

## **“Analysis of Consumption of Female Body and Identity in Margaret Atwood’s *The Edible Women*”**

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### **Abstract**

The present paper is a study of the patriarchal influence over the female body and their identity in the novel *The Edible Women* by Margaret Atwood. The paper also analyses the male overpowering of female sexual identity and their expectation of female body as an object of consumption. The paper also discusses the concept of consumerism in which female body is reduced merely to an object and the way the female bodies are objectified in different manners. The paper analyses all these concepts in a global feministic view.

**Keywords:** Identity Crisis, Consumerism, Objectification, Patriarchal Influence, Global Feminism

### **Introduction**

Margaret Atwood was born in 1939 in Ottawa, Canada. Atwood is a Canadian poet, novelist, essayist and literary critic. In Canadian literature she is prominent and well known for her novels and poems. In her writing career she got many awards like five times Booker Prize and several times Governor General’s Award. In 1961 Atwood published her first collection of poems, *Double Persephone. Two Headed Poems* in 1978, *True Stories* in 1981 and *Eating Fire* in 1998 are some of the major poems of Atwood. Her first and famous novel, *The Edible Woman* was published in 1969, *Surfacing* in 1972 and *The Handmaid’s Tale* in 1985 are the other major novels. Atwood was also prominent in short fictions like *Dancing Girl* in 1977, *Murder in the Dark* in 1983 and *Moral Disorder* in 2006.

The evident themes that we can observe in Atwood’s works are national identity of Canada, environmental and human rights issues and feministic issues. Margaret Atwood is well known for advocating equality for women. She projects the dilemma of oppressed women caught within the identity crisis. Through the feminist voice in her earlier novels we see that her protagonists are very normal kind of women or a weaker member of male dominant society. In these novels women are depicted as "Other" or "Second Sex" which denotes the secondary position of women in male dominated society.

The novel *The Edible Women* is well known for its feministic notion. It revolves around the life of a young Canadian woman, Marian, who struggle with the society, with her fiancé and food. The novel is about different types of struggles faced by women and their relationships with men, society, food and its consumption. By the end of the novel, Atwood portrays women as a symbol of revolt and resistance. The novel depicts feministic issues and questions the contemporary society through feministic ideas by exploring the theme of sexual identity crisis and consumerism. The thematic concern of the novel is the consumption of female body.

*The Edible Women* was finally published in 1969, four years after it was written and during the rise of feminism in North America. Many critics of the time assumed the work as a product of feminist movement. But Atwood herself viewed the work as proto feministic rather than feministic, as there was no women's movement when she wrote the work, during which the society was male dominated. Thus the work is considered to be in the second phase of feminism. The work assumed to bring changes within the society and culture. In effect the book seems more contemporary in its tone. So those who claim as post feminists can consider this as a work of post- feminist era.

As feminism is a literary movement claiming for equal rights for women, it also identifies the elements that are oppressive and suggest resolutions. Feminists recommend woman to fight for their rights and express their feelings. Feminism as a movement went through different phases. Each phase focuses on various feministic issues that need alternatives. By the end of third wave feminism, the movement has entered into a new era of post feminism that includes several other feminist's theories like global feminism. In a global perspective with feministic ideas, we could approach Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, on its thematic concerns like consumerism and identity crisis.

### Feminist Theories and its Thematic Aspects

Feminism is a term given to political movements and ideologies that share a common goal to defines, establish and achieve equal political, economic, cultural, personal and social rights for women. It is a call for liberation of women from every oppressions and gender based discriminations. The movement also aims to provide freedom and self-promotion for deprived women who were denied opportunities and equality with men. The phenomenon of twentieth century put the awareness that patriarchal society with its structure is indifferent to women's freedom and their discrimination is culturally constructed. The society always tried to keep them subjugated in order to establish the patriarchal power and authority. Thus the movement started for establishing equal opportunities for women in education and employment.

In the book, "*Contemporary Literary Criticism*", Dr. Sharad Rajimwale, traces prominent figures and their works, like, John Stuart Mill's (1806-1873) "*The Subjection of Women*"(1896) is a book that reveals the injustice in keeping women oppressed by the social constructions. Mill believed that 'the liberation of the individual is absolutely necessary for the development of the society (54). The next figure introduced by Rajimwale was Mary Wollstonecraft (1750-1797) and with her work "*A Vindication of Rights of Women*"(1792). According to Rajimwale, Mary Wollstonecraft "crusades for the emancipation of women, devoted all her life and energies to protest against institutions that crushed women's identity." (55). Wollstonecraft argued that

women were exploited and victimized and much concerned about their rights and education that they must fight to possess. Next, Rajimwale introduced Virginia Woolf's *"A Room of One's Own"* as third significant work. Woolf's book represents the idea that 'there is something wrong with society's treatment of women'(55). Her book pointed out the deep sense of being excluded, alienated and marginalised which becomes the prominent theme of 1960's.

