

**ECRITURE FEMININE: A STUDY OF SELECTED NOVELS
OF MARGARET ATWOOD**

Ph.D. THESIS

by

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**DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY ROORKEE
ROORKEE-247667 (INDIA)
JULY, 2017**

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OF MARGARET ATWOOD**

A THESIS

*Submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree*

of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

ENGLISH

by

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CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the work which is being presented in the thesis entitled "**ECRITURE FEMININE: A STUDY OF SELECTED NOVELS OF MARGARET ATWOOD**" in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy and submitted in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee is an authentic record of my own work carried out during a period from June, 2014 to July, 2017 under the supervision of Dr. Smita Jha, Associate Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee.

The matter presented in this thesis has not been submitted by me for the award of any other degree of this or any other Institution.

(RACHNA ARORA)

This is to certify that the above statement made by the candidate is correct to the best of my knowledge.

(Smita Jha)
Supervisor

Date:

ABSTRACT

The thesis is focused on Margaret Atwood's fictional journey addressing the aspects of *écriture féminine* which is critically analyzed through her select novels along with the other extant and relevant literary theory and criticism. The language of body and mind that emanates from women's peculiar experience in a subjugated condition is focused as their *écriture féminine* and is applied as the theoretical background to analyze the novels under study. Further, the study attempts to explore how women can delegitimize the culture of silence by expressing their experiences through feminine writings.

The concept of *écriture féminine* was advocated by Cixous as female writing delineating women's consciousness that remained suppressed for centuries of subjugation. Women so far spoke through a borrowed language as was designed and imposed by the dominant male ideological construct. Atwood's protagonists prove to advocate the same by writing their own script by their own hands in the face of marginalized condition. They don't let their male counterparts to define them, rather they give voice to their experiences and desires in their own language and try to fabricate a distinct identity for themselves. Atwood's protagonists initially appear to be a weak creature, often exploited at every step by the male-oriented society. Yet, they reformulate their identity by rediscovering a renewed relationship with their body and voicing it in their own language. The language used in the novels is metaphoric, symbolic and multi-layered, thus, characterizing it as women's writing and such writings attempts to supersede the otherness or boundaries against the binary axis. In all novels under scrutiny the protagonists are able to create their corporeal autonomy and redefine themselves as empowered human beings thus, justifying *écriture féminine* as a reposing, redefining, and renaming power of women.

Structurally, the dissertation is divided into five chapters namely, Chapter I –Introduction; Chapter II- *The Edible Woman: A corporeal Language of Resistance*; Chapter III- *The Handmaid's Tale: Dynamics of Body and Language In Reframing Identity*; Chapter IV- *The Blind Assassin: Writing as a Self Assertion to Reframe Identity* and chapter V- conclusion.

The first chapter analyzes Margaret Atwood's evolution as an author in the background of Canadian literary milieu, her literary career, and literary influence. A literature survey is reflected briefly as to various critical studies carried out on Atwood so far. The rationale for taking up the selected novels and analysing them through the lens of *écriture féminine* is made clear. A brief sketch of Canadian literature and Margaret Atwood's all the novels under study is given. Helene Cixous's *écriture féminine* theory is explained along with other relevant literary and critical theories.

Chapter two of the present study deals with *The Edible Woman* (1969) considering it in relation to Helen Cixous's theory of *écriture féminine*. The study is attempted to focus how Atwood deconstructs the power relation of the patriarchy that has held sway in society so far. Her protagonist, Marian, is victimized at the hands of two men and her relationship with them reduced herself as consumerist goods what she resists through her sordid life. When she started losing her sense of self, she lost her appetite too. Societal oppression found expression through her body that she expresses through baking of cake doll of her image what symbolizes feminine weakness and communication. Atwood has shown how the female body could respond against such oppression and that is the way forward for creating space for women in a male dominated society. Atwood as an *écriture* feminist encourages women through her protagonist to re-embody themselves in order to reorganize society.

The third chapter of the study based on *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) scrutinizes the cultural construction of female identity and language. The protagonist, Offred, is subjected to suffer in the fictional totalitarian regime called Gilead. The dystopian novel shows how women are treated as commodity who are tyrannically controlled for breeding by the powerful. The chapter shows how the heroine uses the explosive language of subversion to reshape her identity. Offred's story brings to light the concept of white ink and female language to show that even under close surveillance and strict control on her, she manages to retain her language and her process of thinking through which she is able to regain her body. Thus, she proves that her identity cannot be defined by the language of the patriarchal figures. She uses her body to defend and write her own language (through her tape recordings) which is her *écriture féminine* and which is free and autonomous that subverts the male domination.

The fourth chapter of the present study is based on *The Blind Assassin* (2000). It attempts to shows how Atwood's female protagonist Iris, when faces acute intimidation and subservience,

raises her voice to fight back against the oppressive patriarchal forces that are instrumental in her construction. It focuses on retelling of the history as her memoir through the use of language that comes from the exclusive experiences of women and free from any male dictates. All the women characters leave their writings, in one or the other form, that serve two purposes: one can undergo a self-transformation and it is a way to reclaim the past in a new light. The key focus is that how a woman, by conquering her body and writing from it which is her *écriture féminine*, gives voice to her silence and thus, redefines her identity against patriarchal social structure which prioritizes and propagates binary division of male/female and the female is always viewed as the 'other'. This ensures a woman to assert her identity while pushing her to the centre and in turn, it is recognized as Subject.

The present study justifies two basic aspects of *écriture féminine*: the female body and the female writings that emerge in the selected novels of Margaret Atwood as distinct phenomena and which help women to assert their identity as subject. The proposed study clarifies that the world is socially structured and interpreted through language; hence, gendered identity is constructed in male centric language. Therefore, women are positioned at the margin in the symbolic order. Atwood attempted to deconstruct the male centric language which prioritizes male hegemony and subjugates women. Atwood's protagonists under the study; Marian of *The Edible Woman*, Offred of *The Handmaid's Tale* to Iris of *The Blind Assassin* emerge as creative non-victim with their deconstructive language at the end of the novel that is the expression of their *écriture féminine*. Thus, Atwood justifies in an agreement with the notion of Cixous's *écriture féminine* that, writing the female body is an empowering and emancipating tool for women to reconstruct their identity and her message is made clear that a woman must not stop writing; her subject will find her; and there are always outlets for voices.

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INTRODUCTION

Margaret Eleanor Atwood is an internationally known, read, translated, critiqued and most distinguished contemporary Canadian literary figure. Atwood started her literary career from the mid- sixties and till date she continues to enrich her literary panorama. She is a prolific writer with more than forty volumes of poetry, literary criticism, non- fiction, television scripts, children's literature, stage plays and her world wide fame rests on the novels she has produced. Atwood is not only an acclaimed literary personality known for being vociferous on social, political and moral issues but her writings also highlights the heart of the issues that marginalized women faces . Her works have already been published in many different languages across the world. *The London Review of Books* has acclaimed her as 'the most distinguished novelist... currently writing in English' (Patrick, Parrinder: 20-22). George Woodcock, the eminent Canadian critic and founding editor of *Canadian Literature* avers: "No other writer in Canada of Margaret Atwood's generation has so wide a command of the resources of literature, so telling a restraint in their use as Margaret Atwood" (Woodcock:327).

The thesis examines the selected novels of Atwood against the background of feminist theory that formally began in the 1960s. Her prime works, published during the second and third wave of feminism, succinctly vouch for feminist concern, though she declines to consider her work under any particular theory or political field. The decades, beginning from the 60s to the present time have witnessed not only diverse feminist movements, but also broadened its horizon with a change of approaches to life following the impact of the dominant ideologies of the decades spanning over the later part of the twentieth as well as the earlier part of the twenty-first century. She is influenced by postmodernism, post-colonialism and post-structuralism which is quite evident in her writings. Naturally, Atwood's protagonists reflect a variety of impulses of women's bodies and mind and their new images respond to the concerns of feminist ideology. The language used is free from any male monopoly.

Last two decades of the twentieth century is remarkable for witnessing a huge interaction among diverse literary theories backed by socio-political ideologies and movements. For

example, the fourth wave of feminism is informed by the attitude of post-structuralism that broadens the attitude to look at the issues of women from all inclusive perspectives. It is breaking free from any -isms and a complete liberation from any sign or symbol that so far has put a fixed limit on the female body, language or their independence with individual libidinal impulses. The author never associated her work with any movement. On the contrary, while publishing *The Edible Women*, she refused to be tagged as a feminist writer: "I don't consider it feminism; I just consider it social realism. That part of it is simply social reporting"(Quoted in Tolan: 3).

Such denial or disagreement by the concern author as being feminist may be viewed as her attempt to break free from any cliché as feminist or any allegiance to feminism but as the author it does also reflect the social realism which is certainly, not free from the polyphonic voices of the society in which majority of the voices are from women. The period also witnessed the influence of the works of eminent feminists such as, Simon De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* that scrutinized the polarity of a female object and male subject. A yearning to constitute an independent female subject was found among all conscious women of the time and the journey still continues. Atwood also rightly attempted to shun away the specific 'given' as a writer. She herself as a woman struggled between positive action out of the subconscious impulse and passive resignation to the traditional society driven by the stereotypical mindset that holds women as other and thus, subordinate the female species. Her protagonists have confronted and negotiated similar struggle in all her major novels, especially in their attempt to go beyond logocentric boundaries carved out by man. It goes without saying that the pathetic condition of women with a sense of otherism from the main stream of society has been painted vigorously till this date but to counter this odd situation or to overcome the injustice to women has been taken seriously by Atwood, in comparison with her contemporaries.

The focus of this thesis is to show how woman, in Atwood's novel, reconstruct her self-consciousness by breaking her boundaries free from the male-dominated ideologies and such attempts to supersede the otherness or boundaries, is not bound against the binary axis; rather, it is in line with Freudian unconscious or Lacanian decentred subject. The selected novels have been analyzed under the critical scanner of such literary theories and movements. Thus, feminine libido or female unconscious are expressed through the lived experiences of the protagonists which often draws attention to the various strains of

experiences through the body and mind. Atwood has attempted to speak a language that emanates from the woman's body as *écriture* and that could express the unexpressed female consciousness. As women are not born women, but they are made women in the society similarly it was the author's attempt to relax at the woman's position and redefine her space.

Atwood's articulation of *écriture* is not fictional imagination or rhetorical on the contrary, she has put forward the social realism, which dramatizes the post-modern phenomenon of anti-essentialism. Contextually, logocentric male authority is subverted and the female as a subject is brought to the fore. Overstepping the traditional boundaries by a protagonist or its author might be viewed as an individual ego, but all the men and women are engaged in the larger society informed and influenced by the post structuralist and postmodern ideologies. Social realism as observed the world over is replete with the existential struggle for women as to whether they are to succumb to the pressure of being viewed as objectified entity or to assert themselves against any power relationships. The argument in the thesis is to show how the major women characters have steered clear the history and social injunctions of specific 'given' or the 'other' and how they do assert their individuality as *écriture* feminist. The study examines the selected novels of Atwood through the lens of *Écriture féminine*.

The concept of *écriture féminine* generally known as female writing was conceived by French feminist Helene Cixous in 1976 in her famous essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* which was referred to as a unique style of writing by women. It is difficult to be understood by man as it expresses the unexpressed of women's consciousness which lay buried under centuries of suppression. Women so far spoke through a borrowed language as was designed and imposed by the dominant male ideological construct. The concept of *écriture* has close connection with a female body and sexuality and it is markedly different from the masculine experience. Women must write from her experience of body and sexuality to counter the male writing as well as the male experience. The period of the novel was appropriate for a revolt against the past. It heralded an intellectual movement with the clarion call for all women to rise in response against historic injustice against the lot. Women have always been viewed to be docile. Any funny desire that could manifest herself was a taboo. Since female sexuality has always been suppressed, Cixous suggested women to write from this unique experience as female libido is different from

men. Hence, a new language came up through intellectual and creative writings. It is believed that the language acquisition starts at the prenatal stage. So the language and sensibility of mother lie unconsciously in a child and this unconscious potentiality in a woman breaks the barrier of the male dominant ideology imposed through verbal signs. New verbal signs that emanate from the female unconscious manifest itself as literary text that celebrates *text- joissance*. This is not just subverting phallogocentric language or superseding the power relationships, but it is more to the celebration of diversity, multiplicity and a flux. It is joyous freedom and a free play of meaning.

The protagonists in Atwood's novels experience a continuous struggle against this phallogocentric world. To explore the change of mindset among the Atwood's protagonists, how they come to terms with the society and their evolution to *écriture féminine*, it is quite important to know the background of the author and Canadian literary milieu. An analytical study of the contemporary period and its ideologies are focused as to show how the thesis statement is drawn that befits the approach and focus of the author.

The position of Canadian Literature on international platform that we witness today is the result of a long Campaign. Canadian Literature gained its literary identity in 1867 after Canada's independence from Britain. Canada was divided in two sections ie: the French speaking people and English speaking people. Canadian literature got split into English and French sections due to this bilingualism. In the late 18th century, two events stimulated the growth of Canadian English literature: the victory of British over French forces in Quebec and the American revolution in 1775. Under such historic circumstances Canada achieved its individual literary identity. The first piece of Canadian English literature came up in 1769 (*The History of Emily Montague*).

The earliest development of Canadian literature took place in the form of oral voices of the native tribes in the form of folk tales and poems and stories of the Canadian countryside and day to day life and sketches of historical romances of individual locale. Canadian Literature couldn't make its mark in the dawn of the twentieth century due to its local exposure but by the close of twentieth century Canadian literature shifted its focus from local to global and was able to secure a place on the world literary map. During the first half of the twentieth century Canadian literature highlighted the theme of national identity. This very theme marked the poetry of Smith and the novels of Macleman. Frederick Grove

Changed the course of Canadian literature from romance to realism which is quite clear from the titles of his writings: *Settlers of March*(1925), *Our Daily Bread* (1928), *The Yoke of Life* (1930) etc. It was Morley Callaghan who moved the Canadian novels towards the urban Canada. He skillfully conveyed the complex Catholic humanism through his writings. Callaghan's *The Loved and the Lost* (1951) is spectacle in epitomizing man's spiritual distress. His *Barometer Rising* (1941) is a vent to the rising spirit of nationalism. Hugh MacLennan's novels like *Two Solitudes* (1945) and *The Precipice* (1948) gave voice to the growing nationalist consciousness of Canada. His novels portray the conflict and differences of Canada with United States and the advancement of nationalism in Canada during second world war. The Canadian novel finally bloomed in the 1950's with the novels of Robertson Davies, Mordecai Richler, Mavis Gallant and Sheila Watson. With Robertson's novels such as *Fifth Business* (1970), *The Manticore* (1972) and *World of Wonders* (1975) Canadian literature achieved success on an International platform. With this, the prominent theme in Canadian literature shifted from landscape to the plight of immigrants' dreams, thoughts and emotions as R.K. Dhawan points out that people in those days were engaged with "The struggle to come to terms with a landscape, and more than that to aspire for a psychological identification and imaginative oneness with their physical environment "(31). Works of Robertson portrays the plight of immigrants to find their identity in the artistic world. Richler in his writings was concerned with relationship problems and the opportunity of survival. He also talked of degradation of moral values in the modern age.

Sinclair Ross in his writings focused on the tyranny of natural calamities in Canada. His first novel, *As for me and My House* (1941), a classic in Canadian literature talks of the unpleasant, dry and melancholic times of 1930's. The year 1960 was the bright period of Canadian Literature as during this period it widened its scope and became universal. Canadian literature started defining itself on the principle of thinking local and acting global. This political and literary revival steered the Canadian writers to write about distress and disorientation themes. Altogether a new dimension was added to Canadian literature by the emergence of women novelists like Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, Alice Munroe, Sheila Watson, M.G. Vassanji, Marian Engel, Gabrielle Roy, Anne Hebert, Adele Wiseman, Aritha Van Herk, Jeannette Armstrong and Rudy Wiebe.

The women's movement of 60's had a great impact on Canadian women novelists .They divorced the traditional patriarchal norms and voiced against the violence, abuse, exploitation and oppression with which women suffered. Margaret Laurence is one of the most vocal women writers of the time. She was a visionary writer. Alice Munro's writings dealt with the devastating issues of adolescence and marriage. The women writers of the age collectively tried to empower women through their writings. Munro's novels emphasized on women's perception and insight about their femininity. Today, Canadian writers like Mordecai Richler, Michael Ondaatje, Margaret Atwood, Alice Munroe, Timothy Findley, Rohinton Mistry, M.G.Vassanji enjoys global recognition. Many immigrant as South Asian writers like Rohinton Mistry and M.G. Vassanji are also the part of the successful journey of Canadian literature. Findley in his writings talks about the social, political and personal epidemics such as the first world war, sexual assault, moral passivity and flood. Novels of Ondaatje focus on the politics of survival, diasporic situations and questions the feasibility and authenticity of history. He opposes the Americans or their highly mechanistic and materialistic approach to life.

Margaret Atwood is one of the internationally recognized Canadian writers of the age. Atwood's fiction provides a comprehensive review of the problems women confront in attaining full recognition and enjoyment of all human rights and a woman's plight to reclaim and enjoy her sexual autonomy. She is one of the precursors to speak about women's individuality and sexual autonomy. Her writings have always been unique among her contemporary writers as while writing on the other social issues of the age she moved a step ahead by focusing on the female power and female language as the liberating force for women.

Atwood was born on November 18, 1938 in the family of Carl and Margaret Killam Atwood, in Ottawa and she was brought up in the Quebec bard. Her father was a field entomologist and hence she spent her childhood in the Canadian countryside which in turn had a great impact on her human perception. Later, Atwood's father became a university professor, and the family moved to Toronto. Atwood's love of learning stemmed from a young age out of her experience which she encountered in the countryside and bushes during the formative stages of life. Atwood studied in Victoria college,university of Toronto. Since her college times, she actively participated in drama, debates and journalism and was honored with numerous accolades and prizes for her creative writing.

After college, she built a network of literary friends and eleven colleagues who witnessed and prompted her growth as a writer. Atwood has been much interested in the creative arts since her college days. Generally, after the college hours she used to develop skits, cartoons and off beat parodies. At Victoria College Atwood found a group of creative people who helped her to sharpen her creative skills. Douglas Fertherling an eminent scholar of 60's throws light on Atwood's Qualities as a friend in his memoir, he claims:

Peggy was loyal to all her friends. Loyalty was the most attractive of her many attributes. It was the rarest and the one people would most like having themselves. When Peggy was your friend, she was your friend for life and what's more, in a world of impractical poets and artists, she was worldly-wise in the extreme (238).

During Atwood's stay at Victoria College, she became friends with Jay Macpherson, a well known Canadian poet. She shared with her common interests like poetry and love for gothic elements. Macpherson had an extensive collection of poetry at her home library. Atwood took full advantage of the literature available at Macpherson's personal library. Hence, Atwood enjoyed great intellectual freedom during her years at Victoria College. She started exploring her interest in writing by editing the college magazine and she also designed programs for the college drama society. In 1961, she privately published her first poetry collection titled *Double Persephone*.

