



Woman in the Patriarchal World as Portrayed by Margraet Atwood in *the Edible Woman*

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ABSTRACT

Literature is a social evidence and testimony. Gender bias characters portrayed gender related problems. Society and the other forces dominating womanhood are later questioned and they began to question for their right. Margaret Atwood's novels explore women's experience in a patriarchal culture. She presents women caught in oppressive stereotypes who struggle to create a female space for themselves. *Life of Marian* pictures in the *Edible Women* shows as though the protagonist have a decent occupation and contented affiliation with her lawyer but later proves to be subjugation forced on her which curtails her freedom. Realisation of her victim stage struggle over her situation to accept the social convention or to ascertain the free will life was a big question in her life. She is not ready to accept the superiority of the man who exploits her in all ways and rejects to be inferior to any power. She facilitates herself in the path of life though stumbled in the earlier stage she later realises her self identity and proclaims not to be an edible product consumable for any in the society so she offers cake in shape of women to her fiancé.

KEYWORDS : Gender bias, Superiority, societal patriarchy, exploits women, inferiority, facilitate and balance.

Literature is a very effective way of understanding a culture of time or of a class, social, ethnic group. It represents and explores the ways in which the world is viewed and experienced by people. It is picture of human life and a mirror of society. Lewis A. Coser (1913-1975) in his *Sociology through Literature* (1972) comments that

Literature, though it may be many other things, is social evidence and testimony. It is a continuous commentary on manners and morals. Its great moments, even as they address themselves to the external existential problems which are at the root of the perennial tensions between men and their society, preserve for us the precious record of modes of response to peculiar social and cultural conditions (15).

Various work of literature depicts the oppression, suppression, racial discrimination, gender disparity, societal upheavals. Oppression, suppression, superiority societal patriarchy setup exploits women by the forced inferiority. Male whose hands are up are benefitted by their own made comfortable laws. Patriarchal society emphasis the differences of men and women, by enforcing superiority for men and oppress women. Socio economic improvising is needed to raise the state of women. Canadian women also suffered the same. They suffered both economical and social oppression in male dominated society. Educational opportunities, job and earning are unsuitable for them in society by different ways.

Social impacts and all the forces of captivating womanhood are later subject to question and they began to raise voice for their right. Waves of tide changes, as it are stated in *Self Reliance* (1847) by Emerson (1803-1882), who quoted that

Society is a wave. The wave moves onward, but the water of which it is composed does not. The same particle does not rise from the valley to the ridge. Its unity is phenomenal. The persons who make up a nation today, next year die, and their experience dies with them (81).

Gender bias characters portrayed by those realistic writers way gives us a greater understanding of gender related problems. Those works gives us the real picture of society. Literature replicates our history, our tradition and our culture. It provided the opportunity for the writers to view on gender issues as epitomized in the works of our outstanding Canadian writer Margaret Atwood (1939).

Margaret Atwood the queen bee of Canadian literature has an uncanny knack for writing books. She is one of the world's leading women novelists. In *Second Words* (1982) she delineates her thought of hope "Writing, no matter what its subject, is an act of faith the primary forth being that someone out there will read the results. I believe it's

also an act of hope, the hope that things can be better than they are" (349). Her work has been published around the world and attracted maximum critical attention.

Margaret Atwood is the first major novelist of Canada who spotlighted on the modern woman as self identified, self-determining, self-regulating and autonomous and seeking to evolve an identity of her own. Margaret Atwood in her writing lime light the personal quest for fulfillment through cultural identity. Christine Gomez scrutinizes in *Perspective on Canadian Fiction* (1994) says:

At the thematic level, Atwood's novel examines themes related to the politics of gender such as the enforced alienation of women under patriarchy, the delimiting definition of woman as a function, the patriarchal attempt to annihilate the selfhood of women, the gradual carving out of female space by woman through various strategies and woman's quest for identity, self-definition and autonomy.... Atwood's novels are based on the politics of gender (74).

Margaret Atwood's novels deal with women's experience in a male dominated culture. They present women caught in oppressive stereotypes from which some women struggle to create a female space for themselves. This may be done through autonomy of thought, through self-definition and self-reconstruction of one's own history, through creative composition, oral or written, through bonding among women and through a refusal to the role of subjugation.

Life of Marian pictures as to have a decent occupation and contented affiliation with her lawyer boyfriend. Marian dreams that her marriage would be enjoyable. But the whole thing collapses when she realise him by moving along with for some period. In an evening time when they are discussing about hunting with Len in a bar the true intention and face of him is shown up. She wants to get rid of him. She starts to do things beyond her control.

Marian in fact accepts the patriarchal enforced roles as such of subjugation. She allows Peter to choose for her neglecting her own choices. "He could make that kind of decision so effortlessly. She had fallen into the habit in the last month or so of letting him choose for her... She never knew what she wanted to have. But Peter could make up their minds right away" (180). She realizes of her oppressed sublime state it irritates her and it initiates her idea of breaking up of relationship with Peter. She understands that her marriage with him would surely push her to take the stereotyped passive woman role engaged by women community generation after generation till now.

Duncan too manipulates her in her confused state. Though she is in-

clined to him it is also a futile relationship. All their encounters resulted in sexual pleasure. Anyhow Marian manages to classify both Peter and Duncan relation towards her is not a bond that she wanted. Peter's expects Marian to convert herself as a woman of his taste, control over her body and mind, whereas Duncan uses her body to his pleasure. He explains that "I don't want you to think that all this means anything. It never sort of does, for me you're just another substitute for the Laundromat" (145). Marian is not clear with the relationship of Peter. She could not sacrifice herself in the name of marriage. Peter never wants Marian to be his equal and he exercises supremacy over her. The intention of Peter to have her ever in the authoritative attitude and as consumable product for his life evoked the institution her of running away from the engagement party. She decides to break the engagement and offers him a cake woman as a substitute for her as a consumable edible food and decides to be independent. This attitude of making decision at the appropriate time has been praised by, Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, where they explain

it is true that many women have been victimised intellectually, emotionally-and physically-by men, it is also true that some have managed effectively to counter the male power. Stressing our right, aggressively if necessary, to appropriate other people's ideas for our own political purposes, we may avoid a defeatist analysis of the situation of intellectually and culturally active women. (119-120)

Margaret Atwood brings out that nobody could proclaim dominance over the other gender. She states that Enigma of the men Woman relationship should be solved through her protagonist character Marian. Woman plays the vital role always, in the creation of man and she never realizes her true natural self. Woman has to set free herself to facilitate and result in a balance into nature.

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