Feminist theories begin from feminist movements which aims to understand the nature of gender equality by observing women's social roles and it began to respond through feminist activities. These activities get into different waves of feminism to bring up its varying intensity in different centuries. First wave feminism spans from seventeenth to early twentieth century. As women were still denied the right to vote, suffrage was still an ongoing struggle in many parts of the world. Though the first wave focused on women's right to gain the status as a human being with full civil, intellectual, social, economic and legal rights. In our near history women were not considered to be fully human and rational. When contemporary feminists account equal intellectual and educational rights, culture claims woman as less than fully human. Mary Wollstonecraft was an eighteenth century feminist who argued for full humanity of women and their moral personhood. Through her work *"A Vindication of the Rights of Women"*, she tried to expound the equality of the sexes. Wollstonecraft also explored that by excluding women from the development and practice of rationality, women were treated as less human. She also argued that women must act courageously to become fully human and to attain the same status as men. Women's suffrage, other legal equality, liberation from slave labor, equal opportunity in employment and equal wages were the economic concern of the movement. So, the first wave focused on gaining political, legal and economic status whereas second wave put emphasis on other sources of oppression.

By the chorological account of the waves the second wave begins between 1948 and 1960 and peaks from 1960 until the early 1990's. Many sexual oppressions are unable to resolve by acquiring. Rights through equal treatment. Second wave feminism includes aspects of women's physical existence or experience. It is also a search for solidarity among all women in the experience of oppression. The second wave tried to address all aspects of women's oppressed experience and extends women's bodily experience in culture and society and an analysis of oppression. This creates a new understanding of the body, morality, subjectivity and identity of females.

In the book *"Feminism"*, Sally j. Scholz refer to beauvoir 's book *"The Ethics of Ambiguity"* (1947), to point out that freedom is a central value and it should be opened for oneself and others. It argues to promote liberation for women and shows it is a very complex achievement. The second part of the book provides an account of women's situation as oppressive. In the work Beauvoir explores the cultural myths that surround women, motherhood, feminine sexuality and many other aspects of women's lives. Scholz argued that according to Beauvoir "Women has been defined as Other" (68). Here, she tries to figure out the view that man is the 'one' or the norm and woman is the 'other' i.e., men create the margins of the 'feminine' to maintain the oppression of women. Scholz again refers to Beauvoir's *"The Second Sex"* and suggests that, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman". (69). She also argues that woman must see herself as a subject just like man and never as an object.

One of the central theme that comes under second wave feminism is “Embodiment”. There are certain issues in second wave feminism like eating disorders, female sexuality, sexual violence, standards of beauty and also bodily behaviours. Scholz, in her book, "Feminism", pinpoints embodiment as a theme which has its roots in an age old philosophical problem, that is, the relationship between the mind and the body. She explains that mind and body are two different substances as the mind is not extended that cannot be controlled and the body is extended substance which can be controlled. Embodiment as a feminist concept shows how one lives in one’s body. It discloses that women’s bodies are the subject of much social control. Some feminists criticize eating disorders as resulting from women’s alienation from their bodies. Scholz also stated that the concept of body as alien or “other” which has similarity with Beauvoir’s concept of others. Feminist studies female sexual pleasure, how they get reduced to an object for reproduction and how they experience embodiment which leads to alienation.

Third wave of feminism starts in the mid 1990’s. Third wave feminism explores new forms of theory and new waves of implementing feminism. This wave of feminism accounts the structure of consciousness, language and other new strategies for social change. It also involves some creative uses of culture and focused on women centred political theory rather than depending on masculine theories. (Scholz,7).