Atwood started her carrier as a writer with the publication of her first of poem, *Fruition*, in a non- college edition. The poem got published in "Canadian Forum"(1959). In the same year, she got her another poem titled *Small Requiem*, published in the same magazine. Then came her *Woman in the Subway* and two other poems in the autumn issue of the "Tamarack Review" in 1961. Since then, Atwood has remained committed to her writing passion. She also played an active role in the drama team at Victoria College. She also had an inclination towards lyrics writing and drawing. Her interest in drawing is quite visible from her sketches and cover designs of a number of plays like *The Pirates of Penzance* in 1959, *The Silent Woman*, *The Mikado*, and the *Yeomen of the 14 Guard* in 1961. Atwood also acted in some of the dramas such as *Skit Hilda* (1959) in which she played the role of 'Specksy', and in *Epicene* she performed the role of "Lady Haughty". With such performances, Atwood's interest in creative arts gained momentum. During her graduation days she realized the biasness of Americans towards Canada and Canadians. As Howell

observes, "Her graduate studies at Radcliffe College allowed her to experience living in America and to understand how others view Canada and Canadians like herself" (3).

During her stay in America, she went through provincial experience of a metropolitan culture. This colonial experience sparked Canadian nationalism in her which, later on, is reflected in her works of 1970's. Atwood was not able to digest this colonial jolt and hence, without completing her doctorate degree, she moved back to Canada and spent about ten years of her life there which she describes as her "Rooming House" (Atwood:111). Her supervisor, Professor Jerome Buckley, explains that "Atwood's rapidly accelerating career as a poet and a novelist soon diverted her from the routine of critical scholarship, and in any case, before long she had acquired so many honorary doctorates that an academic Ph. D. must have seemed superfluous" (94).

Atwood has been a great achiever since her college days and was felicitated with many awards. On March 17, 1967, she was accorded with The Governor General's Literary Award for her poetry collection *The Circle Game* and in the same year (June, 1967) she married Jim Polk. Since then, Atwood has established a strong publishing relationship with Oxford University Press and a long lasting friendship with T. Oe. They worked together on thirteen different books. Atwood was also approached by other publishing houses such as McClelland and Stewart and House of Anansi to publish her further collections.

As a writer, Atwood's artistic charm lies in her style. She sublimates her words and the voices of her characters in a perfect harmony so that the distance between the author who creates and the woman who suffers disappears. She expresses her views on the inequalities of the world. Her fiction enjoys global recognition as it has been translated into many languages. Her works represent personal, social and public expressions of life. Her prose and poetry have interconnected themes. She has a unique writing style as she writes the lived experiences of life. Therefore, her writing is non-linear and frequently shuttles between past and present. Her writing is an attack on the pain and injustice meted out to Canadian women. With first hand experience, vivid expressions and deep concern for marginalized women, Atwood stands as a true ambassador for the writers of her age. Robert Fulford rightly says, "representing Margaret Atwood is like representing a dynasty of writers. I am always racing to keep up with her. There are some important things that have

to be said. This woman is larger than life. This woman is a genius, she is magnificent in what she creates and the expanded and exquisite way she lives her life” (200).

Story telling appeared to be Atwood’s natural talent. She secured her literary career as a fiction writer in 1969 with the publication of the *The Edible Woman* (1969) and thereafter continued writing novels like *Surfacing* (1972), *Lady Oracle* (1976), *Life Before Man* (1979), *Bodily Harm* (1981), *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), *Cat’s Eye* (1988), *The Robber Bride* (1993), *Alias Grace* (1996), *The Blind Assassin* (2000), *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Penelopiad* (2005), *The Year of The Flood* (2009), *MaddAddam* (2013), *The Heart Goes Last* (2015), *Hag-seed* (2016). Today, Atwood has secured her place among the top women novelists of the world. She is not only a renowned novelist, but also a great poet and critic. Along with her novels, she has a good number of collection of poems to her credit like *The Circle Game* (1966), *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970), *Power Politics* and *You Are Happy*. Atwood’s literary work continues to be the subject of scholars worldwide. As a discerning critic, she has produced some influential critical works like *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* and *Second Words*. Atwood cannot be tagged under any one literary genre as her writings range from Canadian to contemporary women’s writing and again from feminism to the issues of international human rights. Her interviews are compiled under the title *Conversations* that covers a broad spectrum of topics and reveals her stance as a writer. Atwood is also a prolific short story writer. Her first story was published in 1977. Some of her famous short story collections are *Dancing Girls*, *The Man from Mars*, *Hair Jewellery* and *Giving Birth*. She won the Canadian Bookseller’s Association Award and the Periodical Distributors of Canada Short Fiction Award for her short story collection, *The Dancing Girls* (April 1977).

By 1980’s, Atwood became an eminent author and a poet. She earned great credentials in her career in the year 1981: she was elected as the vice president of the Writer's Union of Canada; she won the Molson prize and was also nominated for Chatelaine Magazine's Women of the year award and she was also the regional winner of the Commonwealth literary prize. Above all, Atwood was also an active member in founding the PEN association, an organization committed to liberate the writers who were political prisoners. Atwood had also been deputed as the president of International PEN, Canadian Centre (English speaking) in 1987 and in the same year, she was honored with the Ida Nadel

Humanitarian Award on 3rd June at Queen's Park, Toronto. She was also nominated as Ms Magazine Women of the year. There was no dearth of accolades as she was also titled as Humanist of the Year and was acclaimed a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. She became an accomplished writer with a temporary residential post at Macquarie University, Sydney in 1987. In 1988, she was accorded with the YWCA women of Distinction award and the National Magazine Award for Environmental Journalism. She wrote the introduction of McClelland and Stewart's *The Canadian Green Consumer Guide*. Atwood was also an active environmentalist.

She happened to spend her childhood in the lap of nature due to her father's profession what made her sensitive to the issues of environment. Thus, environmental awareness became an explicit theme in her fiction during the late 1980s. In 1994, she was awarded Chevalier dans Ordre des Arts ET des Letters by the government of France. She became the regional winner of the Commonwealth Writers' prize for the Second time. Atwood won this award for the first time in 1987 for her novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. She also received the Swedish Humor Association's International Humor writer Award in 1995. This award was, indeed, given for the Swedish translation version of *The Robber Bride*. Atwood was honored with the Booker prize for *The Blind Assassin* in 2002. Along with the academic degrees, Atwood also earned many nominal degrees such as: D. Lit. and honorary Doctorate degree from renowned universities: Oxford and Queen's University.

Margaret Atwood raised her voice for the rights of writers. She advocated in defense of copyright legislation for writers. She took initiative to support struggling writers through her involvement with organizations like Amnesty International and PEN. She is not only a literary figure of remarkable distinction and success, but she is also a renowned public figure and a social activist. Atwood is an innovator who experiments with various narrative forms in order to adequately express the cultural and human rights issues of global concern. Depiction of female characters in her novels is of universal appeal as she deals with global issues. Although her novels are governed by feminist consciousness which runs as an undercurrent with the plots and characters but in doing so, her approach toward women's issues have exceeded the conventional feminist attitude. Her feminist concerns are "her wider humanitarian concerns with basic human rights and their infringement by institutional oppression" (Howells:7).

In the *Second Words* Atwood transcends the usual concerns of the feminist world and writes from her “sense of the enormous complexity, not only of the relationships between Man and Woman, but also of those between other abstract intangibles, Art and Life, Form and Content, Writer and Critic etc” (190). In the non fiction, she further states that she is concerned with human rights of women and thus her feminist approach has “a larger, non-exclusive picture” (282). Atwood in her fiction not only explores gender norms and forms of sexuality through her characters, but also deconstructs the gendered binaries by empowering the female protagonist with some or the other artistic skills to voice her desires and choices. In the process of struggle for change, her protagonists transcend the patriarchal definition of gender and seek for a harmony between man and woman.

Sometimes in this struggle, her heroines also become rebellions. Female protagonists in Atwood’s fiction are outstanding characters as initially her heroines seem to be victimized, but ultimately they become survivors. They are able to reconstruct their identity because they bring forth the courage and wisdom that resides within them and transform themselves in order to fit into their environment. Despite being victimized in innumerable ways, her female protagonists succeed to redefine her subjective identity, free from male hegemony. Almost all the protagonists in Atwood’s fiction suffer from one or the other form of victimization but finally they overcome these countless obstacles and are able to find their distinct voice through which they reclaim their individual identity. Atwood’s female protagonists remain engaged in search of their subjective identity. She does not portray women characters as victims for ever, rather, she empowers them with the voice of their own instincts that surpasses repression while displaying a spirit of transcendence and a resultant victory. Her main characters are primarily women who are the victims of male domination.

Hence, the major preoccupation of Atwood’s heroine is a struggle between her mind and body against the predefined patriarchal norms and to voice her corporeal autonomy to testify her individual self. Atwood aims at self-awareness and self-awakening of a woman to redefine her status as a human being in a predominantly male-oriented society. The author feels that women are a willing victim of unwritten codes of conduct laid down essentially by patriarchal society. She further says that because society always expects women to be a good role model, therefore, women doesn’t see herself as a victim and she continues to be a victim of the male domination. A preconceived notion of female role in

the society existed even in the writings of early female writers. Kate Lilly in her recent paper on women's writings views that both early modern women writers and their modern scholars exemplify 'the problematic of sexual difference'(177).

Hence, Atwood in her novels creates ambivalence and life-like female characters. Her protagonists possess positive as well as negative qualities. She doesn't want her woman to be manipulative just for the sake of what society expects her to be. She expects her protagonists to lead a normal life as her male counterparts. Therefore, she empowers her women characters with the strength of self-expression that enables them to convert their inferiority to superiority. In her essay, "The Curse of Eve" compiled in *Second Words*, she asserts:

If I create a female character, I would like to show her having the emotions all human beings have - hate, envy, spite, lust, anger and fear, as well as love, compassion, tolerance and Joy - without having her pronounced a monster, a slur or a bad example. I would also like her to be cunning, intelligent and sly, if necessary for the plot (227).

She further says, "For a long time, men in literature have been seen as individuals, women merely as examples of a gender; perhaps it is time to take the capital 'W' off woman (228).

Although Atwood primarily focuses on women's issues, yet she cannot be labeled as a feminist writer. Her concern goes much beyond feminism. She is, indeed, a diverse and elusive writer. Sherill Grace rightly observes that "such a versatile and evolving writer as Atwood can't be fixed in a single phase" (27). The focus lies on the fact that how Atwood's female protagonist voices her silence in order to empower and liberate herself in the patriarchal society. Atwood's protagonists not only represent women, rather they represent the human beings who are struggling for a subjective identity, free from patriarchal boundaries.

Atwood's protagonists prove to be adherent advocates of *écriture féminine* by writing their own script by their own hands. They don't let their male counterparts to define them, rather they give voice to their experiences and desires in their own language and try to fabricate a distinct identity for themselves. Atwood's protagonists initially appear to be a weak creature, often exploited at every step by male-oriented society. Yet, ultimately they gain

strength because of the struggle they face and turn to be powerful women who have the remote controls of their lives in their own hands. As Goldblatt endorses this by saying: “after enduring, accepting, regurgitating, denying and attempting to please and cope, Atwood’s protagonists begin to take action and change their lives” (277). Atwood backs the notion of *Ecriture feminine* by gifting her protagonist an artistic talent which also helps them to express their experiences and voice their repressed self. For example, the nameless protagonist in *Surfacing* is an artist, Elaine Risley, the protagonist in *Cat’s Eye* is a painter and Rennie Wilford in *Bodily Harm* is a writer. In this context Goldblatt says that, “the creative aspect that fortifies each woman enables her to control her life: It is the triumphant tool that resurrects each one” (278).

Atwood's not only explores the stereotypical gender structure created by patriarchy, where women are victimized, oppressed and ruined but her novels also provide women with the solution as to how to establish their individuality. In fact, her mission is not only to place woman on equal level with the male counterpart, but she also aims at encouraging woman to enjoy and celebrate her femininity and difference. Atwood's protagonists namely: Marian McAlpine (*The Edible Woman*), unnamed protagonist of *Surfacing*, Joan Foster (*Lady Oracle*), three principal characters: Nate, Elizabeth and Leje in *Life Before Man*, Rennie Wilford (*Bodily Harm*), Offred (*The Handmaids Tale*), Elaine Risley (*Cat’s Eye*) and Iris and Laura Chase (*The Blind Assassin*) etc. are not only victimized but they are also shown advancing on a journey to rediscover their selves and retrieve their independent identity.

The thesis investigates selected novels of Atwood namely *The Edible Women* (1969), *The Handmaid Tale* (1985) and *The Blind Assassin* (2000) with special attention to her deep concern for women’s subjective identity and her attitude towards the dominance of patriarchal power structures in the light of *Ecriture feminine*. The research will acknowledge Atwood’s advocacy of the stupendous potential of *Ecriture feminine*, which can lead women to liberate herself and to reconstruct her individuality against the patriarchal norms. It will also examine how *Ecriture feminine* works as a reposing, redefining and renaming power for women’s emancipation and individual identity.

Before proceeding further it is necessary to know the literary and Ideological influences that set down Atwood’s writings. Atwood never aspired to be a professional writer in

Canada. She belonged to a new generation which, according to Howell was "busy discovering the fact of their existence as Canadians and she was also one of the first generation of students who were taught that there was a Canadian literary tradition in poetry if not in fiction."(12). Atwood was greatly influenced by Professor Northrop Frye and the poet Jay Macpherson while acknowledging their company, she asserts, "to actually be able to look at someone and say, that person has published a book! You can't imagine how important that was to a Canadian, living at that time"(Conversations :112). Atwood got access to Canadian poetry through Macpherson's private library. Frye's myth centered criticism also laid a great impact on Atwood. Though Atwood's fiction is suffused with Canadian cultural codes yet, her writings have universal appeal. She takes up local issues but she deals with them in a global perspective that makes her themes cosmic. As in one of her conversations she admits :

I write for people who like to read books. They don't have to be Canadian readers. They don't have to be American readers. They don't have to be Indian readers, although some of them are translated into fourteen languages by now, and I'm sure that some of the people reading those books don't get all the references in them because they're not familiar with the setting. I don't get all the references in William Faulkner either. That doesn't mean I don't enjoy the books, or can't understand them. You can pick up a lot of things from context (Conversations:144).

Margaret Atwood , known as a versatile contemporary Canadian writer today, did not want to be recognized as a Canadian writer in 1960's because of the fact that the Canadian fiction of the early decades of the nineteenth century was not much popular. According to her, "one could hardly expect us to make a living at it, and anything resembling the American notion of literary success was out of the question. Canadian books were routinely nottaught in schools and universities as she states that, "I myself have never taken a course on Canadian literature" (Gupta: 2). Like other writers of her time, Atwood also read Sartre, Beckett and British literature of Shakespeare, Eliot, Austen, Thomas Hardy, Keats, Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron. She was not only influenced by Northrop Frye and Jay Macpherson but also by her forerunners such as A.J.M. Smith, Dorothy Livesay and Al Purdy. The poetry of Pratt, Margaret Avison, P. K. Page and Davidson attracted her and molded her literary career. According to Rama Gupta:

The new feminism, a myth-centered poetry, Frye's criticism and the growing nationalism of the early sixties all helped to shape Atwood's literary inheritance: together they produced a particular sensibility, a mythic imagination reflected in her treatment of the male-female relationship and Canadian nature (2).

Atwood's writing not only portrays, but also put forth certain important questions on cultural and national identity and most importantly the female identity and the gender stereotyping. Atwood's recognition as a versatile writer becomes clear when one goes through several critical works based on her fiction and non-fiction. She received a great amount of critical reception. The most discussed studies on Atwood are Sherrill Grace's *Violent Duality* (1980), Arnold E and Cathy N. Davidson's *The Art of Margaret Atwood* (1981), Sherril E. Grace and Lorraine Weir's *Margaret Atwood: Language, Text and System* (1983) and Babara Hill Rigney's *Margaret Atwood* (1987). Further, there have been numerous critical essays proliferating in various literary and non-literary journals on various aspects of Atwood's works. A brief analysis of the critical works on Atwood will be helpful to formulate the thesis statement. Therefore, this section of the chapter briefly discusses the existing literature on Atwood's literary work.

Sherill E. Grace's book *Violent Duality* (1980) is a pioneering study on Atwood's novels like *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing*, *Lady Oracle*, *Life Before Man* ; poems like *Double Persephone to You Are Happy* and *Two- Headed Poems*; and only non-fictional prose, *Survival*. According to Grace, Atwood's central aesthetic concern is with "Violent Duality". Grace has not discussed her work from any specific critical perspective. Rather, she explores Atwood's double vision of art and life in terms of the subjective- objective dualities. She looks at Atwood's dynamics of violent duality as a function of the creative act. The book is regarded as an interpretative guide to form and theme in Atwood's works.

The book titled *The Art of Margaret Atwood* (1981) by Arnold Davidson and Cathy N. Davidson, explore Margaret Atwood as a versatile writer: a poet, a novelist and a critic. The book studies first four novels as stories about multifaceted characters. Sanda Djaw's essay "The Where of Here: Margaret Atwood and a Canadian Tradition" is an explicit description of Canadian landscape and Atwood's heritage as a poet. The second essay in the collection by Professor Judith McCombs, an American Poet and critic, focuses on Atwood's *The Circle Game*, *The Journal of Susanna Moodie*, and *Power Politics*

exploring the international traditions perceived in Atwood's poetic corpus. Third essay of the collection by Sherrill E. Grace analyses the poetics of double vision in Atwood's poetry. The book is enriched with a checklist of writings by Atwood and about Atwood which was supplied by Alan J. Horne.

Margaret Atwood: Language, Text and System (1983) edited by Sherrill E. Grace and Lorraine Weir is one of the critical books which is a structuralist analysis of Atwood's logical contention in her writing. In this book, the author discovers a system in Atwood's work which require dismantling only to discover the inherent dialectics ingrained in the works. Close scrutiny of this essay collection shows that Atwood's dialectics need to be studied from a variety of critical perspectives and while considering these perspectives together, it demonstrates the overall consistency. Duality as shown in the works is not contradictory but it is mutually interconnected and interdependent to form a continuum of relationship. Linda Hutcheon attempts a study of language in Atwood's first four novels from a structuralist point of view. A collection of critical essays titled *Margaret Atwood* (1984) by Jerome H. Rosenberg's provides a detailed description of the debate on Atwood's *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*.

Professor Frank Davey's *Margaret Atwood: A Feminist Poetics* published in 1984 is a study of Atwood's six novels. This book seems to be biased as it offers a male perspective. The study is a misinterpretation of Margaret Atwood's progressive protagonists. It argues that the doctrine of liberalism is refused in all the novels of Atwood and all her protagonists oppose to reconstruct and improve the world by "human technological intelligence". Davey further states: "From Marian McAlpin onward, most, Atwood protagonists desire to be 'whole', and mistrust all technology, whether in the form of freezers, cameras, guns, medicine, law or language itself" (79).

The year 1987 is a breakthrough for Atwood's criticism. There was an upsurge of critical works on Margaret Atwood in late 1980's. Babara Hill Rigney's *Margaret Atwood* (1987) covers Atwood's work from the 1960's and the book also explores the themes like identity crises, women's issues and nationalism. A collection of critical essays titled *Margaret Atwood: Reflection and reality* by Beatrice Mendez-Egle was also published in 1987. Roberta Rubenstein's *Boundaries of the Self: Gender, culture, Fiction* (1987) provides an

extensive discussion on Atwood's novels. Ikdiko de Papp Carrington's *Canadian Writers and their works* (1987) provides indepth analysis of Atwood's fiction and short stories.

