced and your second husband killed in a jet and your third husband blowing his brain out, go home and think of the dozen abortions you’ve had … Go home and think how it all happened and what did you ever do to stop it? (101)

At the end, Montag is pained to know that his wife Mildred has put in the alarm to their house to reveal his secret to the fire chief. She leaves the house with a suitcase without even talking to Montag. Beatty informs him that even before she put in the alarm her friends have alerted them. In Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451, the citizens are conditioned to become pleasure mongers. He has witnessed the effects of modern technological gadgets like television and radio, and how they have altered the living condition.

According to Clarenson, Bradbury has, repeatedly, asserted that he has never had an interest in the future for its own sake. Rather, he uses it to magnify the present. Utopias are created out of contempt for the contemporary society. Frustrated by the futility of living in a society devoid of values, Montag escapes to a future of which he does not have an idea. But he is enticed by the very fact that it will be different from what he has experienced in the society he lived in.

At the end of the novel, sounds of jets and bomb are heard. Only a few minutes later silence prevails. Montag cries, and shouts as the city has become a
heap of rubbles. Granger informs them that they have to go upstream, and the possibility of shaping a new society encourages Granger and company.

Then they sit before the fire and Granger utters the word ‘phoenix’, recalling to mind the mythological bird, which every few hundred years built a pyre to burn himself, and rises from the ashes again. In the same way, human race is setting fire to itself by its oft repeated mistakes. The difference, however, is that the human race knows about the mistakes it has committed. “Someday we’ll stop making goddamn funeral pyres and jumping in the middle of them” (163). The novel ends with the hope that we are capable of resurrecting from the grave. Human race will go on for ever.

Studied against the background of Marxism and Neo-Marxism, society presented in this novel resembles our own society in many ways, and the readers try to compare themselves with the characters in the novel. Except Faber, Clarisse, her uncle, and Montag, we never find a character with critical thinking in this novel. All the other characters engage themselves in mindless entertainment without even trying to understand the significance of human life. Bradbury portrays how advancement in technology can be abused to make people addicted to pleasure.

5.10. Conclusion

Through this novel, Bradbury voices his protest against dehumanization of mankind and highlights the need for intellectual freedom. As suggested by the title, fire provides the central metaphor for Fahrenheit 451. The novel begins, and ends with contrasting images of fire and light. Mogen contends that “the shifts in their symbolic associations illustrate how the novel’s theme develops” (109).
At the beginning of the novel, Montag likes the fire that is used for burning books. But this fire is associated with mental darkness. At the end of the novel, Montag understands the use of ‘hearth’. The fire that destroyed the old woman illuminates him. Mogen states “In the campfire glow Montag finally experiences the warmth of genuine human community” (110).

Bradbury’s vision of the then American society -- society during the 1940s and 50s in the context of McCarthyism and the Cold War -- is also not much different from today’s political climate. Dibbel remarks that America is coming closer to that of Fahrenheit 451. Book censorship as outlined in Bradbury’s text has major societal implications. Without books, people are unable to think for themselves. They are pawns, which the government can fill with whatever information or ideas that it so chooses. The McCarthy witch hunts, the Cold War, the Korean War, the rapid rise of television as a determinant in the culture industry, the spread of advertisement, the abuse of technology within the military-industrial complex, the frustration and violence of the younger generation, the degradation of the masses—these are the factors which went into the making of Fahrenheit 451.

LaBrie endorses that technological inventions threaten to destory what a book stands for and replace it with “instant gratification and one-dimensional thinking.” In his opinion, Captain Beatty is today’s version of Kindle, an invention by Amazon.com. The existence of libraries throughout the world is under threat because of the availability of e-books for devices like Kindle, Sony Reader, and Barnes and Noble’s Nook. In addition, Kindle, like Beatty, acts under Digital
Restriction Management (DRM) system which “operates under the same rule that firemen in the novel do. Novels such as George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty Four* and *Animal Farm* are prime examples of novels that have been deleted from the system.”

In the contemporary society, monetary factor influences academic publication too. Production of scholarly research papers in academic journals has become commercialised forcing the libraries to unsubscribe certain journals whose publishers want more profit. In his article “High Price of Journals hits Ivy Leagues”, Sample quotes the memo from Harvard Library that it could no longer afford the price hike imposed by the publishers. Harvard Advisory Council says “major publishers had created an ‘untenable situation’ at the university by making scholarly communication ‘fiscally unsustainable’ and ‘academically restrictive’.” Free access to critical reading is, thus, denied to people.

Mogen remarks that Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* combines “the oppressive atmosphere of Orwell’s police state with a cultural milieu derived from the other major model in the science fiction of anti-utopian tradition, Huxley’s *Brave New World*” (107). Both novels share similar sentiments in echoing the degrading nature of human culture through entertainment and mass media. Though the idea of thought control is derived from Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty Four* the focus is not primarily on government but on “the potentially poisonous superficiality of mass culture, on whose behalf the firemen work” (107).