According to Scholz , “some feminists argue that we have reached in a fourth wave that focuses on women’s physical accomplishments and possibilities. Many other critics called it as ‘post feminism’ in which feminist ideas of women’s power are used to market products.” (7). As some argued that we are in a post-feminist era, which mean either feminism is obsolete or neglected and thus women are no longer oppressed. It means the term ‘feminism’ might be suitably altered to term as ‘humanism’. Post-feminist claims woman to manipulate power and take the control. (12). If feminism is neglected or unused, then it should be effort fully achieved to avoid sexual objectification of women. In post feministic era, feminism is understood as multiple, plural and varied and got wide variety of thought across the globe (8). Feminist continue to fight for legal rights and they have movements around the globe. They tried to point out issues to get solved and to view it in a global perspective. One of the feminist theory which included in the post feministic era is "global feminism".

According to Scholz in her work “*Feminism*”, global feminism took a task of unifying feminists to work without considering cultural differences. The primary task of global feminism is that careful criticism of societies other than theirs. The global feminism aims to build bondage between women across the globe on collective political commitments to change social conditions (133). Susan Mollar Okin who suggested and argued for promoting global feminism all over the world. Even when global feminists found class, cultural, religious and ethnic differences among women, they found commonality in political sphere of action. The key concepts in global feminist theory are human rights, coalition or solidarity and empowerment (133-134). Global feminism looks at female issues in a global perspective. Consumerism is an issue that requires a feminist consciousness in global perspective. Global feminists take this political project by considering the effects of purchases on women across the globe (135). By considering the female body as a commodity, there it violates the human rights towards women. Human trafficking as an illegal trade of human beings like prostitution and domestic slavery (147), are also against

human rights. By curing the ailment of commoditization of female body, it promotes human rights and establishes liberation. Empowerment is another concept of global feminism that achieves through the victimization of oppression by understanding one's own power in them (135). Through empowerment global feminism extends human rights to women to obtain full legal status from the present status of sex and gender violations (136). The global feminists address numerous issues to advance women's rights and to challenge sexist or patriarchal structures across the world.

### Patriarchal Influence Over Female Body and Identity

According to the editors of the journal "*Questions-Feministes*", "It is...dangerous to place the body at the centre of a search for female identity, the themes of otherness and of the Body merge together,..." (Sushama 141). In the novel "*The Edible Woman*", Atwood portrayed Marian McAlpin the central character. Marian tries to compare her life with other women and society around her. Atwood employed first person narrative in the first part of the novel and gradually it changes to third person narrative in the second part. This change shows the passivity of Marian. After accepting Peter's proposal, Marian subjects herself to Peter's desires which disunites her personality. After Marian's engagement with Peter, she identifies herself with things (food) that can be consumed thus she totally undergoes personality split and loses her appetite. Gradually she identifies her passiveness in relationship with people around such as Peter and Duncan. By the end of the novel, in the third part Atwood again employed a first person narrative to show the integration of Marian's personality. This indicates that Marian has identified her true self.

In the book, "*Feminine Psyche: A Post Modern Critique*" Neeru Tandon refers to Chesler, that, it is her madness that she, "gives birth to...herself anew" (89). It is clear that Marian rejects her passivity and refuses to be a victim by the end of the story. As a woman Marian changed from a traditional and lost woman to bold, conscious and rebellious woman. Neeru Tandon refers to again Sharon R. Wilson, to suggest that "by making, decorating, serving and consuming the cake-woman image; Marian announces, to herself and others, that she is not food". (89).

Atwood has clearly represented the restricting codes set in female life by the male supremacy in a patriarchal society. This patriarchal society actually tried to destroy the potential of women by questioning the mental and physical capabilities of women. Now women has entered into a crisis as, if they want to secure their space as a woman in male society, then they have to prove their utility to men. If we could see that women silently adopt the passive roles in the male society, the it shows that women find it difficult to escape from the clutches of patriarchy. So Atwood suggests through Marian that, every woman should recognize herself in her life.

The novel depicted that Canadian society they gave an upper hand status to men, and women were given a lower status. Here, the roots of gender discrimination are highlighted. The novel reflects the life of men and women in the 1960's. During this period men and women were unequally treated in their personal and professional life. Women were paid less for the same work done by men. By observing Marian's professional life, it is clear that the privileges are

given to men while that are neglected for women. In the company the top most position or the top floor of the office buildings were given to male employees whereas machines and their operators were given the bottom floor. Also, the women who are the least important category are working for low payment. As Marian came to know about her future career in the company, she refuses to become a department assistant like Ms. Bogue. The upper layer was meant for men whereas women were put to secondary status in professional life even though she dedicates full potential in her profession.