Critical Essays on Margaret Atwood (1988) edited by Judith McComb is a comprehensive collection of Atwood's entire oeuvre. It tries to situate Atwood's work amidst the social, cultural feminism and women's literature. McComb also explores Atwood's versatility in different literary genres. *Margaret Atwood: Vision and Forms* (1988) edited and published by Kathryn Van Spanckeren and Jan Garden Castro is a compilation of critical essays on Atwood's literary works. It discusses feminism in Atwood's works including the gothic element along with ecology and cultural politics.

Shannon Hengen's, *Margaret Atwood's Power: Mirrors, Reflections and Images in Selected Fiction and Poetry* (1993) provides a psychoanalytic overview of Atwood's treatment of women power. She attempts to examine Atwood's selected works: *The Edible Woman and Surfacing, Lady Oracle and Two-Headed Poems, Bodily Harm and The Handmaid's Tale, Cat's Eye and Wilderness Tips* from psychoanalytic feminist point of view. Atwoodian criticism grew rich in 1990s. Sharon Rose Wilson's book, *Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale Sexual Politics* (1993) is a feminist structuralist analysis of Atwood's text. It describes the motifs found in her works. She particularly catalogues, analyse and interprets the fairy tale parallel in Atwood's fiction.

Margaret Atwood: Writing and Subjectivity (1994) by Colin Nicholson's is a compilation of critical essays that examine the different theoretical approaches to the works of Atwood. Few articles of the book also explore Atwood's concept of gender in her writings. For exmple, in one of the essays Sherrill Grace criticizes Atwood's scholars for interpreting Atwood's writing through the male gaze and for considering her writings to be autobiographical (Grace: 190). Another essay in the book by Dieter Meindl argues that Atwood's novels are both "woman-derived" and "man-focused" (Meindl 220). *Margaret Atwood* (1996) by Coral Ann Howells is a critical study. The book evaluates Atwood's different literary persona. Howells assessed Atwood's perception and explortion of Canadian landscape over the time span of twenty years. The critical work also deals with Atwood's concern for national identity and environmental issues. One of the chapters of the book explores her feminist standpoint namely, "Feminine, Female and Feminist: from being subject to object. It also explores the sexual politics by questioning the stereotypes of

gender identity. A brief description of Atwood's love for gothic is also provided in the book.

Margaret Atwood, the Shape Shifter (1998) edited by Coomi S. Vevaina and Coral Ann Howells deals with the critical essays on the assorted themes in Atwood's literary works. The essays in the book portrays that Atwood's writing style is highly flexible and her fictive world is one of continual metamorphosis. *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact* (2002) by Nischik, Reingard M. is a collection of essays on Atwood's oeuvre – supplied by contributors from Canada, the US, Germany, Great Britain, and France – aims at taking full stock of the range of Atwood's accomplishments and her international impact at the height of her creative powers. Serving also as an introduction to Atwood, this volume treats Atwood's life and status as a canonical writer, her multifaceted work, and important theoretical approaches to her oeuvre. The book is innovative and also includes statements on Atwood from her publishers, agents, translators, and some of her fellow writers. A selection of photographs of Atwood, several cartoons were drawn by and about her and a bibliography of books by and about Atwood round off the volume.

Margaret Atwood: A Critical Companion (2004) is a study on Atwood's writing by Nathalie Cooke. The book argues that Atwood's literary persona is threefold. Cooke is of the view that, "Atwood's writing had an impact of three distinct literary traditions : feminist, Canadian nationalist and postmodern writing (19). Cooke further contends, "Atwood has not only inherited a tradition of Anglo-American feminist writing, and provided a critique of this tradition in her own work, but has gained a canonical status as part of the tradition" (24). *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*(2006) edited by Coral Ann Howells assesses Atwood's writings on the vast canvas of literary genres. Atwood's exceptionally versatile personality is delineated in a series of chapters. The book discusses Atwood's literary context on different levels, such as: biographical, textual, and contextual. It also explores Atwood's criticism since 1970's creative work of Atwood. Howells enriches the book by presenting the extensive scope of scholarship on Atwood's works.

A review of existing critical scholarship on Margaret Atwood, so far, shows that probably there is fewer full-length study available in which her novels are studied through the lens of *écriture féminine*. A large area of her *écriture féminine* perspective, in her fiction

remains unexplored. Hence, there is a genuine need for an intensive study of Atwood's novels from the standpoint of *écriture féminine* to define or redefine her *écriture féminine* perspective. Atwood's feminist thought seeks to encourage women to redefine and reconstruct her identity through her own voice and language.

Therefore, the proposed study of Atwood's selected novels aims to explore her novels in the light of *écriture féminine*. In order to understand the stand point of Atwood's *écriture féminine*, it is necessary to have a historical overview of the feminist movement. This accounts for the history of feminism, its genesis, meaning and scope to comprehend *écriture féminine* and to evaluate Atwood's fictional panorama with reference to *écriture féminine*. Feminine writing is 'feminine' in relation to language. It is multilayered and non-linear. The main objective of the feminist movement is to strive for liberation, equality and the empowerment of women. It does not mean that feminism tries to subvert or excel men; it's just about sharing equal human rights.

According to Maggie Humm the fundamental goal of feminist perspective is, "to understand women's oppression in terms of race, gender, class and sexual preference and how to change it"(x). Feminism is just a corrective measure against the oppression and exploitation of women. Feminism is a dynamic phenomenon, as its aims, intentions and causes keeps changing with time, culture and country. As an ideology, it has registered its growth through three main phases known as three waves of feminism: First (1848-1920), second (1960's-1980's) and third (1990 onwards) waves. Several schools of feminist thought such as liberal, Marxist, Radical, Psychoanalytic, Socialist, Existentialist and Post Modern also came into existence. Feminism both as a concept and movement has emerged as a reaction against the atrocities of patriarchy.

Thus, feminism is a very comprehensive term and it covers many aspects of human life aiming at women's liberation from marginalized condition. Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own*, describes three stages in the history of women's literature and also proposes a similar multi-part model of the growth of feminist theory. According to her the development of feminist theory first comes as an androgynist poetics. Next, as feminist critique and female Aesthetic, accompanied by gynocritics. These three stages are there by followed by poststructuralist feminist criticism and gender theory. Androgynist poetics has its origin in the writings of women writers of mid-Victorian era. The Androgynist critics

were of the opinion that gender does not effect writing, and therefore the concept of a female tradition in writing was sexist. According to them, gender is culturally determined. However, from the 1970s onwards most feminist critics advocated that gender do affect the writing and hence, rejected the genderless mind. They were of the view that it is important to separate 'imagination' from 'self'.

Therefore, gender in a way effects writing. This thought gave birth to a feminist critique. This feminist Critique charged the male representation of women. Recent developments came up with an over-arching gender theory. The gender theory tries to uncover the inscribed doctrines of gender and the artistic effect of gender and it paves way to new literary theories by adding new dimensions and bringing female criticism to the center. According to this theory, gender is constructed socially due to biological differences. The theory takes gender as a fundamental analytic category and hence, brings feminist criticism from the margin to the center.

Ecriture Feminine is a product of post- modern feminist perspective and is also referred to as French Feminism. French feminist such as Jacques Lacan, Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Lucy Irigaray following de Beauvoir's argument believed that "each of the apparently gender-neutral systems of thought- law, science, religion- are actually expressions of male thought, representing masculine world view" (Waugh : 333). These critics deviate from de Beauvoir's theory and proposed that sexual differences are created through language. These critics advocated feminine writing to change the male-defined They also advocated that more and more women should come up to write their language. In the context of Kanika Batra's essay discussing the situation of Muslim women of India in which she states that "There was a sense of collectivism in the women's effort" (Batra: 34). Similarly, Sonia Nishat in her article on Muslim women of colonial Bengal observed that the reforms in nineteenth century Bengal was an attempt to "modernize" and "emancipate" women from traditional laws as well as the emergence of the "bhadralok" class gave rise to new family structures. The education of the "bhadralak" inevitably created the idea of the "bhadramahila", "who were an articulate group of women able to make their voices heard through public institutional channels hitherto confined to men"(25).

The present suffrage right for women was only granted through collective efforts. Similarly, women need to be organized through collective effort to write their own

language which is in the words of Cixous *écriture féminine* and that alone can ensure women's rightful dignity and identity in society. They were of the view that literature reflects and shapes culture. Thus, literature can either uphold female domination or can help to eradicate the subjugation of women in society. With this objective, Helene Cixous formulated her concept of *écriture féminine* and advocated for women with concerted effort. She was of the view that women can subvert the patriarchal domination by avoiding male gaze and male centered explanation of women's lives. In her view, women can liberate themselves by their literary art, as she puts in her *The Laugh of Medusa*,

Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of unconscious spring forth, our naphtha will spread, throughout the world, without dollar-black or gold-non assasmed value that will change the rules of the old game (880)...To write and thus, to forge for herself the antilogos weapon. To become at will the taker and the initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system, in every political process (880)...for once she blazes her trail in the symbolic, she can not fail to make of it the chaosmos of the "personal"(880).

Indubitably, gender issues had been the central theme in Atwood's fiction from the 1960's to 1980's, but her approach is that of a humanitarian. Atwood's thoughts have been greatly influenced and carried forward by some of the canonical critiques such as Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* (1963), Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1953), Juliet Mitchell's New Left-inspired study, *Women: The Longest Revolution* (1996), Shulamith Fireston's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974), Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) and Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977). In "An Introduction to *The Edible Woman*" in the *Second Words*, Atwood refers to these texts as the most significant influences and says that: "like many at the time I'd read Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir behind locked doors...[as] a young woman...in Canada in the early sixties"(Atwood:370). Atwood's feminism is deeply influenced by French feminism especially, the influential writings by Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray.

Though Atwood's novels are concerned with women's issues yet it would be unjust to analyze her work predominantly through the feminist lens. Atwood's fiction is an inclusive reassessment of women's issues as to how they face the world to attain their individuality

and enjoy basic human rights and fundamental freedom. Atwood not only explores the problems faced by women rather, she also aims at finding a solution to these problems. Before proceeding to analyze and discuss Atwood's selected novels in the light of *écriture féminine*, it is necessary to understand the concept of *écriture féminine*. American feminist critic and writer Elaine Showalter defines *écriture féminine* as "the inscription of the feminine body and female difference in language and text (Qtd. in Lodge:300). "*Écriture Feminine* is a product of postmodern feminist perspective and is also referred to as French Feminism. The concept developed as a theory in the early 1970s. French feminists like Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva are considered to be the forerunners of the theory of *écriture féminine*. It can be referred to as women's writing.

The concept of *écriture féminine* has close connection with Lacan's idea of structuralism which was originally taken from Saussure's idea of linguistics. Linguistics shows that a sign is arbitrary symbolizing an image or concept and it is termed as signifier. It does not necessarily connect a word. The meaning /concept is signified which depends on the position of the signifier. According to Lacan meaning depends on 'signifying chain' (Hook: 64). In other words, the place of signifier has primacy in making meaning. Phallus as a symbol of power relations exercised by patriarchy is a signifier which is structured in language and remains unconscious. The working of the unconscious depends on the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations of a word which works through substitution and displacement of it as two axes of language. Further, this syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations form the signifying chain.

Though phallus is not synonymous with penis, yet it is the point of anchoring and structured in symbolic order upon which power relation is hinged. Cixous held that this positioning and this symbolic order can be reversed by positioning *écriture* as a subject of women writing through body as *écriture* would, for Atwood, is a liberating force which may be celebrated as text *joissance* against the order of phallic *joissance* and it would position women as subject in a new symbolic order. She further clarifies that women must discover her own body and write from the body its own specific language. Thus, "women must find their sexuality, one that is rooted solely in their bodies, and should find ways to write about that pleasure, that *jouissance*" (Hook: 67).

According to Cixous feminine writing is away from the symbolic order and is associated with female and maternal bodies. Cixous further says that feminine writing is not only the domain of females, rather anybody can write from the marginal position i.e *écriture féminine*. Cixous denies to limit the concept of the *écriture féminine* in any definition. She asserts that *écriture féminine* has a deconstructive and liberating power that can overthrow the phallogocentric symbolic order. Cixous concept of *écriture féminine* is based on Lacan's idea that language shapes an individual's identity.

Cixous points out that writing is constantly manifested within a system of symbols. The symbolic order is organized via hierarchy of paired restrictions that includes Masculine/feminine. In the paired restrictions one is considered powerful over another and thus, the female is constantly curbed. Cixous formulates the expression of *écriture féminine* to allude the repressed voice or unconscious mind of feminine. She states that *écriture* is conceivable just in verse and not in prose. According to Cixous prose is representational and typified by classes that speak of stable dialect in which one signifier gives meaning to certain reserved categories. Connotations are based on the surface meaning and easily predictable. Where as in verse, the dialect is free. The semantic field gets enlarged and a single word may have a multiple meaning making a chain of substitution and difference. Verse as indicated by Cixous, is nearer to the oblivion, which as Lacan depicts, is organized like chains of signifiers which never rest, never append to any stable meaning. Being near to oblivion, the verse is likewise nearer to what has been curbed into the oblivion, which is female sexuality and the female body.

Cixous further claims that such feminine will serve as euphoria or as a locus of transformation. She is of the view that feminine writing can thus, prove that the Phallogocentric structure of the symbolic order is something that is constructed and that can as well be deconstructed. Language is thus, used in two different ways. The one way is by confining the language to symbolic order of signifier and signified and the other way is to free it from the role of signifier and signified. According to Cixous *écriture féminine* is transformative and it transfigures women's position at two levels. At the first level, women must acknowledge body and her bodily desires ; they should locate their sexuality and discover different ways to express their sexual pleasures. Secondly, when a woman expresses her self and her pleasures, her position in language will automatically transform from subject to object position. Emphasizing this view, Cixous asserts in *The Laugh of*

Medusa that the language of body would transform one from signifier to signified: “of the signifier that would take you back to the authority of a signified”(892). Cixous further states:

The woman who speaks, and who does not reproduce the representational stability of the symbolic order, will not speak in linear fashion, will not make sense in any currently existing form. *I' ecriture feminine*, like feminine speech, will not be objective or objectifiable; it will erase the divisions between speech and text, between order and chaos, between sense and nonsense. In this way, *I' ecriture feminine* will be an inherently deconstructive language” (Cixous: 319).

According to Cixous *ecriture feminine* is liberating, non-linear, polysemy writing that cannot be defined. As Kerth Green and Jill Le Bihan note, “the force of patriarchy is always inscribed upon women and upon men also, by the prevailing symbolic system: it is a fundamental belief of *ecriture feminine* that the only way to transform relations between the sexes is to transform the ways in which we respect relations” (Green:243). Green and Atwood seem to echo the Indian myth of *Ardhanareeswara* of which Anita Singh talks in her paper that:

signifying male female complementarity, if one does not exclude the other the question of opposing the other does not arrive. Cooperation is the manifest need. By using this myth we can aim at deconstructing the ideology of gender polarization thus clearing the path for a reconstruction of gender identity (Singh:14).

Thus, *ecriture feminine* is to be understood in its larger perspective as it is not exclusive for the female experience rather, it is mutual cooperation between both the genders. The language of the women and by the women can transform them from their position of object to that of subject as all the realities are perceived through linguistic realities and more and more such writing would bring the repressed feelings into the surface and thus, it would help deconstructing male discourse while creating space for women. Helene Cixous also holds that *ecriture feminine* is a bisexual phenomenon.

Therefore, *ecriture feminine* demands for a language that originates from female body in order to allow this transformation to happen. According to Cixous, it is "impossible to

define a feminine practice of writing.... for this practice can never be theorized, endorsed, coded, which does not mean it does not exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system" (Cixous: 883).

Hence, it is found that Helene Cixous's concept of '*écriture féminine*' is a powerful tool to deconstruct and reconstruct female identity. It is defined as "a uniquely feminine style of writing, marked by disruptions in the text, 'gaps, silences, puns, rhythms and new images'" (Waugh: 335). Helene Cixous along with Irigaray and Kristeva asserts that *écriture féminine* is non-linear, incomprehensible and inconsistent where as phallogocentric language is linear, authoritative, logical and fixed. These critics believed that the world is interpreted through language, therefore they believe that gender is fabricated via language and that language is phallogocentric. Hence, these critics are of the view that by deconstructing the language the social structure of binary division can be restructured. Therefore, Cixous proposes feminine language. According to her this feminine language would recast women's identity. Cixous correlates her concept of *écriture féminine* to Derrida's theory of 'Difference' which states that, "meaning is not produced in the static closure of the binary opposition" rather is "constructed through the potentially endless process of referring to the other absent signifiers" (Moi : 103,104).

Cixous proposed 'the other bisexuality' to reconstruct women's identity (Cixous and Clement :84). She defines 'the other bisexuality' against the 'classical concept of bisexuality'. This 'other bisexuality' is defined as, "multiple, varied and ever changing, consisting as it does of the exclusion either of the difference or one sex" (Moi :107). Thus, Cixous proposes that male and female, both befit the concept of feminine writing. The critics further emphasize the fact that women should celebrate their difference and marginality in order to empower and liberate themselves from the binary system. Cixous asserts that women can overthrow the patriarchal hegemony by writing their body. Which according to her is, "the passage towards more than self, towards another than the self, towards the other" (Cixous and Clement: 112). Luce Irigaray supports Cixous' view of *écriture féminine*. She subverts the patriarchal binary scheme by asserting that "femininity is plural, multiple, decentered and unidentifiable"(Moi :143,146). Critics like Cixous, Kristeva and Irigaray consider pre-symbolic 'space' as 'woman's space' and the 'experience' which is beyond the symbolic order constitutes "feminine jouissance or sexual pleasure" (Barker :233). They favor the obliteration of the 'discursive mechanism' (*The Sex which is Not*

One: 76) that is in the hold of patriarchy. Atwood resonates the views of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva as Davies rightly asserts that Atwood's female protagonists are 'coded bodies' (Davies: 60) that portrays the abuse inflicted on women considering them merely as sexed bodies.

Atwood does not want her protagonists to be seen through a feminist lens. She resists the binary opposition which is visible in her protagonists. She is well aware of binary oppositions, where a hierarchy is followed and feminine is always seen as weaker, negative and powerless entity. She inverts these binaries and creates her characters against these binaries. Atwood's novels can be considered as feminine texts as she strictly adheres to the definition of a feminine text as suggested by Moi:

Feminine texts are texts that work on the difference, strive in the direction of the difference, struggle to undermine the dominant phallogocentric logic, split open the closure of the binary opposition and revel in the pleasures of open-ended textuality (108).

Atwood echoes this definition of feminine text. She creates open ended characters. Critics limit themselves with the binary logic and hence tag Atwood as a feminist writer. Atwood replies to such critics in one of the sections of her writings entitled *The Curse of Eve* –, *What I Learned in School* from her *Second Words*:

I will enter a simple plea; women, both as characters and as people, must be allowed their imperfections. If I create a female character, I would like to be able to show her having emotions all human beings have – hate, envy, spite, lust, anger and fear, as well as love, compassion, tolerance and joy – without having her pronounce a monster, a slur, or a bad example. I would also like her to be cunning, intelligent and sly, if necessary for the plot, without having her branded as a bitch goddess or a glaring instance of the deviousness of women. For a long time, men in literature have been seen as individuals, women merely as examples of a gender; perhaps it is time to take the capital W of woman (227).

