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## ***THE EDIBLE WOMAN: A VOICE OF RESISTANCE***

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### ***Abstract***

*Female consciousness has always been a polemical issue to know their existence in society in every aspect. A woman has been subjugating in the male-dominated society. Females have also been discriminated, exploited, and subjugated due to their inequality in every sphere of the life. They have always been asked why they are not getting their own identity, which is very intrusive for them. There is a conjuncture in which they are lurking, that is tradition and modernity. Indian English fiction has projected its condition for many ages. Patriarchal manifestation has created such ideologies which subjugate their distinctiveness. They could not get their own identity in the patriarchal dominance in the passing years. This research aims to analyse the internal conflict that arises when*

*Canadian women try to reconcile their sense of identity with the expectations of society at large. Numerous feminism-related themes are highlighted in Edible Woman, including women's enslavement, male hegemony, the debate over gender roles, women as commodities, and consumerism. Margaret Atwood's works show the pitiful side of Canadian women who are limited to predetermined positions that reflect a rigid moral code. They suffer from a permanent identity crisis. The rigidity of patriarchy, which promotes women's traditionally feminine qualities and their subordinate status in society, drives women farther and deeper into servitude.*

*Keywords: Subjugation, femininity, self-identity, patriarchy, gender, equality*



Female consciousness has always been a polemical issue to know their existence in society in every aspect. A woman has been subjugating in the male-dominated society. Females have also been discriminated, exploited, and subjugated due to their inequality in every sphere of the life. They have always been asked why they are not getting their own identity, which is very intrusive for them. There is a conjuncture in which they are lurking, that is tradition and modernity. Indian English fiction has projected its condition for many ages. Patriarchal manifestation has created such ideologies which subjugate their distinctiveness. They could not get their own identity in the patriarchal dominance in the passing years.

Margaret Atwood is often described by critics as a writer concerned with the search for identity. But, for Atwood, the search for personal identity is often paralleled by the search for a universal one. She links her protagonist to the modern consumer culture and colonization. Loss, search and revival of identity play a major role in her texts, but, the submitting woman herself traces back her identity, freedom and survival. Atwood's fiction is found to be always symbolic and she has easily moved between satire and fantasy and suffering as is amply brought out in her novels and her novels successfully transcends all the 'isms'. One can witness multitextured in the sense that what appears as a search of missing father at the surface level turns into search of self thereby touching the boundaries of nationalism and gender politics as well. Her works are nothing but a representative of the rediscovery of the past, including the primitive. In that sense, the journey of the unnamed narrator in search of her father is symbolic of a quest for a Canadian identity in the past.

Internationally acclaimed as a poet, novelist and short story writer, Margaret Atwood emerged as a major figure in Canadian letters. Atwood has helped to define and identify the goals of contemporary Canadian literature and has carved a distinguished reputation among feminist writers for her exploration of women's issues. In every novel, she takes up the conventions of a different narrative form-Gothic romance fairy tale, spy thriller or history. In Atwood's work, writing the female body reflects the writing of the geography of her nation. The survival of women and the survival of Canada amid hostile conditions become equally important for Atwood.

*The Edible Woman* is the first published novel of Margaret Atwood. It can be called as a proto-feminist novel as it entertains and presents the most serious problems that women face. It



depicts how women are objectified by conventional society as consumer products. It shows that there is no place for the attitudes, beliefs, desires, and opinions expressed by women, the central figures of Atwood's fiction. Even though the novel was published even before the emergence of the feminist or women's liberation movement, it successfully exposes the ideological and gender differences, thus proving to be a pioneering novel. The central character, Marian is rather disturbed by the awareness of being subjugated and victimized. This is exactly what the novel depicts - the reasons for the suppression of women within and without the institution of marriage.