By Marian's refusal to her company's position, she rejects the idea of living a degenerated or demarcated life. By being a female, she cannot live a humiliated life. This is her first step of rejection. Marian also refuses to accept the life of three office virgins. According to Marian, the life of these virgins have no meaning, as they want to enjoy their life by dressing up in an feminine way and by wearing heavy make ups to impress others. They also want to remain virgins before their marriage. But Marian wants to avoid the idea of exposing herself to attract others.

In the first part of the novel "*The Edible Woman*", Atwood depicts Marian's attitude towards Clara's life. In the novel, Marian speaks about Clara's present condition in her family as, "the babies had been unplanned: Clara greeted her first pregnancy with astonishment...second with dismay,...Clara simply had no practicality, she wasn't able to control the more mundane aspects of life..."(Atwood 33-34).

Here, Marian tries to relate her life with Clara, her old friend. Through Clara, Marian explores the meaning of womanhood and motherhood. Clara bears many children after her marriage. Marian amazed at her frequent multiple pregnancy periods. Clara appears to find fulfilment through motherhood. But Marian cannot accept this aimless life of Clara. The reproductive role of her friend actually disturbs Marian, because for her the role of a female as a reproductive machine is unimaginable. For Marian, a woman is more than a reproductive apparatus. A woman cannot be reduced to a breeding animal. Marian refuses the idea of a woman to give up for the demands of their bodies.

In the book "*Thinking Feminist: Key Concepts in Women's Studies*"; the editors Richardson and Robinson refers to Christine Delphy and suggests that "thus it is men's exploitation of women's reproductive and productive activities in the household which is the main form of women's oppression. Patriarchal exploitation is therefore seen as' the common, specific and main oppression of women". (56). Here male supremacy over female body made her to lead an aimless life, just as a body to bear and breed children. Marian considers such role of a woman (like Clara) as irresponsible and vulnerable.

Marian finds, Ainsely, who is an example of exploiting female. Ainsely represents those women who want to become a single parent for her child. According to Ainsely, there is no meaning for marriage but at the same time she wants to become a mother. She doesn't want a father to claim a upon her child. She has no faith in the institution of marriage, so she utilizes Len Shank for her purpose. But later in a counselling seminar, when Ainsely came to know about the importance of the role of a father in the growth of a child and when she also realizes that her baby will bear the label as an illegitimate child. Hence, she forced him to marry her.

Marian concludes about Ainsely that she is immoral. But Marian came to a trauma, that she cannot find a real identity of a female in any of these characters around her.

As a main reason for female identity crisis and alienation, Margaret Atwood carefully presents the aspect of male domination through Marian's (her protagonist) relationship with Peter, her fiancé. Peter is a person who wants to impose his desires and expectations on Marian. After their engagement, Marian was totally controlled and instructed by Peter. Peter considered importance only for her physical appearance while he ignores her emotional and psychological requirements. Peter actually wants to fulfill his need and sexual pleasure from Marian. Marian never rejected him as she doesn't want to annoy with him and she was also scared of him.

The book "*Thinking Feminist: Key Concepts in Women's Studies*", according to Lacanian position, that, "identity is constantly disrupted by unconscious desires, women can never be totally successfully fixed within a patriarchal definition of femininity" (58). Here, this statement equates with Marian's experience that she always tries to adjust according to Peter's needs. Her desires have a secondary position while Peter takes the role of decision making. She completely left herself into the Peter's decision. Even though Marian wants to lead a healthy relationship with Peter, he couldn't understand her desire. She is forced to follow Peter without any argument or rebellion. "Women often get blamed if men sexually harass them, and in the way men's sexual violence against women has often been seen as an understandable, if not acceptable, reaction to female provocation" (85). This actually happens in Peter-Marian relationship. Even when Marian doesn't want to have physical relationship, she couldn't resist him from misusing her. More than that she is always neglected by Peter. Marian's subjective as well as submissive nature makes Peter more overpowering. She knows that her relationship with Peter is not comfortable and sustainable.

Atwood explores the pathetic condition of women's dependency on men through her novel. Through the character of Marian, she portrays the female burden which makes women an oppressed being. These experiences of subjugation and humiliation leads to split in her personality. Marian tries to accept her submissiveness and she while accepts Peter's proposal. When she listens to the hunting story from Peter, she feels sympathized with the hunted animals and she identified herself with the hunted animals. She wants to run away from Peter as she doesn't want to be a victim but she couldn't, as she lost herself.