The protagonists of Atwood are cast on the above mentioned notion and her readers are requested to view the characters in new light irrespective of the prevalence of patriarchal binary in society. Atwood wants her protagonists to be looked upon as human beings and

not just as a symbol of women. Her novels emphasize the importance of artistic expression. The most significant fact is that Atwood's heroines are able to struggle and survive through their creative expressions. This notion of creative expression resonates Cixous's idea of *écriture féminine* where Cixous states that:

Women must write herself, must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies. Women must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement” (Cixous: 245).

Atwood concurs with Cixous' concept of 'writing the female body' and therefore she portrays her protagonists reclaiming empowered identity through one or the other creative expression. Through her protagonists, Atwood demonstrates that the female voice can be heard only when she speaks and writes in her own language. Cixous stresses this idea when she says, “By writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display... Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time” (Cixous: 250) and she suggests, “Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth” (Cixous: 250). Atwood's protagonists break through the silence and rewrite their history and thus reconstruct their identity. Her heroines seem to understand the notion of 'seizing the pen'. Women are considered non creative in a patriarchal society. Showalter in this regard points out that:

Victorian physicians believed that women's physiological functions diverted about twenty percent of their creative energy from their brain cells. Victorian anthropologists believed that the frontal lobes of the male brain were heavier and more developed than female lobes and thus that women were inferior in intelligence (17).

Though critics today discard this notion yet some critics favor the “metaphorical implications of female biological difference in writing” (Showalter: 17). Gilbert and Gubar examine this issue in their text on *The Madwoman in the Attic*. They equate penis to a metaphorical pen and state that this is what female lacks. Further, they assert that because women lack this metaphorical Pen which is the tool to write, hence writing is solely male

domain as they possess this metaphorical pen. Emphasizing the significance of penis, Gilbert and Gubar state:

In patriarchal Western culture, the text's author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis. More, his pen's power, like his penis's power, is not just the ability to generate life, but the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim. In this respect, the pen is truly mightier than its phallic counterpart the sword, and in patriarchy more resonantly sexual" (6).

Atwood strongly believes that pen is mightier than sword and even acknowledges this claim in her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* where one of the aunts emphasizing the power of pen tells the handmaids that 'pen is envy'. Atwood is of the view that because women lack this Pen (penis) therefore, they need to 'seize it'. She suggests that women need to substitute it with what she possesses and subvert the patriarchy. As Gilbert and Gubar assert, "when such creative energy appears in a woman it may be anomalous, freakish, because as a 'male' character it is essentially 'unfeminine'" (10). Atwood opposes the notion of feminine intellectual inferiority. Atwood and her three protagonists in focus, namely Marian (*The Edible Woman*), Offred (*The Handmaid's Tale*) and Iris (*The Blind Assassin*) finally gather the courage to seize the pen and subvert the notion of lack of creative intellect in female and transcend the conventional stereotypes about women writers. One of the articles, namely "The Blank Page" of an eminent scholar, named Gubar, addresses various issues related to Atwood's protagonists and to her women artists.

The article focuses on the fact that generally people are more concerned with the missing part rather than what is present. Gubar further narrates a short incident: "When the 'Mona Lisa' was stolen from the Louvre in Paris in 1911 and was missing for two years, more people went to stare at the blank space than had gone to look at the masterpiece in the twelve previous years" (73). Atwood's protagonists relate to these views of Gubar. In her novels we find that the characters, other than the protagonist, are more interested in what is missing from their lives rather than what is present in their lives. The point is more specifically addressed in the novel *The Bodily Harm*. All the people in the life of the protagonist Rennie Wilford are concerned with her missing body part (Breast) instead of what she still possesses. All most all the heroines in Atwood's novel are expressionless in

the beginning of their stories but by the end of the novel they become metaphorical compositions. They are able to express their self beyond the patriarchal norms.

Atwood empowers her protagonists with creative expression and thus, they are able to subvert the notion of feminine intellectual inferiority. For example, the unnamed protagonist in *Surfacing* uses pictures to connect to her past and this connection empowers her to reclaim her subjective self. Elaine Risley, the heroine in *Cat's Eye*, uses her painting brush as a pen to create meaning through her paintings on her blank canvas. Rennie Wilford in *The Bodily Harm* is a journalist. Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale* gives voice to her experiences by narrating her story. Iris in *The Blind Assassin* writes her life history in the form of a memoir and revives her identity and Marian in *The Edible Woman* creates her subjective identity by baking a cake doll in her own image. All the heroines in Atwood's novels 'seize the pen' in some or the other metaphorical way to reclaim their identity.

Advocating the power of the pen (words), Atwood sums up one of the chapters titled "Descent" from *Negotiation With the Dead* with the following quotation from Ovid: "But still, the fates will leave me my voice, and by my voice I shall be known" (Atwood:18). These words clearly encapsulate Atwood's view about the importance of writing for women. She advocates that women can empower and liberate themselves by voicing their own experiences and writing them down in her own language. Atwood explains four victim positions in her writing titled *Survival*. She describes the first victim position as, "Denying the fact that you are a victim" (Surv:36) and likewise she goes on describing the fourth position as, "to be a creative non-victim" (Surv: 38). Atwood's protagonists strive to attain fourth position of a victim.

This position is described as a "position not for the victims, but for those who have never been victims at all, or for ex-victims: those who have been able to move into it because the external and/or the internal causes of victimization have been removed" (38). In the fourth position of avictim she emphasizes the point that at this stage, "creative activity of all kinds becomes possible" (38). The reason she gives for this condition is that "energy is no longer being suppressed or used up for the displacement of the cause, or for passing your victimization along to others" (38). According to her, one must take up the responsibility of one's situation to be a creative non-victim. All the three protagonists in question are able to achieve a non- victim position by giving room to their creativity and hence, they are

able to empower and liberate themselves from the clutches of patriarchy. The protagonists under study are Canadians and this fact alone marks them as victims. As Goetsch notes, “[h]er choice of characteristic Canadian themes is determined by her preoccupation with survival. She argues that the very quality the present demands – the ability to hang on and stay alive – is the central symbol in both English and French Canadian literature” (Goetsch: 172). Atwood’s protagonists are determined to reconstruct their identity. They realize the significance of their past and acknowledge it to reinvent themselves. Their journey to rediscover their identity is both inward and outward. For example, in the novel *The Bodily Harm* Elaine manipulates her boundaries in order to accept her situation and move toward a social and political consciousness. Atwood delegates her female characters with two attributes: to connect with their past to grow and to take personal responsibility for their situation. As Piercy aptly points out, “to cease to be a victim, each of her protagonist fights an entirely solitary battle” (65).

Atwood makes her protagonist realize that one has to dive deep in one's despair in order to find peace and become more powerful. Atwood is of the view that women struggle because they look at themselves as the predefined images of patriarchy. She further says that in order to gain a self defined image, women has to confront to the prejudices of patriarchal society and redefine their relationship to their bodies and voice their own experiences in their own language. As Goldblatt observes, “Atwood’s girls are a vulnerable lot, manipulated, packaged and devastated by the familiar faces in an uncaring, dictatorial circles that reinforce societal imperatives” (278). These girls who are considered powerless struggle to become strong by taking responsibility of their situations as Goldblaat observes, “After enduring, accepting, regurgitating, denying and attempting to please and cope, Atwood’s protagonists begin to take action and change their lives” (279). Atwood’s protagonists prove to be the creators of their identity rather than just being objects of male gaze. In this regard Righey says:

for the female individual to survive, she must recognize and reject not only the pathology of social and sexual arrangements but her own participation in.... , The protagonists of Brontë, Woolf, Lessing and Atwood ultimately achieve such recognition. Each affirms, at the end, a superior sanity based on personal order and the discovery of at least the potential for an authentic and integrated self (127).

In accordance to this, Atwood follows her preceding women authors. Through her characters she tries to portray the struggle that female artists encounter as a writer. The women characters in her novels are able to reconstruct their identity as they retrospect themselves and then focus on what they possess rather than feeling sorry for what they lack. Goldblatt corroborates this statement that, "Atwood's women turn inward. Freed from constraining fears, they locate talents, wings that free them" (281). Thus, it is observed that Atwood's protagonists are inspired by Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine* and therefore they are able to subvert the binary scheme of sexual identity. Atwood's heroines celebrate their difference by giving voice to their experiences in their own language.

Hence the proposed study discusses and analyses the two most significant themes of *écriture féminine*: female body and language in the selected novels of Margaret Atwood. The author in her fiction seems much concerned about the female body. She exposes the way a female body is looked upon and is shaped by patriarchy. In her own words she comments:

The body as a concept has always been a concern of mine- I think that people very much experience themselves through their bodies and through the concept of the body which gets applied to their bodies. I'm interested in where you feel your body can go without being.... Put into danger. How you see the adornment of your body, which every culture does, to some extent, in different ways. Whether you see that as something forced upon you or something that you do of your own free choice. Whether you see beauty as a tool... as part of your stock in trade that you have to use to get what you want. And it is very central to everybody (Elizabeth:187-188).

According to Atwood, it is not only the female body that has to conform to social restrictions, even male body also suffers from societal norms but it is female body that suffers more than the male. For example, Atwood in one of her short stories "The Female Body" (1992) describes, how a female body is represented through a male gaze. The description is divided into seven different sections. Each section narrates and emphasizes women's body as an object. The first section of the story portrays a female narrator describing about herself and her body as two different entities she says, "my controversial topic.... My limping topic, my nearsighted topic...my vulgar topic...my aging topic... in

its oversized coat and winter boots' (Atwood: 78). In the second section, a female voice is shown describing the accessories of a female body. The accessories described in this section, limit the female body and they also convey that the female body is used as a show piece for the male gaze and pleasure such as: "panty girdle...brassiere, stomacher, virgin zone..veil,garter belt...spike heels, nose ring...fishnet stockings..chokers...feather boa"(78).

Atwood addressed the same notion in the novel *Bodily Harm* and *The Robber Bride*, where Jocasta and Zenia are shown wearing these accessories. Atwood is of the view that the male gaze represents female body as per his expectations and desires. Such representation of the female body is seen throughout the novels of Atwood. A Similar description of female body appears in *The Edible Woman* (1969) where Peter, Marian's fiance, forces her to wear a tight fitted red dress, in *Bodily Harm* Rennie tries leather underwear to please Jake, in *Alias Grace* corsets are shown having destructive and deforming effect on the female body. Clinical description of the female body can be found in *The Edible Woman*, *Bodily Harm* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. Initially the female body is portrayed as an object of male gaze and pleasure but gradually the women in Atwood's novels transform and finally at the end of the novel they are able to develop a renewed relationship with their bodies through the female gaze and thus, they are able to transform their identity from object to subject position.

The author as a ecriture feminist empowers her protagonists with the artistic discourse which in turn enables them to liberate themselves from the male defined boundaries of body and language. Her protagonists are able to create their corporeal autonomy and redefine themselves as empowered human beings. In doing so she is not being hard on men as she admits in one of her conversations:

Older men think of my men as wimps because they lead conventional lives and certainly never have to pick up their own socks. The men I write about are men, as seen by a woman, and who knows men better than a woman? He doesn't posture himself in locker room style before her.... Beating his own chest. A man's view of men will be quite different than women. We know about their feelings, anxieties and vulnerabilities (Atwood's box: 130).

She further talks of her women characters that, "I like interesting women with lively minds, a sense of humor and good stories to tell. I write about the kinds of women, but with a flaw or a tragedy. You cannot have life run like clockwork in novels. You cannot have a novel in which nothing happens (Atwood's box: 130).

Atwood's women are split between two identities, one that society expects them to be (passive and caring mother, wife and prostitute) and the other which they perceive themselves to be (dynamic and joyful human being). She portrays women from all walks of life who confront their situations and report their victory in reclaiming their independent identity. By the end of each novel, short story, poem many of Atwood's women achieve the victim position four (creative non-victim) as described in her *Thematic Guide to Canada, Survival* (38). As a writer, Atwood has an interpersonal relationship with language, involving alternating emotions of love and hate. As she confesses:

I think the writer is always both the lover of language and its enemy because any single language will only do so many things for you. It is not within the power of a language to go beyond itself very far. You can push words around and bend them, but you can't get beyond the structure of that language (Atwood's box:129).

Atwood uses multilayered and complex language in her fiction. She is of the view that language is a very powerful tool and hence, it can either be used to dominate and inflict pain on others or it can also be used to motivate and support others. Atwood's writing is complex as she finds that the language is incapable to express female corporeal experiences. So, ecriture feminine characteristic of Atwood's language is complex. This ecriture aspect of Atwood's writing is discussed in the subsequent chapters of the proposed study. Atwood discusses the flaws of human language in her short story 'Mute' from the collection of the *Murder in The Dark* (1983):

Whether to speak or not: the question that comes up again... Another cluster of nouns, A fistful: look how they pick them over, the shoppers for words, pinching here and there to see if they're bruised yet. Verbs are no better; they wind them up, let them go, scrabbling over the table, wind them up again too tight and the spring break (83).

Further, Atwood goes on to say, “the tools of language such as verbs and nouns are presented here as useless objects; speech and communication through language seem impossible; besides, language had a 'Bad Smell' and coming from rotted mouth and the speakers cannot use it until they find a way to wash it clean” (83). Atwood's female characters are unable to express their experiences and desires through the language as language is believed to be phallogocentric. As Irigaray claims, 'The masculine' is not prepared to share the initiative of discourse. It prefers to experiment with speaking, writing, enjoying 'woman' rather than leaving to that other any right to intervene, to 'act', in her own interests (Irigaray's emphasis: 157). But Atwood's women characters realize the power of language and as they feel that the language at their disposal is dominated by male, hence, they find artistic discourse as an alternative means of expression and communication. Body and language are interconnected in the fiction of Atwood. She, like Cixous, believes that the language is male dominated and women have to deconstruct the language in order to reclaim her identity. Therefore, she makes her protagonists speak through their body language. For example, in *The Edible Woman* Marian's body refuses food conveying her resistance to her fiancé's dictates, the protagonist in *Bodily Harm* develops breast cancer and in *Alias Grace* the protagonist uses the somatic language of hysteria in order to show her bodies resistance to the predefined rules of patriarchy .

With this background the proposed study implements Helen Cixous's theory of *écriture féminine* in the selected novels of Margaret Atwood. The Study is aimed to focus two major themes of *écriture féminine*: body and language following the literature and critical review in the fore going passages and Atwood's own inclination of authorship. The introductory chapter thus, is attempted to highlight an introduction of Margaret Atwood; her works, a brief account of her major works and the review of literature. The second section of the Introductory chapter has focussed on Margaret Atwood's theory of fiction and the literary and philosophical influences on her literary career with brief reference to her biography. The concept of *écriture féminine* as discussed before is applied in her major novels to show how the language of body shines through women protagonists and tend to push them to meaningful living from the marginalised space. Thus the present work is divided into five chapters and a brief sketch of the subsequent chapters are given below.

Chapter two of the thesis, *The Edible Woman: A corporeal Language of Resistance* discusses the story of Marian, a young woman who identifies sex and love with food and becomes anorexic. The Novel was written in 1969 during the heyday of feminism. Marian,

the protagonist of the novel, becomes increasingly alienated from her body and she feels distanced from its own internal logic. The Edible woman is the saga of the journey of a women's self-realization through her body. The novel portrays how body, nurtures identity and that how a woman's corporeal experience directly influences her social identity. The Novel has been transformed into a stage play by Dave Carley, a Canadian playwright. A textual examination of the novel tries to examine how body sustains an individual's identity and how women's bodily experiences straight forwardly impact her identity.

The chapter also aims to delineate how the feminist aesthetics have been deconstructed that inspires women for a re-reading of the female body so as to liberate and emancipate them toward making a niche of an individual identity. The key focus is to show how the theory of *écriture féminine* corresponds to the female body in the novel that ensures a distinct female existence. Her protagonist, Marian, is victimized at the hands of two men and her relationship with them reduced herself as consumerist good what she resists through her sordid life. When she started losing her sense of self, she lost her appetite too. Societal oppression found expression through her body as it responded differently. Atwood shows how the female body could respond against such oppression and that is the way forward for creating space for women in a male dominated society. Through the protagonist Marian, Atwood encourages women to reembody themselves in order to reorganize society.

Chapter three of the study, *The Handmaid's Tale: Dynamics of Body and Language In Reframing Identity* discusses Atwood's one of the most successful novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. It is one of her award winning novels. The novel scrutinises the cultural construction of female identity and language. It is the story of a woman's social, psychological and physical abuse under a futuristic totalitarian regime that treats women just as child bearing machines. The author cautions and creates an awareness against organized and ritualised tyranny against women. The dystopian novel shows how women are treated as commodity who are tyrinically controlled for breeding by the powerful.

The protagonist, Offred, is subjected to suffer in the fictional fundamentalist state called Gilead, which reminds us of the Nazi regime and which might engulf our society in the near future, no matter how advanced we have become and how much progress we have made in liberating the women against tyranny. The story of Offred qualifies Atwood as a precursor of female speech. Further, the chapter brings to light the concept of white ink

and female language to show that even under close surveillance and strict control on the protagonist (Offred), she manages to retain her language and her process of thinking through which she is able to regain her body and reconstruct her individual identity. The chapter shows how the heroine uses the explosive language of subversion to reshape her identity. Thus, she proves that her identity cannot be defined by the language of the patriarchal figures. She uses her body to defend and write her own language (through her tape recordings) which is free and autonomous. Thus, the chapter attempts to analyse the novel in the light of *écriture féminine*.

Chapter four of the research titled *The Blind Assassin: Writing as Self Assertion of Identity* is based on the novel *The Blind Assassin*. The novel is a complex three fold story including three parallel narrative strands i.e. the main story a memoir and within this main story is a romance and a science fiction. Along with these parallel narratives, there are reports from newspaper clippings. The novel raises the question of personal responsibility versus societal forces. The novel is mainly about the life of two sister's Iris and Laura. Both strive for their individual identity and voice their experiences through literary discourse: Iris writes her experiences into a memoir and Laura writes the novel titled 'The Blind Assassin' which was published only after her death. The analysis is attempted to show how Atwood's female protagonist Iris, when faces acute intimidation and subservience, raises her voice to fight back against the oppressive patriarchal forces that are instrumental in her construction. Iris, by conquering her body and writing from it, gives voice to her silence and thus, redefines her identity against patriarchal social structure which prioritizes and propagates binary division of male/female and the female is always viewed as the 'other'. The chapter brings into force that how women by identifying their potential and by voicing their silence can punish and overthrow patriarchal hegemony. Atwood destabilizes and deconstructs the predefined gendered identity for women. She skillfully designs the character of Iris, who also represents the real world women, trapped in a male dominated society and struggles for identity. Writing of the memoir is the tool through which she finds an outlet to assert her identity.

Finally, the conclusion summarizes the whole discourse carried on the treatment of two important aspects of *écriture féminine*, i.e. body and language in the selected novels of Margaret Atwood. The chapter also sums up the argument of the thesis by discussing how *écriture féminine* in the selected novels of Atwood serves as an empowering and emancipating tool for women to reconstruct their identity.