*The Edible Woman* offers a quest for self-identity by Marian who is fairly sensible, intelligent young woman, decently liberal in her views and somewhat defensive about her own individuality. She is employed in Seymour Surveys Company, a market research agency. Facing an identity crisis, she is confronted with various alternatives. The first phase of the problem Marian has to face and overcome is at her work place. The company Marian works for has a highly stratified, three-tiered, hierarchic structure. The top floor is occupied by men and is not accessible to her. The bottom is managed mostly by old housewives and she does not wish to go there. "On the floor above are the executives and the psychologists referred to as men upstairs, since they are all men. Below us are the machines - mimeo machines." (35)

The prospect of getting fixed at the middle point of the office structure for the whole of her life, with a pension at the end of her tenure of job, makes her feel that in front of her was a "self...waiting, performed, a self who had worked during innumerable years for Seymour Surveys and was now receiving her reward." Marian's crisis, however, acquires a feminine colouration when she looks for alternatives to her present situation. These alternatives are represented in her office colleagues, Eumey, Lucie, and Millie, her friend Clara, and her husband Joe, Peter, and Ainsley, her flat-mate. A proto-feminist to the letter, Ainsley has strong views about the male-dominated 'consumer' society. Wanting children "by choice" rather than as a natural consequence of a happy relationship in a marriage, she looks out for a perfect male specimen to father her child and finds one in Len, thus partially fulfilling her dream. It does not take her long to realize that such a role as she has chosen for herself would be a difficult one to perform in the patriarchal society and she changes her views regarding matrimony and accordingly gets married to provide the infant a father.

Choices and alternatives presented by her friends apart, Marian feels outraged by the



attitude adopted by Seymour Surveys towards its women employees. The Manager, Mrs. Bogue, regards the very acts of marriage and pregnancy as offensive to the company; such discrimination against women arouses in Marian righteous indignation. While conducting market research survey, Marian interviews a man who outspokenly stresses that she ought to be at home doing house-hold work and with a rather strong man who will care for her - a comment which enrages her justifiably.

Marian refuses to accept the alternatives given to her in Ainsley and Clara. She seeks something different from life. She rather hopes that she would be able to fulfil this yearning for a better life with Peter. She thinks that Peter is an ideal choice. He's attractive and he's bound to be successful. He seems to be a godsend to relieve her from her monotonous life at Seymour Surveys, for her he is a rescuer from chaos, a provider of stability. Despite her dreams as to their fixture, she also has her own doubts regarding Peter. Disturbed by his casual attitude towards sex and general behavior, she feels at times that he was treating her as a stage-prop; silent but solid, a two-dimensional outline". He is a conventionally acceptable figure obviously at the start of a successful career, he in turn is drawn to Marian because she is unlike the other women of his acquaintance.

After Peter proposed to her, Marian's psychological state of mind completely changed and she had strong physical reactions to it. At first, her body was trying to run away from Peter. When this proved unsuccessful, her body started rejecting certain food, meat at first, but then it escalated to the point that she could barely eat anything. The food became a metaphor for her own life. She felt it is unfair that she should decide for meat or vegetables that are then deprived of their own choices and life. Perhaps Marian feels like she is being eaten up and consumed in the same way like the carrot, without her will. However, all her dreams about Peter come to an end as he states that she would be perfect for him as he can be 'dependent' upon her. Her relationship with Peter seems to have undergone a sea change and Marian realizes that she had let herself be sold as some kind of a desirable commodity and thus fails to identify the real Peter underneath all that sophistication and doubts her understanding of his true self.

A novelist with both popular and literary appeal, Atwood provokes her readers to confront issues that are of special importance to women, such as domestic and sexual violence, pornography, eating disorders, mastectomy, and problems with body-self-image. And in all of



her fiction, Atwood who is deeply concerned about the uneven and potentially damaging power relations that occur in the parent-child situation, heterosexual romance, and female friendship relentlessly focuses attention on the gender and power politics that govern women's lives.

Atwood writes about women because she wants to draw attention to all the issues surrounding women's lives and she wants to encourage women to take the action about it. In this novel, she focuses on de-constructing the gender politics and how consumer society perpetuates these power relations among genders, privileging men. What Atwood clearly suggests women of all race is women should not be depended on men. They have their own capabilities and literature in which they can choose their way to express their feelings and emancipate their thoughts. Women feel inferior in the male chauvinism ideology which drags them from their individuality.

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