Atwood, also explores that a woman is not only humiliated physically by a men but also mentally. There is a departure of body and mind takes place within woman like Marian. Her body is separated from her mind. Now she doesn't have any control over her body. She is directed by some other person like Peter. Her mind get suppressed. It is depicted in the second part of the novel by the change from first person narrative to third person narrative. This happens after she accepts Peter's proposal. Marian left merely as a possession for Peter. Here females are getting objectified. Their body is merely considered as objects for sexual pleasure for men. This issue is mentioned in the book, "*Thinking Feminist: Key Concepts in Women's Studies.*", as "crucial issues for the 1990's include women continuing to organize themselves...to resist the extension of the division of women into body parts , objectified, reduced to carriers of male genetic material...." (Richardson and Robinson 247). Marian's subjugation and suppression leads

to lose her appetite. She started to reject food, first meat, then egg and vegetables. Through Marian's eating disorder it is evident that her emotional disturbances bring her to the brim of loss of appetite.

In the book "*Feminine Psyche: A Post Modern Critique*", Neeru Tandon refers to Robert Lecker's suggestion that, "Marian, stops eating for two reasons (a) her job with an advertising research provided by an artificial society, and (b) she equates the consumption of food with her feelings, she has been assimilated and exploited as female object".(88). Her body's decision to give up eating fills her with fear and disturbances. The gradual loss of control over her own self makes her increasingly conscious of her identity. She became alienated from her surroundings. She was frozen in the midst of Peter's expectations and desires. She went away from reality.

Marian compares herself with two childhood dolls. One was a rubber doll which she considered as her image presented in front of the society. It is a perfect symbol of femininity. The second doll was dark haired which represented her inner self. She finds that throughout her life she has been dominated by others so she couldn't rule her life according to her wish. Marian tries to reconstruct a new relationship to food. Her illness of non-eating is a symbol of denial of the patriarchal model of femininity. Atwood tried to draw the culturally defined conventions that lead to loss of female identity in the male society. She gave examples of patriarchy encroaching on female space to control the female body.

The limitations of a female is set by male and her female identity is her limitation according to a male society. But through Marian, it is evident that a woman naturally has large quantities of strength necessary to protect her own individuality. The hardships and humiliations of their daily life, brings up idea that all women are capable to raise their voice for themselves. In the case of Marian, Atwood, pictured herself realizations with the act of her restless quest to find her identity. Marian changed to a new woman who believes in her identity and individuality, after returning to her consciousness and reality. This occurs only by the unification of a sharp mind and body, i.e. only if body escapes from being consumed by others. So Marian at last get escaped from the trouble of identity split and alienation, it is evident through Atwood's employment of narrative techniques.

#### Consumption of Female Body: In a Global Feministic View

Sally J. Scholz in her book "*Feminism*" refers to Simone de Beauvoir's suggestion from the work "*The Second Sex*" (1949), "Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men, they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth."(71). Here according to Scholz, Beauvoir describes that women are still the "other" and the "second sex". In this contemporary world, women are given only a secondary position by the male dominated, consumer society. In this society she is used as a commodity for the male desire. Feminist all over the world with a common interest tried to wash out cultural setups, to eradicate the gender biased power distribution so that women get equal rights in society.

In the novel "*The Edible Women*" Atwood tried to explore the prominent issues and the hidden issue like considering female body as a toy in a consumer society. The issue of exploitation of female body as a consumable item is a symbolic representation of problems of

consumerism in the modern contemporary society. Atwood depicted the male hegemony and the suppression of female characters in the name of gender inequality.

While analysing the novel, the view point of consumer society is prominent. As the title itself meant "*The Edible Women*" is about the life of an ordinary woman, Marian McAlpin, the protagonist who develops an eating disorder. The review of the novel shows that "Ever since their engagement, the strangest thing has been happening to Marian McAlpin: she can't eat ... Marian ought to feel consumed with passion, but she really just feels... consumed". After getting committed with her fiancé Peter she feels that she's been eaten up. Gradually, she experiences a difference in her mind and body as they detach from each other.

Marian's problem is same as a willing member of a consumer society. The problem starts suddenly when she identifies herself with the things being consumed. Her loss of appetite shows herself loss. It also meant loss of her freedom. This leads her to a mental trauma. That is, the gradual loss of appetite is a physical disorder results to a psychological disorder. Duncan who meets Marian during her survey in Seymour Surveys points out her restlessness and refusal to take food (eating disorder). Atwood tries to explore the idea of revolts against the dominating patriarchal society, by employing her eating disorder. By meeting Duncan, Marian takes up a turning point in her life and starts finding her true self.