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THE EDIBLE WOMAN : A CORPOREAL LANGUAGE OF RESISTANCE

The proposed study focuses on Margaret Atwood's *The Edible woman* (1969), considering it in relation to Helen Cixous's theory of *écriture féminine*. The study is an attempt to uncover the facets of corporeal language that emanate from female body. It further delineates how this corporeal language of female helps women to liberate herself from the patriarchal domination. The chapter discusses in detail that how female revisits and reformulates her identity by rediscovering a renewed relationship with her body and thus, the voice emanates from this rediscovered position forms a narrative of self assertion. A textual examination of the novel is attempted to examine how body sustains an individual's identity and how women's bodily experiences straight forwardly impact her identity. The study also highlights that how Atwood deconstructs the feminist aesthetics and proposes a re-reading of female body by woman in order to liberate and empower herself toward making a niche of an individual subjective identity. The key focus has been to show how the theory of *écriture féminine* resonates through Atwood's delineation of female body, thereby carving out a distinct female existence.

History has witnessed that patriarchy exerts control over women by oppressing female body. Feminist writers or early and modern women writers have already voiced it through creative or scholarly writing against this hegemonic control as Kate Lilley in her paper on women writing observes that women writing is "...grounded in the experience of a patriarchal hierarchy of gender..."(184). Women is looked upon just as a body, an object of male pleasure in the traditional patriarchal society. Thus, women's subjugation in society has impelled women activists and authors to strive to disentangle the female body from the male designed image. Women need to discover their own bodies and identify the potentialities so that a distinct language of female body could issue forth that is not dictated by patriarchal design. It is rightly observed that: "[N]o woman can call herself free who does not own and control her own body.... It is for women the key to liberty" (Sanger: 533). As Cixous asserts in her essay *The laugh Of the Medusa*: "Women's language is fundamentally different from men. When a woman speaks, she uses her body

to support the logic of her speech. Her flesh speaks true.....She signifies it with her body” (251). Margaret Atwood echoes the same ideological construct with Cixous. She presents a sensible and corporeal investigation of the female body in her text which not only addresses the intricacy of self-perception, but also demystifies the female form.

Atwood’s first novel, *The Edible Woman*, written in 1965 on the threshold of the women’s movement and published in 1969, focuses the facets of corporeal language that emanate from female body. Critics so far have analysed the novel from a feminist point of view. The proposed study intends to add to Atwood’s criticism by examining the novel from a divergent perspective. The study reinterprets the novel in the light of *écriture féminine* that delves further into Atwood’s fiction and her literary style. However, other interpretations speak of her work as text of second wave of feminism, though the novel is possibly more substantial than just be a product of feminism. Atwood rather deals with the complex concept of female body as a subversive tool against patriarchy.

A textual examination of the novel tries to examine how body sustains an individual’s identity and how women’s bodily experiences shapes her individual identity. The chapter also aims to delineate how women by re-defining her body through the female gaze can liberate and emancipate herself and reclaim her individual identity that is free from patriarchal codes . The key focus is to show how the theory of *écriture féminine* resonates through the female body in the novel that curves out a distinct female existence.

The Edible Woman is a journey of a young female researcher, Marian. Her acquaintance with several men and women makes her realize the ways in which a female is controlled in a patriarchy. Eventually she finds a solution from this patriarchal oppression through self-realization and self- expression. Marian endeavours to reconstruct her identity. At the end of the novel she gets transformed from an ordinary submissive woman to a inviolable, unconventional and assertive personality. The chapter tries to sketch out the transformational journey of the protagonist through the lense of *écriture féminine*. The chapter analyses the novel at two different levels i.e: the narrative structure of the novel while the second is the analysis of the metaphorical treatment of the theme of the novel.

Style, Structure and Tone of the Novel:

The notion of *écriture féminine* (women's writing) cannot be expounded but, it is conceivable to recognize some of its features as described by Kristeva and Cixous. According to them, feminine writing overthrows the traditional conventions of structure and form, and is composed through body in a non structured pattern. Atwood in this novel moves away from the traditional style of writing in linear form. Some of the observers have mulled over Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, either as a commemoration of female freedom or as a woman activist's challenge. She uses a non-linear narrative and a complex tripartite structure. Here, the author exploits a shifting narrative technique in the three different sections of her novel to give the readers an access to the psyche of the protagonist. In the first section of the novel, Marian addresses herself with personal pronoun 'I' and in the second section the narrative shifts from 'I' to third person singular. The second voice also belongs to Marian, and finally in the last section of the novel the narrative turns back to 'I' again. Marian speaks: "Now that I was thinking of myself in the first person singular again I found my own situation much more interesting than his [Duncan's]" (284).

The entire account is narrated through Marian's eyes. As a distinct narrative technique, she undergoes her character transformation. The shift of narrative from first person to the third person and then back to first person can be deciphered as an impression of her transformation from object to subject. The narrative shift in the chapter portrays the metaphorsis of Marin's personality. Marian's Fractured voice portrays her as if she is distanced from her own feelings. Marian's self-estrangement enables her to generalize her experience and distances herself from it and thus, this distancing empowers her to liberate herself from the initial position of a victim. She starts acknowledging her feelings and begins to make her independent choices.

Marian's language that is in turn Atwood's prose style, is closely scrutinized in order to comprehend the transformational journey of the heroine from victim to non-victim position. Atwood very skilfully uses the language and styles to correlate with the progressions that takes place in the protagonist's self discernment. The linguistic versatility of the author is analysed in the chapter by examining and comparing the language and

writing style in two different scenes of Marian's shopping visit. Marian goes for shopping twice in the novel. First time, in the beginning of the novel after her engagement with Peter and (chapter, 20) second time, after her break up from Peter (chapter, 30). These two shopping scenes metaphorically portray the transformation of Marian's identity.

Marian, the protagonist, goes for shopping immediately after her engagement for the first time to buy some food stuff for a feast to celebrate the occasion. The eye appealing curiosity of the store attracted her so much that she bought everything which she saw. But soon she feels disillusioned with cooking and eating. By the end of the novel Marian again goes for shopping but by this time she has run away from her engagement with Peter. This time Marian goes for shopping without any list and gets things of her choice and very comfortably continues to bake a brightened cake that too in her own image. She bakes a cake doll and dresses and decorates the cake doll exactly the same as she herself was dressed for Peter's party. Her designing and consuming of the cake doll connotes her acknowledgement and dismissal of her submissive self and optimizing her potential to listen to her own voice and instincts.

The novel opens with Marin's marriage proposition and as the story unfolds Marian is undecided to choose between Peter and Duncan, as she finds Peter to be appropriate and promising man but at the same time she finds that Duncan suits her choice. However, the novel does not have a happy ending. Marian is neither contented with Peter nor with Duncan. The novel ends up leaving many open questions on the maze of life. By disturbing the design of plot, Atwood proves that marriage is not the ultimate goal of women's life and that a female's life can not be directed by man or institutions like marriage. Thus, Atwood deconstructs the design of conventional plot and questions the certainty of marriage as an essential criteria for happy ending. Perhaps a balance is ought to be made in life. On one hand, Marian's aspiration was to be a liberated woman and on the other, she was caught between her aspiration of marriage and the patriarchal reality she experienced with Peter. Therefore, she runs away from him and attempts to find satisfaction with Duncan. She fails in her aspiration; her marriage to Peter breaks as she was trapped under the patriarchal bondage. Atwood intentionally keeps shifting Marian's narrative from first person to third-person and then back to first person in order to express Maian's self-distancing and devastating attitude which she develops in the wake of

consenting to wed Peter. The novel begins with Marian portraying her own story. The first twelve chapters that constitutes the initial part of the novel are narrated in first person. Herein, she talks about her personal and professional life. This narration not only informs the readers about Marian's psyche, but, also opens up her mood to the readers and uncovers her self perception. The primary section depicts her feelings and her awareness that something isn't right with her, but she is unable to reason it out, yet she is in contact with her emotions. She asserts, "I know I was well all right on Friday when I got up; if anything I was feeling more stolid than usual" (3). As the novel advances Marian gradually loses touch with her feelings and her body. She realizes that her body and her feelings were becoming uncontrollable: " I was astounded at myself. I'd never said anything remotely like that to him before. The funny thing was I really meant it" (94). Second part of the novel opens up with drastic changes in her personality.

Here, the narration shifts from first person to the third person. In the second section of the novel, she is unable to tell her story as she loses her control over her body and her feelings. Thus, in the second part of the story it's not only the reader who is not able to have access to Marian's thoughts but Marian herself feels distanced from her musings. Marian's self-alienation becomes more clear in the dinner party scene, where she is not able to feel that she is crying, until she finds some tear drops on the table. She narrates:

After a while I noticed with mild curiosity that a large drop of something wet had materialized on the table near my hand. I poked it with my finger and smudged it around a little before I realized with horror that it was a tear. I must be crying then!" (71).

Here, Marian start losing control over her body. The gulf between her body and self gradually increases and her body refuses to eat many things. Again by the end of the novel, Atwood strategically links Marian's self-alienation and the third person narration. It is only in the pen-ultimate section when her clash with Peter is settled, and the danger of marriage is escaped that she can once again connect herself with her body and her psyche. With the union of Marin's body and mind, she restarts narrating her story again in first person. Thus, shuttling between first and third person narration is just to expose the psychological pressure that Marian goes through. Atwood uses this narrative technique just to unburden

Marian's psychological pressure. Critic Ellen Peel argues that, "Alternating narrative voices, as opposed to integrated voices, stresses the alienation and tension between the subject and object"(108). At the end of the novel, Marian seems to bring both subject and object together when she says: "[n]ow that I was thinking of myself in the first person singular again I found my own situation much more interesting than his" (284). She tries to compose herself both as subject and object symbolically by baking a cake doll in her own image and then eating it. This act of baking the cake and eating it conveys that although Marian has restored herself from being consumed but she is still unclear about her future.

Working from the premises that feminine experience is marginal and oppositional, Irigaray developed an understanding of the disruptive capacity of an alternative, semiotic language working in opposition to the language of the symbolic, disrupting its logic and its authority. Irigaray in her book *The Sex Which is Not One*(1977), defines female sexuality as "more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle" (11) than the symbolically unified phallus. The multiplicity of feminine sexuality is not in opposition to masculine unity, but, instead, defines opposition (which Cixous defined as a masculine compulsion in 'Sorties'). Like Cixous, Irigaray applies this physical difference to feminine language (*écriture féminine*) which operates in the same "diffusive, oppositional manner"(11). Irigaray describes this as: "the multiple nature of female desire and language"(11). Further, according to her, conventionally male writing is considered to be linear, coherent, dynamic and authoritative where as, feminine writing (*écriture féminine*) is thought to be symbolic, non-linear, uncertain and with numerous and even opposing implications.

One of the natural characteristics of *écriture féminine* is that it is multifarious and no single view is special over other. As Susan Seller explains, "Language, because of the particular world-view it encodes, represses, excludes or appropriates all other constructions; and thus is the repressed, feminine or unconscious other of language- what language does not say- that the feminist revolution must find a base"(12). Atwood seems to echo Cixous and Irigaray's notion of language. In order to analyse the *écriture féminine* aspect in *The Edible Woman*, the chapter compares the two scenes where Marian goes for shopping and the two episodes wherein Marian prepares the food. The last episode finally portrays Marian eating what she has cooked. On comparing the two shopping scenes it is observed

that the first shopping scene is lengthier than the second one. Marian is so much baffled in the first shopping scene that she is confused to decide what she wants, and thus, is engaged in a monologue. Whereas the second shopping scene is very short. Further, the novel is dominated by food eating metaphor which makes the language symbolic and multi-layered, thus, characterising it as women's writing.

Thus, following the line of ideological construct of Helen Cixous and Irigaray, it is conceivably observed that Atwood's linguistic versatility of her prose style in *The Edible Woman* can be termed as *écriture féminine* as Marian's language is embodied with more of verbs, alliterations and metaphors that attempts to give symbolic and non-linear implications. For instance, Atwood uses a number of reflexive verbs in chapter twenty of the novel and action verbs in chapter thirty of the novel to portray the transformational journey of the protagonist Marian. Reflexive verbs like 'found herself', 'writing herself', 'watching herself' used in chapter twenty shows that Marian has no control of plot structure, it appears as if she is watching her own dream. "She had caught herself lately watching herself with an abstracted curiosity, to see what she would do"(177). Whereas, in chapter thirty, no reflexive verbs are found despite the fact that the speaker uses third person narration yet, she has moved from the position of a spectator to eyewitness. Marian comes closer to her inner self in chapter thirty. She moves from her dreams to the world of reality.

Moreover, the verbs related to food choice in chapter twenty, relates more to the set actions, e.g.: Shot out (her hand), tossed, closed (her fingers), glared etc. There are no verbs which signify willingness or choice, which in turn shows Marian's lack of control on the events of her life. Here, Marian acts like a puppet who unwillingly buy the items mechanically. Whereas in chapter thirty the verbs used to select food do not relate to any mechanic gesture. Verbs used in chapter thirty are related to her preference and aspirations choice and desire :

Picking the things off the selves

She *wanted* everything new

She didn't *want* (177).

Marian transforms from a marionette to an autonomous individual who has the freedom of choice. It is observed that in chapter twenty the protagonist's expressions depend on external rather than on her own desire. For example, in this chapter she takes a list of items that she has to buy which in turn does not give room to her choice and is directed with the list of items that she is supposed to buy:

“Beans”, she said

“Noodles”, she said (177).

Since she is directed by the prescribed list to buy the items that are needed for a specific recipe, she totally stifles her own needs and choice. Thus, she lacks spontaneity. Where as in chapter thirty Marin moves out for shopping without any prescribed list: “[She] threw down the pencil after she had written several words. She knew what she wanted to get” (274).

Similarly, on comparing the verbs related to cooking of food in chapter twenty and thirty, it is found that the protagonist transforms to the subject position. The verbs in the following passage regarding preparing and cooking of food exemplifies her mental state:

She **Rubbed** the wooden bowl with a half-clove of garlic and **threw** in the onion rings and the **sliced** radishes and the tomatoes, and **tore up** the lettuce. At the last minute she thought of adding a **grated** carrot to give it more colour. She took out from the refrigerator, located the peeler finally in the bread-box, and began to **peel off** the skin, holding the carrot by its leafy top (220).

The above underlined verbs convey a sense of violence portraying Marian's dissatisfaction and anguish. These verbs also picture Marian's lack of performing voluntary actions. It seems that she is certainly not enjoying herself. Where as in chapter thirty, she bakes a cake of her choice engaging all her mental faculty with interest. Till now, she had been preparing food as prescribed by others. At Peter's house, she prepared “frozen peas and smoked meat, the kind you boil in three minutes in plastic packages” (64). Then, before going to Laundromat she “warmed up and ate a frozen dinner” (93). Further, “She had not felt much like cooking lately” (166). But in chapter thirty Marian uses creative verbs out of her creative inspiration and thus, voluntarily bakes the cake as per her own choice. In

contrast to the violent verbs in chapter twenty, here in chapter thirty she uses creative verbs that are actually related with cooking. The verbs (Separate, folding, mixed, refused to put etc.) used in chapter thirty portray her creativity. She uses the word 'to make' almost six times for the expression of cake - baking which suggests that Marian has transformed to 'a maker'.

Thus, with the analysis of the narrative technique and language employed by Atwood in *The Edible Woman*, it's obvious that Marian transforms her identity from a victim to an artist. It is observed that language, when connected to self (body), brings a transformation in one's identity. Marian's imaginative faculties interlace with her body and the language, as thus, formed to characterizes her movements to be smooth, controlled and powerful. At the end of the novel, she asserts: "I was cleaning up the apartment. It has taken me two days to gather the strength to face it, but I had finally started. I had to go about it layer by layer"(283). Marian can now distinguish between food, her body and her environment. Atwood finds the tools of language such as verbs and nouns to be useless objects. She finds it difficult to communicate through language as she points out: "Besides, language has a 'bad smell' coming from rotted mouths and the speaker cannot use it until they find a way to wash it clean (Atwood: 83).

The female characters in Atwood's novels find it very hard to use language as a means for expressing their bodies and emotions because they live in a patriarchal society and believe that language is a male weapon. As Irigaray claims that, "the masculine is not prepared to share the imitative of discourse. It prefers to experiment with speaking, writing and enjoying woman rather than leaving to that other any right to intervene and act, in her own interest "(157). Similarly, Suman Bala while commenting on *Difficult Daughters* comments that, "Male geocentricism blinds them to the situation of women" (Bala and Chandra: 108). The similar condition occurs for Peter. Had he the sensibility to the aspirations and feelings of Marian, both could have developed a harmonious relationship but his dominating patriarchal disposition blinds him to the needs of Marian.

Contrary to Irigaray's claim, Atwood's women act in their greatest interest by discovering an alternative mode of expression and communication echoing Helen Cixous's view that: "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring them to writing...Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement"

(Leitch : 2035). In the novel, Atwood equips her protagonist with body gestures as an alternative for language. For example, Marian develops a eating disorder for which her body refuses to take any food. The bodily act of eating disorder replaces language in order to express Marian's physical and emotional hunger. Palmer, in her book *Contemporary Women's Fiction: Narrative Practice and Feminist Theory*, rightly justified this point:

No longer is the Western phenomenon of eating disorder interpreted as a reaction to the barrage of images of extreme slenderness promoted by the fashion industry and media. Rather, feminists have come to understand the eating disorder, overwhelmingly a female problem, as a rebellion against culturally defined experiences of womanhood (28).

Along these lines anorexia and chronic eating disorder can be viewed as a calculated act that show either cognizant or oblivious dissent against the patriarchal notions of femininity and women's lack of corporeal autonomy what is again corroborated by Orbach's statement that feminism "has taught us that activities that appear to be self- destructive are invariably adaptations, attempts to cope with the world" (9). She continues: "To see the anorectic's food refusal as a *hunger strike* is to begin the process of humanizing her actions" (Orbach: 102). The author has used a corporeal language of resistance throughout the unfolding of the events of the story. Atwood deploys a bodily act of eating disorder as a trope of language to resist patriarchy what Atwood concedes in an interview :

It's a human activity that has all kinds of symbolic connotations depending on the society and the level of society. In other words, what you eat varies from place to place, how we feel about what we eat varies from place to place, how we feel about what we eat varies from individual as well as from place to place. If you think of food as coming in various categories: sacred food, ceremonial food, everyday food and things that are not to be eaten, forbidden food, dirty food, if you like –for the anorexic, all food is dirty food (Qtd. in Lynos :228).

Sandy Friedman asserted the same line of argument that any denial of food by a woman might be viewed as patriarchal domination through language. Forcing a woman to consume food is just to force one to concede to male designed language and to accept the dictates of patriarchy. He observes that:

The patriarchal language forces women either to deny their own experiences or to reframe them in male-defined language. Reinforcing only the male perspective makes women feel that the very way that they speak is wrong and that the stories they tell are trivial (Friedman: 290).

The feminist approach of embedding stories from the private circle into the political domain to build up legitimacy has rendered quite easily into the realm of food disturbances. Orbach noted that the eating disorder might have healing effect since, if “we begin to see the anorexia as an attempt at empowering, and food refusal as the action of one whose cause has been derogated, dismissed or denied,” then, “there is an urgency and a strength in the refusal to eat” (102).

Some of Atwood’s critics have evaluated this eating disorder as women’s language of resistance. Karen Stein describes Marian’s eating disorder as “enacting her resistance to the traditional female romance plot with her body” (Karen:160). T.D. MacLulich on the other hand interprets Marian’s eating disorder as behavioural response to something that can not be tolerated and it is a “cry for attention.... [she is] asserting her autonomous existence” (MacLulich:192). MacLulich describes Marian’s eating disorder as a action to show resistance he describes this action as a “rejection of her own body” (MacLulich:190). J. Brooks Bouson labels Marian’s disorder as 'self-starvation', which “reflects her resistance to the cultural constructions of femininity” (Brutal Choreographies: 25). Thus, eating disorder is not an isolated case, but it stands for subject-object dichotomy.

The present study goes a step ahead on focusing on the subject-object dichotomy as opposed to just naming Marian’s eating disorder as a cognizant and insubordinate decision. The objective of the chapter in question is to place this eating disorder as body-language-identity theory of *écriture féminine*. By analysing the corporeal behaviour of the protagonist, and the ways in which language is deconstructed through body, the study tries to uncover the echoes of Cixous’s theory of *écriture féminine* and that how the body constitute to explicate the gendered identity and that the body has the potential to control language and empower women with subjective identity.

The body has the power to control both the interpretation of discourse and empower identity. Through the narration of the story, it is gradually made clear. Young Marian works in market research company, namely, Seymour Survey which follows a three level hierarchy. All the authoritative and decorous positions in the company were held by men. The organization was too much biased towards females that the top floor of the office was solely operated by men and females were not even allowed to visit the floor. Moreover, the housewives were assigned to the lower floor of the office. Marian disliked this positioning.

Through the imagery of the three layered structure of Marian's office building, Atwood proposes, "a metaphoric parallel for woman's place/space in society. The three layers represent three planes of reality: mind, body and matter. The men are in minds; the women are bodies" (Salat:95). This is the received categorization in patriarchal discourse. Marian says, "On the floor above are the executives and the psychologists-referred to as the men upstairs, since they are all men...below us are machines-mimeo machines..." (Atwood:19). Marian can neither think or plan of holding an administrative position nor can she bracket herself with machines. According to the hierarchical positioning of Seymour Survey Marian was placed above 'matter' but below 'mind'. She feels suffocated in the companies system and thus expresses, "What, then, could I expect to turn into at Seymour Surveys? I couldn't become one of the men upstairs; I couldn't become a machine person...as that would be a step down" (20).

Marian's professional set up is completely gender biased. Her job at the company is to translate the complicated questionnaires formulated by male psychologists into a simpler form, so that a common man can understand it. Her job involves the manipulation of language rather than the creative use of language. Moreover, the norms at Seymour Surveys are sexist. The organization embargs marriage and pregnancy of its women employees. Marriage and pregnancy are considered illegal acts for the women who are employed in the company. Marian feels distress and disoriented due to the sexist conditioning. She feels scandalized with the comments of a man upon her: "you ought to be at home with some big strong man to take care of you" (Atwood :48). Despite possessing a handsome and successful boyfriend (Peter), urban life style, air of confidence

and independence, Marian is not satisfied because of the predefined stereo typical roles which society expects her to play. On the other hand, she is ravenous for cognitive and psychological incitement through which she can achieve something laudable. She says:

At times I'm certain I'm being groomed for something higher up, but as I have only hazy notions of the organizational structure of Seymour Surveys I can't imagine what (19).

The only thing what Marian feels happy about is her engagement with her boyfriend, Peter as she feels that he will spare her from her deadlock employment and spinsterhood. But, continuous inner turmoil emaciated her as her body chooses to deny consumable items, step by step. She is stunned by her body's choice to change without her authorization. Her body experiences an unwilling self-starvation: “[S] he was becoming more and more irritated by her body’s decision to reject certain foods. She had tried to reason with it, had accused it of having frivolous whims, had coaxed and tempted it, but it was adamant; and if she used force it rebelled” (177-178). Marian soon realises that this bodily act of eating disorder is more than ‘bridal nerves’ (206). Duncan, one of Marian’s friend in the novel, gives his own particular clever view on her dietary issue. Duncan interprets this disorder as rebellious and comments, “oh, you’re probably representative of modern youth, rebelling against the system; though it isn’t considered orthodox to begin with the digestive system. But why not” (208)? Although Marian is a shrewd wheeler-dealer of words at work but it becomes difficult for her to express her feelings in language. Subsequently, her body disagrees with her thoughts. Throughout the novel, Marian faces difficulty expressing her feelings through language. So, her body finds alternative way to express her thoughts. Marian finds language to be a male weapon. Atwood uses the body as the medium of resistance to this male dominated language. Marian’s eating disorder is a symbolic bodily act of resistance. The pattern of her eating supports Rainwater’s contention that:

...undesirable relationships with food appear amongst Atwood’s characters during the first phase of their metamorphoses, and such troublesome relationships are symptomatic of these women’s disturbed attitudes towards the body (Rainwater:17).

The experience of eating disorder wanes her body as well. As she wakes up one morning remembering a dream: "I had looked down and seen my feet beginning to dissolve, like melting jelly, and had put on a pair of rubber boots just in time only to find that the ends of my fingers were turning transparent" (Atwood:43). For Rainwater, these disturbing body images "evince the fundamental difficulty of negotiating the boundaries between self and world" (15) and are also examples of the process of self-actualization that Linda Hutcheon refers to in her comments:

...we must not always take it at face value, for this process, is not...always presented in positive terms, and when it is not it is usually a signal of Marian's unreliability as what Henry James called a narrative 'centre of consciousness': images of drowning, dissolving, drifting into a natural realm are viewed as negative at first, that is, from Marian's limited, unreliable point of view. Such loss of individuality as is implied in these images of merging with process is therefore perceived as dangerous to her personal sense of herself (141).

In the early stages of this process, Marian's mind perceives the tenuous state of her existence through these surreal images, images that re-enforce her "pathological condition of self-division" (Howells : 27). It becomes markedly evident after, she has agreed to marry Peter and this opposition between body and mind becomes evident as her body "becomes the battleground in the struggle towards self-definition" (Rainwater :17). Peter's comment on food item at a restaurant, shortly after their engagement that: "A good meal always makes you feel a little more human" (152). It is at this point that Marian's body wakes up and senses that she is going to be caged as traditional Canadian women. If she does not begin to navigate a more autonomous course, she will have no clear individual identity. The intuitive nature of her body protests and begins refusing food. It starts with a rejection of steak and slowly adds on to eggs, cheese and finally breaks down to a few carrot sticks and spoonful of peanut butter. She is surprised to learn that her body appears to have a mind, a knowledge all of its own, a knowledge that is other than her conscious intellect, a knowledge that is centred in her body.

Although mind and body are yet to merge, her mind's growing awareness of her body's voice indicates the potential conversation that might arise between the two. This conversation between her mind and body offers an interesting twist to Cartesian ideology that sees "the body as alien...a confinement and limitation...the enemy (and) the locus of all that threatens our attempts at control" (Bordo: 144-5). The sudden and strange reaction of Marian's body is her initial step to recapture freedom. As she gradually finds the nature and reasons for her compulsive eating, she begins to comprehend her own particular needs and sentiments. When her relation with Peter turns out to be more genuine while he proposes to her, she begins to walk away from Peter: "I drew back from him. A tremendous electric blue flash, very near, illuminated the inside of the car. As we stared at each other in that brief light I could see myself, small and oval, mirrored in his eyes" (83).

The unappetizing tendency bears the stamp of her personality and position. It creates the impression that food is excessively comparable to her body: she is an eatable like the foodstuffs she disdains. All of a sudden, Marian winds up relating to the things being expended. She realises that she can adjust and cope up with almost every situation but finds her self helpless to cope up with her eating disorder. With growing aversion to eating chicken, then lamb, pork, and vegetables, she realizes the necessity to understand her body gestures that sensitizes her to win back her identity. One of the manifestations of her oblivious internal resistance is to adjust with the role of the mother that Clara epitomizes in as much as her body refuses to dine with Peter despite the fact that she is ravenous. Both the body and the sentiments of Marian have picked up autonomy that continues on an unusual path till she recognizes and coordinates them. When she adjusts and acclimatizes her mind and body, she recovers her narrative power.

As she gradually discovers the nature and reason of her eating disorder, she begins to retaliate to the gender biasness by distancing herself from her body. By empowering Marian's body to challenge the gendered binaries, Atwood reproves the harsh polarities that structures the society. Atwood exposes the onerous control that patriarchy exercises on the female body. According to her, rather than admitting and confining to the dominating and culturally defined conventions women must re-write them. Atwood's

notion of rewriting the culturally coded conventions, in a way resounds Cixous's view that feminine language (*écriture féminine*), operates in diffusive, oppositional manner.

Marian irrespective of her choice goes to salon just because of Peter's persuasion. She considers her-self to be acting off her own free will. The language of female body is quite inconceivable by men what is made clear through the protagonist's eventful life. The salon episode makes it clear that female space is not a place for women to fulfil their aspirations; rather it is a space to fulfil the desires of men. Atwood's dispassionate representation of the beauty salon is an impression of the examination that patriarchy dispenses on the female body. Ostensibly, the beauty salon scene is a case of patriarchy infringing on female space to control the female body. Marian is greatly aware of the substantial pressure that patriarchy inflicts upon her body. Peter's love making is just a clinical approach as his insensitivity to Marian is fathomed by the movement of hands: "gently over her skin , without passion, almost clinically, as if he could learn by touch whatever it was that had escaped the probing of his eyes" (63).

The representation of Marian as a victim on a doctor's examination table obviously suggests that Peter and Marian share a stereo typical relationship. Marian's body transforms into a corporeal space whose apparent components are exposed to a close examination in order to apprehend her mental guts to administer and regulate her subjectivity. Peter's scrutiny of Marian's body is a ferocious attack on Marian's integrity. On the other hand, Marian could not discuss her likes or dislikes nor she could protest actively for "Women's sexual expression within relationship in general is never really discussed" (Kanika Batra).

Thus, Marian entertains Peter's apprehensions and encapsulates the patriarchal thought of feminity. These practices may lead women to 'utter demoralization, debilitation and death' (Bordo: 9). Marian realizes that feminine paradigm are restricting her to be her real self, she envisions herself vanishing: "Sitting in the bath tub, Marian is all of a sudden overpowered by the dread that she is dissolving, 'coming apart layer by layer like a piece of cardboard in a gutter puddle'" (218). This picture is at first presented by a fantasy:

I [Marian] had looked down and seen my feet beginning to dissolve, like melting jelly, and had put on a pair of rubber boots just in time only to find that the

ends of my fingers were turning transparent. I had started towards the mirror to see what was happening to my face, but at that point I woke up (43).

Marian starts imagining her colleagues as consumable commodities as she says :

They were ripe, some rapidly becoming overripe, some already beginning to shrivel; she thought of them as attached by stems at the tops of their heads to an invisible vine, hanging there in various stages of growth and decay (166-67).

The plot strikes its crest when Peter hosts a party on their engagement ceremony .The engagement gives Marian an opportunity to have all her male and female companions together . The patriarchy manifests itself in Marian who is decorated as per the directions of Peter. Marian has an elaborate hairdo, a 'daring' new red dress, a girdle, heavy make-up, and gold ear rings. She doesn't feel herself to be real and finds herself manipulated. On looking into the mirror she feels her own image mocking at her.

She held both of her naked arms out towards the mirror. They were the only portion of her flesh that was without a cloth or nylon or leather or varnish covering, but...even they looked fake, like soft, pinkish-white rubber or plastic boneless, flexible...(229).

Marian's self image is shattered. She realises that she is no longer her real self rather, she is an image of Peter's wife and she has become all that society expects her to be. Marian discovers herself as predominated by her deadly transformation into Peter's significant 'other'. Marian realizes that she has turned to 'other' an 'object' and loses her capacity to perceive anything. The image of the hunter and hunted becomes stronger in her mind. She feels victimized in her red dress and imagines herself to be Peter's 'perfect target'. Marian identifies Peter's camera to be a gun ready to shoot her. Peter needs to get several shots of Marian alone in order to display her in the red dress on a projector at the outset of the party. This makes Marian uncomfortable, for she feels as if she has turned out to be inert statue implied for show. The blinding flash of Peter's camera attacks her like a hunter. She screams as it startles her. It shocks her into the awareness of the reality of Peter, the hunter. Being shocked Marian aptly likens her face to a "vastly spreading and papery and slightly dilapidated: a huge billboard smile, peeling away in flaps and patches..." (244). This

makes Marian realize that she is entreated into a condition of interminable subjugation in the name of marriage. She feels the exigency to eschew her-self out of this calamity. As T.N. Dhar comments:

Her beliefs and modes of thought are out to a strenuous test till, after being battered in body and psyche, she finally passes into a state of 'raised' consciousness (269).

Marian now finds a confident voice of her own. Marian repents for wearing red dress to the party as she feels that it has made her an impeccable focus of Peter's plans. At the party Marian realizes that Peter has the potential to devastate her individual identity and he wants to dominate Marian and rob her of her sexual autonomy. There by anticipating that she should accept the customary role of wife and mother. She apprehends that Peter is a threat to her identity what J. Brooks Bouson justifies: "As a realistic novel *The Edible Woman* shows how female passivity and submersion in the traditional wife and mother roles can pose a serious threat to the very survival of the self" (231). Marian flees from the engagement bomb shelling Peter's intentions to subjugate her identity. It demonstrates her feminine audacity for her intriguity and her challenge is the attempt to subvert the patriarchy. Basu and Patnaik hold in their paper, "Representation of Women in Indian Music Video" as to the women's potential to challenge the patriarchy that states: "Thus, subversion is carried out within the framework of patriarchy" (Basu, Patnaik:20). Similarly, Marian's escape from her husband is a challenge to the patriarchal framework.

In this discourse, it is the mind that must control the body, yet in Marian's case it is her body overriding her intellect. It is not until she accepts this dialogue with her body that her intellect can take action towards autonomy which is symbolized in the cake baking and eating scene. At the end of the novel she plunges "her fork into the carcass, neatly severing the body from the head" (273).

She feels that the cake's fate would well have been her own fate if she had stuck with convention, but in the end she asserts that the cake is edible, whereas- she is not. At the end of the narrative, she may not yet be 'fully human', but she appears to be on the track that will lead her there. This conversation between mind and body is what sets Marian apart from the anorectic, for, as psychologist Helen Malsen observes in her study of anorexia that:

Women with eating disorders are relentlessly attempting to silence the body and its messages saying body management becomes central to the maintenance of self-integrity, and eating becomes an occasion when the body, something that is 'not me', 'takes over' and triumphs in the discursively produced conflict between mind/self and body. As an object of bodily desire, food takes on very powerful significations within this discourse. It is simultaneously wanted (by the body) and forbidden (by the mind/self). Food becomes constituted as a profoundly threatening temptation (125).

It is in this relationship with food that Marian and the anorectic person, experience their corporeal realities differently. In the case of the anorexic woman, food is constantly craved by the body yet repeatedly denied by her conscious self, while in Marian's situation, her mind constantly acknowledges that she is in need of food, but it is her body that is denying its entry. As Maud Ellman claims:

Hunger depends upon its context for its meaning but...self-inflicted hunger is a struggle to release the body from all contexts, even from the context of embodiment of itself'(14).

Thus, Marian's self-inflicted hunger releases her from the confinement of conventional norms of society and from the stereotypical norms of her body.

Clay observes that by accepting to marry and follow convention Marian is "ignoring the demands of her subconscious mind" (126), or to put it otherwise, ignoring her more intuitive sense of being, that is, the knowledge of her body. When she is finally forced to listen or starve, she, as suggested by McLay, reaches a 'higher level of reality':

While she is faced with the same decisions as before and must search for a new job, new accommodations, and a new lover, she has gained a sense of identity and a new knowledge of self. And she has discovered, in a world seen as alien and threatening, the need for integration not only of mind and body but of multiple aspects of self (126).

Although Marian and the anorectic appear to diverge in their corporeal experience, they are similarly influenced by the hierarchy of gender that has been established by a

phallogocentric economy. Throughout the text Marian feels self alienated which is quite clear from the non linear narrative of the text. Atwood intentionally adopts the technique of shifting narrative in order to project Marian's surge of losing her corporal autonomy. She feels that, by detaching her self from her body, she can escape patriarchal control, but soon she realizes that the body can not be ignored so easily. Atwood acknowledges this in one of the scenes where Marian's body forcibly makes its presence known, it indicates Marian's corporeal alienation. Her body demands acknowledgment. Marian is unable to eat certain foods and thus, she faces 'each day with the forlorn hope that her body might change its mind' (178).

Marian's body manifests its resistance to male domination by developing an eating disorder, which fills her with the sense of loss of self. With this, she turns from a subject to object and the narration in the novel changes from first to the third person. She feels herself to be an object of Peter's choice and pleasure. Marin notices that Peter treats her as his property and considers her engagement ring as a trade mark of his ownership to Marian: "[s] he took off the engagement ring and deposited it in the soap dish...she had developed a fear of seeing it disappear down the drain. Peter would be furious; he was very fond of it"(217). On one hand, Peter rejoices to serve Marian to his friends, where as Duncan (another man in Marian's life) on the other hand, chooses to keep their relation secret. Duncan was a graduate student who met Marian during her survey on a new brand of beer. Duncan shares an apartment with two of his graduate friends, Fischer and Trevor, and relies upon them for his sustenance. Duncan is self-fixated and not able to complete his graduation. Duncan questions Marian's notion of machism and romantic love. As Duncan neither examines her nor judges her, therefore, she feels de-stressed in his company. He appears in contrast to her fiance. Peter invests a lot of time and energy gazing Marin. He tries to control her thoughts.

As Berger claims in *Ways of seeing*, '[m]en act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at'(John Berger: 47). Marian feels uncomfortable under Peter's gaze, and even in his company. The camera which Peter holds in the party, in the novel, is considered a masculine weapon just like that of language as Butler states: "It trades on the masculine privilege of disembodied gaze, the gaze that has the power to

produce bodies, but which is itself no body” (Judith Butler:136). Peter’s camera produces a fallacious picture of Marian’s body that symbolizes the representation of female through male gaze. Not only this but Peter even scrutinizes Marian during love making: “when they were lying side by side exhausted on the bed she would open her eyes and realize that he had been watching her...hoping perhaps to surprise a secret expression on that face” (149). Duncan, on the contrary, is so engrossed in his egotistic personality that he is least concerned to look at Marian. He even switches off the lights while making love with Marian. Unlike Peter Duncan enjoys touching Marian rather than staring at her. Duncan’s touch provides her with sensual gratification. As Irigaray says, “the predominance of the visual... is particularly foreign to female eroticism. Women take pleasure more from touching than from looking” (Irigaray:25-26). Marian enjoys sexual autonomy with Duncan, as she feels to be her real self with him. She does not have to stick to the submissive role of a woman and flatter his love making to satisfy his ego. Duncan contempts the stereotypical notions of masculinity: “I guess now I’m supposed to crush you in my manly arms” (253), same as Marian after love making asks Duncan ‘[h]ow was it for you’ (263).