In the book, "*Feminine Psyche: a Post Modern critique*" Neeru Tandon refers to Anshul Chandra's suggestion from the essay, "Cry, The Peacock and The Edible Women- A Comparative Study", that "The second part of the novel shows deep penetrative probe in Marian's psyche, ...had let herself be sold as some kind of a desirable commodity... We see her losing control over her mind and body. Now Marian feels that Peter wanted to transform her according to his needs and happiness... She thinks that peter is a destroyer of her individuality and identity." (87)

Here Marian tried to define herself status as below an individual. She feels that she is getting reduced to an object as well as a mindless body. As novel progresses, it seems that her interaction with the outside world, with men, especially with Duncun. Here it is understand that Marian's realisation of self- enhances a sort of awareness of the individuality. At the same time, there is an urge within her to establish her lost identity.

As the story move on the novel has other references to consumerism, woman's body and its exploitation by men. By the end of the first part of the novel, said in a first person narrative, Marian gets engaged with Peter and experiences a feeling of alienation and self-lose from co-workers, friends and from her living atmosphere. In part two, which is the longest part of the novel said in a third person narrative, shows Marians eating disorder getting more critical and complex. She not only loses the ability to eat anything but also haunted by the idea that she is being consumed by others. At the end of part three, Marian bakes and serves a cake in the shape of a woman that is, an "edible woman" to Peter. It symbolises that she rejects him as her life partner. We can also witness Marian's emergence from the clutches of Peter. By regaining the ability to eat she once again become the speaker of novel. It is represented through the use of first person narrative in the third part. According to Chesler, in the "*Feminine Psyche: A Post*

*Modern Critique*”, “Atwood’s protagonist is in her madness that she, ‘gives birth to ...herself anew.’ Marian rejects her passivity and refuses to be a victim.”(89) In the end of the novel, the act of consuming is interpreted as an act of defiance as well as liberation or as an act of her revolt against both economic and social capitalism.

In the book “*Thinking Feminist; Key Concepts in Women’s Studies*”, Richardson suggests that, “...sexuality have tended to emphasise how sexual relations are determined by unequal power relations in society...that sexual relations also determined those unequal power relations... sexual relations both reflects and serve to maintain women’s subordination... how male dominated sexuality constrains women in virtually all aspects of their lives.”(75)

In the relation of Marian with Peter, it is evident that there is a gender inequality between them. At the beginning, Marian found a rescuer in Peter and Peter sees in her a sensible woman and expects her to have individual thinking. When he proposed her, he explained the reason, that he needs a wife to boast of his collection of guns and cameras. He keeps addressing to Marian’s admiring qualities like her common sense, independence and uniqueness from other typical women. Peter at the same time tried to attribute an identity upon Marian which is convincing to his conditions. By this time, she feels that her identity was taken away from her.

By the loss of identity, she feels alienated and just being reduced to an object for male gaze. This imprints an image of being victim. Here woman become vulnerable in a consumer society. Her identity as woman is fully based on her sense of self-ness. There is no use if she retains her identities like nationality, class, race, and language, if she is devoid of her basic identity as a woman. In patriarchal society, the primary identity as a woman is necessary to create an individual space for females. It protects her from being eliminated.

When Marian viewed Peter as a hunter and herself as the hunted rabbit, she loses respect for him and instead, she became afraid of him. It is a symbol of her conscious awareness against victimisation. Because man is imagined as a predator or as a hunter of woman. She considers him as a predator who hunts her for economic profit and selling her body and mind in the commercial market of consumerism. In the book “*Thinking Feminist: Key Concepts in Women’s Studies*”, Richardson suggest that, “Feminist theories of sexuality are not only concerned with describing the ways in which our society; they are also concerned to identify how sexuality, as it is currently constructed, relates to women’s oppression”.(83). Here shows the definite boundaries between masculinity and femininity. The power that women have over their body reflects social particularities. That’s why Marian undergoes identity split and later she become able to her diseased body to achieve a new identity. In other way she tried to escape from the restrictive forces that Peter put on her. At the same time she needs to escape from the feminine body as it resembles the power and control that Peter has on her. It symbolises the power that man has over animal.

It is clear that, Marian has went through psychological and emotional crisis of identity. Later she finds herself as a commodity when she felt that she is being consumed. It is clear from her words to Peter, after regaining her identity. By the end of the novel that, “You have been trying to destroy me, haven’t you”, she said. “You have been trying to assimilate me. But I have

made u a substitute, something you will like much better. This is what you really wanted all along, isn't it? "Here Marian claims that she was consumed by Peter. Actually by giving the idea of consumption Atwood really attempts to make the sense that consumption as the fulfilment of oppression, rejection and distinction of mind and separation of identity.

In the book "*Literary Theory and Criticism*", Patricia Waugh refers to Judith Butler's words to state Beauvoir's idea that, "In the highly influential book "*Gender Trouble*" (1990) the gender theorist took Beauvoir's idea of self and other, along with the statement 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman', and developed an argument about the fluidity of gender." (338). Here the concept is that woman and the animal's otherness is constructed by a culture that tries to neglect women's original nature and importance. It vaguely points out to the idea of split identity and consumable object, by merely transforming animals into meat and they were renamed according to their body parts. This actually changes its identity as an animal. A woman's continual production and usage gave her the same transformation in her identity.

In his book Richardson states that, "To say that sexuality is socially constructed means that our sexual feelings and activities...and our sexual identities, are not biologically determined but are the product of social and historical forces. Sexuality is shaped by culture in which we live..." (78). He says that more than the idea of a real woman, the image created by the interest of a culture gives a two dimensional status to woman which threatens her existing social roles. Marian's escape from Peter is actually the rejection of masculine characteristics that inherited by men. Her escape from external forces reflects her later retreat from society. It is evident through her body's complete rejection of food.

Another incident of Marian's consumption is when Peter attempts to photograph Marian in her red dress. Marian felt fear the danger and she resisted as she interpreted the fear of humiliation as she was arranged by Peter's lens (eye). Marian recognises herself as a target for male gaze. This may lead to the condition that she will be silenced, or renamed for consumption as a commodity and may be absorbed by Peter's instructions. According to western society it is the permanence of biologically determined roles, reinforces an attitude of man-woman gender sexuality as unchangeable. Also Simone de Beauvoir argues that a woman's reproductive capacity limits her to a passive of body. When we go through the existing cultural value systems and taboos, women are aligned with an animal's status, as they are not considered in terms of reason and intellect. So they never raised their voice but resist in a silent distinctive manner. In Marian's case, when she was caught in front of Peter's gaze, she was also caught within the fear of being consumed through justifying the use of the camera. Peter's suggestion to take a snapshot created an anxiety in Marian that explores her trauma between resistance and acceptance. She feels uncomfortable with people who possess power over her.

The anxiety in Marian's behaviour, is the result of her resistance towards consumption. This anxiety can only be resolved by adjusting the conventional practices. Still Marian feels some commitment to the standard norms that has been set by Peter. It is evident when she wore red dress. Here unknowingly she becomes a partner of her consumption. When Marian eats the valentine cake, she feels an anxiety of consumption. The consumption of the cake suggests her subordination to the cultural codes set for male female relationships.

Atwood evokes the idea that woman make themselves as targets for male consumption by taking an image of a prey to be consumed. Here comes the comparison of females with animals as both were consumed with assign of male success. The bodies of animals and females are covered for their male consumers. It is evidently stated by Margaret Marshment in “Representation of women n Contemporary Popular Culture”, in the book “Thinking Feminist: Key Concepts in Women’s Studies”, that “Cultural definitions identifying femininity with physical “attractiveness” compound this identification.” Marian’s consciousness to resist the notion of herself as prey even though she puts herself to a self-slaughter condition. When Marian faces the eating disorder, Peter is still able to have food. It is because Peter is able to look at the steak. Like this he observes Marian not as a soul but as flesh to be consumed. Marian also visualized the manliness associated with control, cleanliness and efficiency that can be seen in Peter while his brutal act of killing the animal the polite mannerisms of slicing, chewing and swallowing the steak. The man’s aggressiveness is pushed out through the reshaping of his victims.

From the novel it is evident that Peter’s and Marian’s attitude towards their food. “She looked down at her own half eaten steak and suddenly saw it as a hunk of muscle...Peter raised his head smiling...he said, I sure was glad to get that steak inside. A good meal always makes you feel a little more human”. When Peter is pleasantly conscious of his own superior capacity, Marian unhappily watching Peter’s steak that disappear into his mouth. Here, Peter notices Marian as his prey and consumes just like a steak. Marian imagines the steak with the diagram of a cow with different body parts labelled and she relates her suffering and conception through the animated picture of a cow.