Duncan is quite different from Peter. He calibrates Marian's perception of her own persona. Being a man, Duncan exemplifies a more misrepresented and strange variant of Marian's inactivity. So, Marian can obviously see her distorted image through Duncan. His personality is not only in opposition to that of Peter but he also appears to be a replica of Marian. Being a man, Duncan epitomizes an amplified and absurd image of Marian because of which Marian can perceive and comprehend her self for the first time. Her efforts to change Duncan is indirectly an effort to change herself. Duncan confesses that he does not love her: “[y]ou’re just another substitute for the Laundromat” (Atwood: 145) but, irrespective of gendered stereotype he treats her equal to him. He even forces her to consider her own wishes and desires. At Peter’s party Duncan couldn’t recognize Marian as she was dressed in a flirtatious outfit and makeup. Marian sees herself in the mirror and finds her self artificial:

Marian stared into the Egyptian-lidded and outlined and thickly-fringed eyes of a person she had never seen before. She was afraid even to blink, for fear that this applied face would crack and flake with the strain (222).

The mirror reflected a selfish image of Peter and an artificial image of Marian, which fades her delicate sense of identity. As Berger puts it:

The mirror was often used as a symbol of vanity of woman. The moralizing, however, was mostly hypocritical. The real function of the mirror was otherwise. It was to make the woman connive in treating herself as, first and foremost, a sight (John Berger:51).

As Marian starts identifying herself with food items and is unable to pose as Peter's to-be happy bride, and hence, she runs away to Duncan in Laundromat. He makes her confess her selfish motive of coming to him and there after, they spend a night together in a low class lodge. The very next morning Marian finds herself unable to eat anything at all, so she strives to resolve her eating disorder. Marian and Duncan both distrust language; Marian visualizes words: "like snakes, they had a way of coiling back on you and getting you all wrapped up" (134) and Duncan feels, "all tangled up in words" (142). So, they both silently walk together to the bottom of a huge valley as Marin comments: "frozen ravine where in the snow you're as near as possible to nothing" (Atwood: 263). Atwood intentionally employs ravines in her works and exploit them as a place of transformation. For example, in *Lady Oracle* Joan sees an attention seeker in the ravine, who displays his genitals and gives her a bouquet of daffodils, this makes her realize that a man carries dual personalities that of a villain and of a hero at the same time. In *Cat's Eye* Elaine, the protagonist, is left to die from low temperature in the frozen ravine where she visualizes Virgin Mary. Likewise, it is ravine only in *The Edible Woman* where Marian realises that she should stop being a victim and should not expect Peter to be her rescuer; instead, she should break her silence and voice her feelings. Hence, leaving Duncan in the ravine she returns to her home and finally decides to bake a cake for Peter.

The act of cake baking of Marian is symbolic of voicing her expressions through body language. Both Duncan and Marian seem to be constantly hungry. Duncan, Marian and Peter have a recurrent connection to nourishment: Duncan anticipates that Marian will sustain him; Marian needs to be encouraged by Peter; and Peter whines that she doesn't cook frequently. It is observed that almost everybody in the novel is ravenous and is a parasite on the other to gratify their needs. Marian and Ainsley visit Clara's for meal,

Peter and Marian often eat in restaurant and Duncan and Fischer are dependant on Trevor for food. But the irony is that almost all the dinner parties in the novel fail. At the end of the novel, everyone practically stays hungry, typically this yearning speaks to the scholarly and enthusiastic stirrings of their spirit, and to fulfill these sentiments they ought not depend on anyone but rather, they should depend on themselves.

As Marian feels lack of her individual identity, she relates herself with her two dolls (a blonde and a darker one). She associates her cheerful, social personality with the blonde doll and her inner troubled self with the darker doll. Here, it must be mentioned that as a woman Marian is in trouble in the male dominated society. The two dolls are metaphorically the representative of the two kinds of women: Black and White. Both are socially marginalized yet, white woman enjoys more privileges than the black woman. The Black Women's movement in America is a case in point. Within America and other developed countries there existed a hierachial position between the Black and the White women, even though both are socially marginalized as women. Similarly, Marian also suffers both the conditions of these two categories of women. Hence, her cheerful personality represents the blonde and the troubled self represent the darker doll. Marian gives voice to her self-expressions by baking a cake in her own image with the shape of a bridal doll and serves it to Peter. Marian wants him to eat the cake which will in turn preserve her real self. Marian does not want to be identified as the doll, empty headed wife that Peter desires.

Thus, by baking the cake doll Marian becomes an assertive creator of her own body. She offers this cake to Peter to consume it; he is able to comprehend the symbolic corporeal language of her action and escapes from there in horror. Duncan, on the other hand, had neutral relation with Marian; so, he eats the cake without satisfaction or pleasure. It is Marian who first eats the cake and resolves her eating disorder by regaining her appetite back. Marian's regaining of appetite symbolically represents regaining her identity. The way Marian proceeds the act of eating cake is that of liberating her self from patriarchy. She eats the feet first, on the grounds that they are the part of her body that she uses to punish Peter, "I reached out my right foot- I gave agile feet- and turned on the COLD tap"(63). Marian gives importance to her feet because she was able to run away from Peter

after knowing his real nature which he had concealed under the image of decent lawyer. Duncan follows her foot steps and starts eating the cake from the head of the cake doll, since his perpetual and muddled self-investigation has not brought any outcomes.

Marian rejects her passivity and refuses to be a victim. She bakes the cake-woman to test and expose the true colors of Peter and Duncan. As she says, "Simple and direct as litmus paper" (267). Marian explains her objective for creating the cake-doll. She further says: "The price of this version of reality was testing the other one"(271). She bakes the cake-doll in her own image, the surrogate of her own artificial self she presented at the Cocktail party. In an interview with Gibson Atwood comments:

Marian performs an action, a preposterous one in a way, as all the pieces of symbolism in a realistic context are, but what she is obviously making is a substitute of herself (Graeme, Gibson:25).

Marian has now transformed to a creator. By baking the cake, she would like to symbolize her feelings in the wake of her experiences with Peter and Duncan. Thus, symbolically, the cake-doll represents woman as an object for male consumption. Here, Howells rightly asserts that the doll shaped cake is "Marian's perception of women's condition and fate as decreed by the feminine mystique so that her cake-baking is both a gesture of complicity in domestic myth and also a critique of it" (Howells:43).

Marian offers Peter the cake as a substitute for herself when Peter questioned as to her escaping the party. She remarks:

You've been trying to destroy me...You've been trying to assimilate me. But I've made you a substitute, something you'll like much better. This is what you really wanted all along (271).

Marian deconstructs Peter's image of her by making the symbolic literal. This symbolic gesture is suggestive of Marian's release from what George Woodcock calls 'emotional cannibalism'(26). Peter is embarrassed by the cake and is nonplussed at this unanticipated behaviour of Marian and leaves the place. Marian begins to eat the cake ending her withdrawal from food, as soon as peter leaves the place. She regains her appetite which symbolises Marian's regaining of individual identity. Through this act she can't change the system, however, she is able to recuperate herself from the harm done to her identity, her

body and her language by male stereotype. She has acquired assertiveness. Marian's body works as a liberating force for her.

Firstly, her body acts as a site of resistance to stereotypical hegemony of patriarchy and secondly, she is able to realize her potential to subvert the patriarchal norms. She gradually starts comprehending her eating disorder as her body's reaction to the patriarchal hegemony. The recognition that her body has the potential to subvert patriarchy finally empowers her to liberate her body from male gaze and fight for the autonomy of her body, which she acknowledges by baking a cake. Thus, Marian chooses a traditionally feminine medium to express her resistance which in itself is *écriture*. The wilful creation and ornamentation of a minor adaptation (cake) of her-self means an inversion of power. Marian picks up cake as a communicative symbol. As Greene compliments Marian's creative skill and asserts, "Although Marian's creation is a simply impulsive, and short-lived gesture of defiance" (Greene.111). The cake Doll represents feminine ingenuity and weakness yet emerges from a yearning to display power and credibility in a social system that frequently denies women of her corporeal autonomy. As Doglus Mary puts it: "Marian's actions in the penultimate scene attests to her bizarre sense of humour, the dissolution of her engagement, the renewal of her appetite, and ultimately, her will for self-expression" (Doglus: 49).

As a woman, Marian has definitely changed from the meek, docile, traditional woman to bold, conscious and assertive being. She has become active again, an agent, a subject, a consumer rather than a consumable object. Marian is a representative of Modern women. Thus, the character of Marian is among those women who are avant guard in bringing the changes in the world, Professor Smriti Singh in her scholarly article, "The Nexus between Language and Power in The Mimic Men" has justified the notion of such women that:

They refuse to conform to the image of the effeminate, docile, silent and victim, a picture invented and nurtured through male oriented culture. They are revolutionary in nature. They are rather talented, intelligent and indulges in deep self-analyses and introspection (Smriti , Singh:12).

Atwood in her thematic guide to Canadian literature, *Survival*, describes that in order to persist as non-victim, one must become "creative non-victim" (Survival: 38). Marian

achieves this forth position of “creative non-victim” by the creative act of cake baking and transforms to non victim position from the position of victim . Marian ultimately regains her identity by coming back to personal pronoun “I”. Thus, it is analysed that in the novel *The Edible Woman*, Atwood deconstructs the patriarchal conceptions of femininity and presents a renewed exposition of female body. By redefining female body, Atwood gives voice to women’s concern over her harsh social encounters and to defy that abuse. Her fiction uncovers the struggle between mind and body that distances woman from her body and forces her to surrender her corporeal autonomy. Through the characterisation of Marian , Atwood proposes women to transcend the male defined boundries of female body and to announce her sexual autonomy. Atwood claims that woman can empower and liberate her identity by knowing her body through her own gaze and by being one with her body. As Marian’s body expresses woman's inadequacy while simultaneously protesting against it by adapting compulsive eating to resist the patriarchal norms . The novel *The Edible Woman* voices Atwood’s notion of female body as a site of power and resistance.

The protest that Atwood manifests through Marian's corporeal experience becomes life-affirming, eventually leading Marian to regain her atonomous identity, symbolically narrated with a new eye/I. To sum up, it is perhaps the changed equation between women and her relation to her body that will strengthen and redefine her individual identity. Narratives are an essential means to establish a culture as well as to share and transfer this knowledge from mother to daughter, from woman to woman. Atwood claims that, “literature not only reflects society, but it also acts as a guide to our own geology that comprises of shared information, and this common learning is not a luxury but a necessity. Without that knowledge we will not survive" (19).

In *The Edible Woman*, Atwood deconstructs the patriarchal concept of femininity and adds a new meaning to the female body. By re-defining the body, Atwood is able to voice women’s apprehensions over her subjugative patriarchal encounters and is also able to confront that oppression. The novel uncovers the basic fabrication of female body that enstranges woman from her body, and pushes her away from her carnal self. Atwood echoes Helen Cixous view that the body is an avenue through which woman can declare her existence. Eating disorder is experienced as corporeal language of women’s liberation. Marian neither wants to be a man nor a machine but a woman who quests for a meaningful

human identity. She is able to reclaim her humanistic identity by re-evaluating her body and developing a renewed relationship with her own body irrespective of patriarchal dictates. Atwood employs a corporeal language of resistance in the novel. The author as an intellectual, tempered with high morality and honesty also urges women to empower themselves through positive re-embodiment. She is of the view that women need to re-embodiment identity by first re-embodiment themselves. Through Marian's physical and mental responses to the changes in her life and her society, Atwood illustrates how the female body can be a possible site for a woman to rediscover herself.

In the present novel Atwood has scrutinized the ways in which women's bodies have been offered as products for heterosexual male consumption and that in order to free women's mind from patriarchal control, it is necessary for women to reclaim their bodies and give voice to their bodies. Anorexia is experienced as a corporeal language of women's liberation in the novel. Marian aspires to be a human identity with human dignity. Marian is able to do this by understanding her body and developing a renewed relationship with her own body irrespective of patriarchal dictates. Marian is able to find a language (body language) suitable for her to rediscover her voice and regain her identity. This is Atwood's écriture feminist perspective as found in *The Edible Woman*.

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THE HANDMAID'S TALE: DYNAMICS OF BODY AND LANGUAGE IN REFRAMING IDENTITY

The Handmaid's Tale (1985) exposes women's subjugation especially, with respect to their body, sexual desire and authority. Atwood through this novel tries to delineate the power of language as a subversive weapon for women to reconstruct her identity. The novel is set in the late twentieth century. It is a work of dystopian fiction that depicts the vibrancy and potential of feminine voice. *The Handmaid's tale* is set in a time of religious unrest and political upheavals at a time when the United States was shattered into various religious fractions and when the New England turned as the Republic. The Christian fundamentalists have executed the President, suspended the constitution and converted New England to Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian theocracy. Gilead enforces extreme gender roles; women are banned from reading and writing, owning property, and earning money. The birth rate declined drastically due to AIDS, syphilis and environmental toxics in the regime and brought about fertility crisis among the ruling elite class, which lead to the practice of using concubines (Handmaids). They were women slaves who give birth on behalf of the wives of elite men of the state of Gilead .

The novel is a story narrated by one such handmaid named Offred. Her narrative does not unfold in a linear fashion, but weaves through past and present. The protagonist oscillates between her former life as a mother and wife and her present life as a handmaid in the house of commander in the Gilead regime. The epilogue of the novel reveals that the novel is the tale of Offred, the handmaid. The story of the novel has been pieced together from the tape recordings that were ostensibly made by Offred as she attempted to escape from Gilead through 'The Underground Female Road'. The novel ends ambiguously leaving many questions unanswered.

The Handmaid's Tale has gained much critical attention. For example, Peter Stillman and Sanne Jonhson read it as an 'explicitly political novel', while Coral Howells declares the book to be 'entirely social and political in its agenda' (163). Most of the critics recognize *The Handmaid's Tale* as a novel of power and sexual politics. The present chapter of the study analyses the novel from the aspect of ecriture feminine and aims to explore the subversive potential of feminine voice that can help her reclaim her individual identity by gaining sexual autonomy. Within this context the chapter examines how the Gilead regime

exploits women's body and language and subjugates them and how identity is reconstructed through the reacquisition of the body and language by the protagonist (Offred).

Since Offred is the protagonist of the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* so the entire situation has been projected through her perspective. Her tale concentrates on "the fate of women in Gilead who are seen and used as mere means of procreation" (Mc Combs Judith:235). Offred is recruited as handmaid to a commander in the Gilead regime. The novel delineates the conflict between the protagonist and the world that sees her as a sexual object void of sexual autonomy. The chapter in the following passages delineates the subjugation of women's on two counts: the language and the body. The regime of Gilead asserts its control on women in such a way that they turn into a desexualised body with an imposed language that robs their free speech. Thus, a critical analysis is given below as to how women's body and language are constructed by the totalitarian regime.

Women's Body and Language as Constructed by Gilead Regime:

In Gilead women's bodies and identity are relegated to the realm of national property. Individual women are stripped of their original names and are re-named by giving titles which do not relate to them rather, these titles are labels of their relationship to a specific men. For instance, through out the novel the real name of the protagonist is not known to the reader. She is introduced as Offred, a name given by Gilead regime. The given name, Offred, signifies protagonist's association with a commander named Fred. So, Offred is 'Of-Fred', which means that she belongs to the commander Fred. If she were to be placed under another master, her name would change to reflect new ownership. This re-naming of women by suffixing 'Of' to the name of commander shows that women were being treated as commander's property.

Women in Gilead were given identity as per their reproductive capability and were accordingly given the colour of dress which signify their role in relation to men. Based on reproductive capability and privilege of relation to men, the women in the novel are categorised in different categories. Wives take care of house hold, Martha's (household servants) do the job of cleaning and cooking, handmaids bear children by proxy for the infertile couples of elite class, aunts train the handmaids and women and those who refuse to obey this system or are infertile are called 'Unwoman' and are sent to the colonies to

die. As Bouson states, “Gilead regime effectively robs women of their individual identities and transforms them into replaceable objects in the phallogentric economy” (Bouson137).

The designation of Gilead women under the control of the elite class, thier roles and dress codes are shown in the table below for easy identification of different roles and a contrastive study thereupon.

Designation	Role	Colour of Dress
Handmaids	To bare children for infertile couples of elite class	Red
Marthas	Household servants	Blue
Econowives	fill the function of all the other "kinds" of women	Striped dress of colour red, blue, green
Aunts	To teach handmaids their task and control them	Brown
Unwoman	No role are to be starved to death	Gray
Jezebles	Prostitution	Bunny Suit

According to Karen Stein, this categorization of women based on their biological function and assigning them a specific colour of costume emphasizes the ‘infinite interchangeability’ of women as he says, “colour-coded in this way, the handmaids become interchangeable, identified only by their biological function, child-bearing” (271). Thus, the distribution of women and marking of their identity as per the male to whom they are assigned vivify the condition of women under the authorian regime of Gilead in which women are reduced to fleshy bodies in the male gaze, not a human being, as they are identified by thier biological function, child-bearing capability or one or the other way as slaves to gratify the whims and fancies of the ruling class.

Exploitation of women’s body is articulated by Aunt Lydia, who defends Gileadean practises by defining male and female sexuality. According to Aunt Lydia, “men prey upon women sexually because ‘God made them that way’(45), while women, who in contrast have no sexual urges themselves, are responsible for curbing male sexual behaviour” (45). The commander echoes these sentiments, appealing to the ‘procreational strategy’ of divinely created ‘Nature’, which justifies and naturalizes male promiscuity (237). Gilead, he claims, has simply returned society to ‘Nature’s norm’ (220) Handmaids are just

considered to be the “breeders” As Offred states, “We are two legged wombs, that’s all: scared vessels, ambulatory chalices” (128).

In Gilead, women are not allowed to conceive subjectivity in their own terms; they are constructed by the ruling discourse and restricted to the male defined horizon of procreation. Women are restricted from all forms of written language and reduced to their supposed natural function of child bearing. Even, women’s spoken words to each other are tightly controlled. The handmaids have prescribed greetings for one another that affirm their reproductive roles. All the salutations and addressings merely portray the sexual functions of handmaids body : “ ‘Blessed be the fruit’ and ‘May the Lord open’ ” (19).

In Gilead regime women have been reduced merely to objects of male gratification and are devoid of individual identity and autonomy, which creates an experience of disembodiment that Offred describes through her narrative:

I used to think my body as an instrument...an implement for the accomplishment of my will...Now the flesh arranges itself differently I’m a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than I am (73-4).

Madeleine Davies asserts that throughout the novel, the female body “is linked with metaphors of disembodiment, a failure to be completely there” (Madeleine, Davies: 2006,58). Offred describes her womb as ‘more real’(74) than herself and avoids looking at her own body, “which now ‘determines [her] so completely” (63). Offred becomes fearful of menses as she considers it to be the signal for her failure to be pregnant, “which have become [her] own”(73). The articulation of the female body as vacant flesh, valuable only through fertility, alters Offred’s sense of her own bodily experience: “I am like a room where things once happened and now nothing does” (104).

Gileadian society not only manipulates the female body, but also ensures that handmaids see their bodies in parts. This altered view of the female body is interceded through discourse. Thus, Offred's records her story in parts as she confesses, “I’m sorry there is so much pain in this story, I’m sorry it’s in fragments, like a body caught in crossfire or pulled apart by force. But there is nothing I can do to change it” (279). Thus, the handmaid's condition is now a fragmented identity which speaks of the post modern and post structuralist phenomenon of fragmentation of identity and the women are reduced to torn surfaces, no depth and no essence. In order to keep handmaids unaware of their body as a whole their dress was designed with big white wings that could prevent them to look

beyond the given direction, as Offred says, they “have learned to see the world in gaps” (40).