From this nature of Peter, while eating the steak by dividing it into neat accurate pieces that symbolises fragmentation and consumption of Marian. This process of eating shows male strength and power. Peter’s appetite is unending i.e. his unending desire leads to women’s exploitation. The fork used by Peter represents Marian’s consumption after her fragmentation, which refers to the complete destruction of her mind and body. When she wore the red dress with the interest of Peter and she went to hotel with Duncan, people mistook her as a prostitute. This is the highlight of humiliation of female value. It is an image through the eye of a consumer society. The act of prostitution as business of selling female body as commodity for pleasure. At the end of novel, Marian is served with humanity and exist as representing her selfness. To refuse the threat of being consumed, she bakes a cake in the form of a woman. It is a symbolic act as once it was an object of consumption and later as an object of liberation. While eating the cake Marian declares that she is rejecting her femininity by coming out of her bodily disorders and disabilities.

## Conclusion

In the book “Thinking Feminist: Key Concepts in Women Studies”, Richardson and Robinson refer to Jackie Stacey as, “the question of universals and particulars is not only relevant to looking at women subordination however, it has also been an important and component in debates about women’s resistance to patriarchal control.” (60). Women all over the world without any distinction of whether a feminist or not, have put forward some resistance

against the cultural and patriarchal control that play upon them. “Women’s resistance have also been linked across national boundaries.” (61). Women shared their commonalities in their life and experiences. From these commonalities they framed their manner of resistance. Sometimes these resistances took the form of some movements like liberation movements. “Some feminists have emphasized the similarities between women’s position in different societies, challenging the narrow focus of some feminist analysis, which ignores the international dimensions of women’s resistance.” (61). There exist similarities in women’s challenges and oppressions. It is a need to focus on these similarities within an international ground. Even though there exist dissimilarities within women, their experience of subjugation and oppression shares similarity within the male dominated society. Even if women are from different social status race, caste, identity and cultural representation, there exist “the assumption of a shared collective identity amongst women as a group who have a certain set of interest in common.” (65).

“Globally, this is clearly true: a multifaceted oppression requires a multifaceted response” (137). To make a response towards oppression and discrimination women should move into the main stream. This is the task of feminists who are activist in the global perspective. “Women’s international meetings are important occasions for both dissent and agreement. Women’s experiences of reproductive technologies...and sharing knowledge and participating in confrontations between opposing view points can increase consciousness and move theory and politics forward.”(247). Only by the get together of women, they could consider each other as sisters, to achieve the quality of movement which is politically developed and strong. If women acquire a sense of sisterhood, which is necessary in a global feministic dimension, they could make their activities responsive and resistive towards the dominant societies and ideologies. The strength of sisterhood among global feminists existed through commonalities in their lives. This produces such commonalities even in their activities too. In the book “*Feminism*”, Sally J. Scholz refers to Susan Mullar Okin’s suggestion that “women’s activists all over the world sought connections between women.”(133). It is actually the process of globalization of feminism by giving the sense of global sisterhood. “Global feminism as a movement looks at issues that affect women globally or consider issue from a global perspective.”(135). Globally women faces common issues like sexual abuse, sexual violence, domestic violence, human trafficking such as selling off women and children, killing of female child, legal, political and cultural oppressions. All these issues are faced by women across the globe without any distinctive boundaries of class, colour and race.

In the work “*Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*”, Bell Hooks suggests that, decolonized feminists perspective would first and foremost examine how sexist practices in relation to women’s bodies are globally linked.(47). This is what indirectly Atwood tried to explore in her novel. Even though she wrote the novel in a second wave feministic view, it leads its concept beyond the era and extends its importance and validity to post feministic period. Through the life of Marian McAlpin, Atwood connected her sexual life with life threatening eating disorders which shows the direct consequences of a male dominant culture. This would emphasize sexism, misogyny and also globally mirrors other practises against femininity. Atwood also tried to explore the idea of viewing feministic issues in a global perspective for women’s collective actions and resistance. These collectiveness leads women’s issues to a universal level. As female’s have their own roles to conduct in a male society, which is depicted

in the novel through Marian baking a cake in the shape of a women signifies that she can empower herself to play her role. So by globalizing these feminist problems, it is not only a female's issue or a women's concern, for feminism is not just a women's issue but it is for everybody.

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