Besides being categorized by colour of dress and reproduction capabilities, women were deprived of their autonomy. They were fully dominated by the authorities. Women were objectified as rewards and prizes to felicitate the men of Gilead. They were categorized as prize value according to their fertility. For instance fertile women were made the handmaids and were sent as prize objects to the commander’s households to bear child for them through sarrogacy. Once the handmaid was able to deliver a child for the commander, she was then allotted to some other commander. As Offred recalls in her narration, “I wait, washed, brushed, and fed, like a prize pig. Sometime in the eighties they invented pig balls, for pigs who were being fattened in pens” (69). She is not given any liberty. She is directed to take a bath, given some food to eat and then ordered to simply sit and wait for the further orders. She feels objectified and she is an example of how men in authority are remunerated with fertile women. In the same manner virgins are awarded to the Angels in the regime. Another example of women's objectification as prize are the underground prostitutes who are served as entertainment reward to the commanders and their guests.

Women in Gilead are also devoid of spatial freedom. They are not allowed to move freely. Women of all status are restricted from any sort of freedom and are confined within their allotted space. The wives and Martha’s are allotted the space only within the house. Moira is one such characters among Gilead women who tried to run away from training centre and faced her nemesis. She was caught and then was confined to a space in one corner of Gilead called Jezebel, where women’s body is displayed for sexual gratification of men. The dress pattern, colour codes and confinement of handmaids for sexual gratification in *The Handmaid's Tale* have connections with "harem" what the westerners hold it to be a place of confinement or imprisonment of Arab women as is stated by Nawar Al-Hassan Golley: "The ‘harem’ has been looked upon as a closed space within which females are imposed" (523).

In the succeeding part of the novel, Offred, during one of her personal meetings with the commander at Jezebel, finds that here the female body is controlled and presented more sensuously to entertain men. As at Jezebels, Offred finds her friend Moira, dressed voluptuously in a bunny suit which highlighted her body. Offred learns from her that how her mother was exploited in the Colony as she narrates women’s life in Jezebel. Moira told her that how infertile female bodies in Gilead are treated as dirt and are exposed to toxic and fatal

environment , and how rebellious females with viable ovaries are used in Jezebel as the objects of entertainment and erotic pleasure by removing their ovaries. Moira confesses to Offred about her attitude towards her body as she says:

Well, shit, nobody but a nun would pick the Colonies I mean, I'm not a martyr If I'd had my tubes tied years ago, I wouldn't even have needed the operation Nobody in here with viable ovaries either, you can see what kind of problems it would cause (249).

Offred feels sorry for Moira's apathy, who once used to be not only positive but also gave hope to other handmaids to get over the entire plight, Offred recalls:

Have they really done it to her then, taken away something – what? – That used to be so central to her? And how can I expect her to go on, with my idea of her courage, live it through, act it out, when I myself do not? I don't want her to be like me Give in; go along, save her skin That is what it comes down to I want gallantry from her, swash buckling, heroism, single-handed combat something I lack (249).

It is this optimism and boldness of Moira that backs Offred to resist the wide range of control and limitations. However, Moira's apathetic mentality, recommending her disappointment and self-acquiescence makes Offred much more frantic at finding an exit plan sardonically. Offred wants to be "off-red," and wishes to redefine her identity and subjectivity while Moira has changed herself to an adapted Jezebel who can not be off the mark , nor can she act naturally any more.

The Gileadian norms not only relegate women's body merely as the object of child bearing machines and source of sexual entertainment for elite class, but it also marks women as a national property by stamping them with a small tattoo as Offred remarks:

I cannot avoid seeing, now, the small tattoo on my ankle Four digits and an eye, a passport in reverse It's supposed to guarantee that I will never be able to fade... I am too important, too scarce for that (75).

In Gilead, re-naming, dress code and tattooing female body is used to strip off women from their personal identity and to stamp them as national property. Gilead weaves a mosaic texture to control female and their bodies both spatially and physically. Besides physical confinement and reconnaissance , handmaid's ideologies are also constructed and moulded and their bodies are rigorously indoctrinated in order to keep them "useful". The handmaids are re-educated in

the Red Centre where they are made to watch old obscene movies of the eighties in which women are exposed in different types of compliance and animalization with brutal injuries. Obscene pictures are shown to create an alarm about the life for women outside Gilead and to ensure that the female body is more privileged in Gilead society. Through these sexually explicit movies the Aunts tried to exhibit that how the female body was controlled amid the pre-Gilead time. Different female body parts are shown as brutally abused to show that woman's body is manhandled and aggrieved. This is designed to create a fear among women so that they remain confined and obey the dictates of the males in authority. The Aunts directed the handmaids to maintain low profile. They were even indoctrinated to think of their bodies as an object only to serve the authority. For example, when Janine one of the handmaids tells about her encounter with a group assault, she is blamed for being an enticing body. Aunt declared her guilty in front of other handmaids:

But whose fault was it? Aunt Helena says, holding up one plump finger Her fault, her fault, her fault, we chant in union Who led them on? Aunt Helena beams, pleased with us She did She did She did.

Why did God allow such a terrible thing to happen? Teach her a lesson Teach her a lesson Teach her a lesson (72).

Thus, this affirming experience embosies that how Jaine's assault is transformed into a lesson for her and for the entire group of the handmaids. They are deprived of their corporeal autonomy. The Aunts advocate Gilead's norms and convey that Gilead makes the right and valuable use of female body. The paradox is that the Aunts on one hand criticize the abuse inflicted on female body in the sixties and on the other hand, these Aunts themselves exercise heinous punishment on the bodies of rebellious women. Moreover, the abuse inflicted on the handmaid's bodies are equally brutal to what they were shown in the sexually explicit movies. Offred recalls the time when her friend, Moira was captured back to the Red Centre after her first attempt to abscond from the handmaids training center, she was viciously thrashed as Offred remembers: "It was the feet they'd do, for a first offence, after that the hands. They didn't care what they did to your feet or your hands, even if it was permanent" (92).

The "discipline and punishment" used is to control and manipulate women's bodies according to male desire and motivations. The handmaids are educated and moulded ideologically from various perspectives to hold their femininity. At Gilead, femininity is characterized by docility, morality and self-control. In the Red Centre, Aunt Lydia reminds all the handmaids, "The

Republic of Gilead knows no bound. Gilead is within you” (23). This effective explanation demonstrates the level to which Offred and other handmaids imbibe the instructions of Gilead regime and work as per their expectations. They are compelled to remember that: “The posture of the body is important, here and now: minor discomforts are instructive” (79).

Besides being submissive and self-abasing, the handmaids are even anticipated to subdue their eating habits. Therefore, they are directed a strict diet regime. They are fed with healthy and limited diet. Gilead society controls their dietary patterns because of the fact that their bodies are used as national property. Women are not allowed to degenerate their bodies with anything as Gilead wants them to be reproductive machines. In spite of the fact that the handmaids seem to have more flexibility in going around, they are not given liberty in any sphere right from eating regime to thinking. For instance, Offred is accustomed to the directions of Martha when it comes to food and bath.

In Gilead the female body is dealt with as though there is just a single women body, an aggregate female body. Female body is denied of individuality. Regardless of what societal position a woman has, her body amounts only to a child bearing machine. Thus, according to Gilead norms, a woman can be substituted with any other woman who has the same function (reproduction). The fact becomes clear in the novel when the commander confuses his own wife, Serena, with Martha Cora. As he reveals the death of Martha, Offred reflects his words: “She hanged herself,” he says; thoughtfully, not sadly “That’s why had the light fixture removed in your room”. He pauses “Serena found out,” he says, as if this explains it and it does. If your dog dies, get another (87). “I suppose it was Cora who found her,” I say That’s why she screamed “Yes,” he says “Poor girl” (87), he means it to Cora. The narration of the commander proves that the handmaid’s death is insignificant and inconsequential as women is treated just as one body without any individual characteristic, and therefore, they can be replaced easily. Generalising the female body, the commander remarks that the female body is “the meat market” (219).

In this carceral society of Gilead, women’s identity is constructed through male gaze i.e. of a child bearing machine of household and procreation. Though handmaids’ primary sexual function as concubines is to bear child, the women themselves are entirely desexualized. The question of female pleasure and desire is completely disregarded. As Aunt Lydia advocates patriarchal discourse throughout the novel and teaches the handmaids that, “unlike men, God did not design women as sexually charged and desiring beings”(45). Offred describes the sexual ceremony as: “utterly devoid of ‘passion’ or ‘love’; the desire and arousal of the

women involved is immaterial and the goal of orgasm, for women, is no longer deemed necessary” (94). The pleasure of women is seen as irrelevant as the sole purpose of any handmaid is to produce as many children of as many men of the ruling class men folk. The sexual act itself is no longer voluntary for women, but sacralized and institutionalized, occurring under the authority of men. The handmaids are schooled to be meek, modest and invisible,“ in order to become ‘worthy vessel(s)’ ”(28,65). Women’s worth and roles are defined by authority (men). Here, language is controlled to suit the design of the ruling class of Gilead regime. The women of Gilead Regime are marginalized due to their socio political situation. The term marginalized refers to "individual or groups who live at the margins of society" (Sanjiv, Bhadury: 108), though the term marginalisation vary according to the situation of a social class or cultural group. The condition of Gilead women can be termed as subalterns as the subalterns are denied their right to protest or voice their concern.

In fact, the subalterns, as the post colonial debate goes, cannot speak due to various trends of their marginalisation. The Gilead women are at periphery in the region and Atwood through her discourse has attempted to lay bare the condition of marginality so that women could come to the centre and this could be done through *écriture féminine*, as is nuanced in the novel. Further, the feminist movement and postcolonial literary debate move around the question of marginality. The power relations extant in the society functions as a key factor for marginalisation. Atwood has attempted to showcase the subaltern condition of Gilead women taking into consideration the matter of their class, gender and political domination through patriarchy. One of the tools to subordinate women was language. Peter Barry, in the context of marginalisation holds that:

Man, as the Renaissance slogan had it, was the measure of all other things in the universe: while the Western norms of dress, behavior, architecture, intellectual outlook and so on provided a firm centre against which deviation, observations, variations could be detected and identified as Other and marginal (67).

In the present case, the Gilead regime is substitutive of the same age old patriarchal domination . Hence, an analyses of language would justify as to the subordination of women.

Language:

Irigaray said that the patriarchal foundations of our culture are ingrained deeply in language and that “sexual difference can not therefore be reduced to a simple,extra-linguistic fact of nature” (20). She writes that because women are barred from patriarchal linguistic order and

hence, it can not be justifiably said that they cannot ‘speak in a sensible, coherent manner’ (20). *The Handmaid’s Tale* resonates the above mentioned view of Irigaray that portrays how Gilead restricts the use of personal language and enforces an official language. In Gilead, women are restricted from all forms of written language and they are reduced only to their supposed natural function of child-bearing. Reading is considered sinful for women and is punished by the severing of a hand (89).

The novel reflects that the patriarchy is deeply inscribed in the economy of language as the Gilead regime grants men complete control of language while relegating women to the realm of reproduction and there by, pushing them into a pre-literate sphere. The most effective control tactic of the Gilead regime is the enforcement of an official language where words are replaced by pictorial symbols at public places. Even the words spoken by women are strictly checked and controlled. The Gilead suppresses the desire for language through the official language. For example, in the starting of the novel, Offred and her companions comprehended each other’s names through gestures because they were not allowed to communicate freely with each other in the Rachel and Leah centre, where they are trained to be handmaids. Offred describes this in her words as, “we learnt to lip read watching each other’s mouth”. Free access to reading, writing and speaking is banned in Gilead. To restrict the use of personal language, words on signposts, hoardings and advertisements were supplanted with images and icons as Gilead considered images and pictures to be more safe than actual words. Some of such symbols exemplifies as given below:

Red hexagons mean stop (27).

a huge golden lily is the sign for the Lilies of the field shop (33).

milk and honey store has a sign with three eggs, a bee, and a cow (34).

a pork chop sign directs shoppers to the entrance of All Flesh(36).

a fish with a smile and eyelashes is painted on a sign for the Loaves and Fishes store (212).

Thus, in place of language, signs and symbols are used. Moreover, any kind of private conversation has been censored in the Gilead regime. The aunts of the Gilead instruct the handmaids not to speak to commanders' wives unless any of the commander's wife asks them direct questions and vice versa. Similarly, any commander’s wife generally do not speak to Offred or any other handmaid unless it is unavoidable. Even Offred is instructed to not to call her ma’am because Offred isn’t “a Martha” (21). No one in the Gilead regime is allowed to communicate freely with the handmaids. Therefore, when Nick compliments Offred saying, “Nice walk” (60), Offred feels uneasy and nervous as handmaids don’t expect common men to

speak or compliment them as it was against the Gilead norms. Moreover, the specific language of greetings of handmaids portray the strict dominance of official language and it also certifies that the handmaids are focused on their expected duty of child bearing. The greetings the handmaids are instructed to use also confirm that women in Gilead have to be docile and submissive. The handmaids are well informed that they are always under surveillance that is enforced in their farewell greeting "Under His eye"(19). All the addresses used by the handmaids relate to their body and sexuality. For example, when they greet each other they say:

"Blessed be the fruit," She says to me, the accepted greetings among us

"May the Lord open" I answer, the accepted response (19).

Similarly, images of reproduction are everywhere whether it is their abstinence, appearance, sex or foods: "think of yourself as seeds" (19), "Modesty is invisibility" (28), "Waste not, want not" (7).

In Gilead, men are placed in a direct position to receive, embody and convey through language, whereas, women maintain a marginal position to language. Stales observes that the leaders of Gilead : "highly esteem the values of logocentrism and indeed enact a tight control of language in which the potential polysemy of discourse is replaced by absolutely homogenous, univocal signs" (457). A univocal sign language occupies the centre of Gileadian power, and women are strictly banished to the periphery, barred from all sorts of literacy. Mario Klarer neatly summarizes women's position in the Gilead regime as: "In Gilead, being a woman means to become pre-literate and to follow the pre-scriptions of men" (Mario, Klarer:132).

Women in Gilead have no direct access to the Bible, only selected passages that prescribe gender roles are read to women, and that too always by a man. Even in The Rachel and Leah Center, run by the aunts, the women listen to the Bible on tape, and it is read in a man's voice (89). Before the impregnate ceremony, which is a wordless sex ritual, the commander reads aloud prescriptive passages from the Bible that he alone can access, because it is kept under lock: " It is an incendiary device; who knows what we'd make of it, if we ever got our hands on it? We can be read to from it, by him, but we cannot read" (87). The commander's power lies in his power over language, specifically divine language. As Offred describes, he has something the women of Gilead lack: "he has the word" (88). This 'word' that the commander

possesses is literally a control of written and spoken word as D. Hooker in this regard says that:

The male appropriation of language within Gilead reinforces the fundamental binaries of western religious discourse, which oppose a positive, masculine transcendence to unfocused, irrational ontology of the mythological, nature and women, while simultaneously stripping women of their ability to perform their own interpretations of authoritative texts and write beyond the myths of female subordination (279).

In Gilead regime men had full control over language and women are relegated to the realm of body. Though the women were reduced to bodies only but as bodies also they were devoid of identity and autonomy. Women's corporeality was redefined which created an experience of disembodiment that Offred describes throughout her narrative:

I used to think of my body as an instrument,...an implement for the accomplishment of my will...Now the flesh arranges itself differently. I'm a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a paper, which is hard and more real than I am (73-74).

Offred's words clearly describe how the Gilead Society has fundamentally changed her perception about her body; the body which prior to Gilead was an integrated part of herself. Her body was directed by her desires and will. Now in Gilead regime the same body is not her's as she has no say to it and it has been fully subjected to authoritative male discourse. Offred's description reflects her inability to develop her own subjectivity. She feels that her identity is reduced to an object i.e. the pear-shaped womb and her destiny is determined by the fertility cycle. Offred calls her womb to be 'more real' than herself and avoids looking at her own body. She is now only a sexed object and a machine to produce baby through her womb which now 'determines [her] so completely' (74, 63).

Women in Gilead are denied of all those things which enables them to read or write as Klarer says:

Women from all classes of society...are excluded from any kind of written discourse. These measures aim at giving the male leadership all the advantages of a highly developed text-processing culture and of using these advantages purposefully against the women who are condemned to orality (Klare: 131).

Gilead employs pictographs and visual signs to claim ownership and power over women. The very structure of language is controlled by the state. Restricting women from reading and

writing and omitting written words is metaphorically loss of speech which is even more pernicious. For instance, Serena Joy (wife of commander) was earlier (before the inception of Gilead) engaged in the job that necessitates speeches and teachings to the public. But in Gileadian rule as Offred observes: “She doesn’t make speeches any more. She has become speechless. She stays in her home, but it doesn’t seem to agree with her. How furious she must be, now that she’s been taken at her own word” (61).

Thus, it appears that irrespective of their position, no one has the freedom of speech though handmaids suffer the most. Handmaids are dictated to convey their message in short and unattractive manner. In Gilead regime the handmaids are not only watched constantly but overheard too. They were isolated completely like an open arrest in a free space in order to restrict open and public communication. Offred introspects her own discussion with Ofglen; “we talk If you call it talking, these clipped whispers,projected through the funnels of our white wings. It’s more like a telegram a verbal semaphore amputated speech” (260). Thus, the control of language shapes the gender relations exploring the issues of reproductive exploitation, gender discrimination and objectification of women as sexed body. It expands our understanding of the space of women in society and Atwood's reimagination of a possible totalitarian society in future. Hence, Atwood's concern is humanistic and feministic, both at a time which she proves through her protagonists as they embark upon subverting their subjugation by the creative use of language, and thus, reframing their identity.

Dynamics of Body and Language in Reframing Identity

As Gilead exercises more and more domination on the handmaids body, Offred the protagonist in *The Handmaids Tale*, realizes that her identity in Gilead is defined just by her womb's reproductive capability. She discovers that she has become an object and refuses to accept her status as a 'a two-legged womb' (146)) provided by the state. She aspires to reconstruct her identity beyond the boundries of her body, which is obviously seen in her words:

“I wait, I compose myself. My self is a thing I must now compose, as one composes a speech. What I must present is a made thing, not something born” (76).

This self-realization of Offred of her identity manifests itself first in Offred’s observation of her own body. She introspects her relation with her body before and after the inception of Gilead regime. She discovers that, it is not only her body that has changed due to the strict

dominance of the regime but her attitude towards her own body that has changed a lot. She retrospects:

I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of my will []. There were limits, but my body was nevertheless, single, solid, one with me Now the flesh arranges itself differently. I'm a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and not more real than I am and glows red within its translucent wrapping []. It transits, pauses, continues on and passes out of sight, I see despair coming towards me like famine To feel that empty, again, again (74).

Here, Offred's inner transition of separating her body and herself is apparent. She is shocked to register the detachment of her body from her self. At this point, Offred realises that her body has degraded as an object of male desire and thus, her self realization urges her to cater and retain her secret will to redefine her identity and her will to resist this objectification as mere sexed-body starts in her very body. Offred realizes that body and language are interconnected. Without language, she cannot conceive and express an alternative conception of her corporeality without access to words, Offred cannot reclaim her body. Offred craves for her individual subjective identity within the oppressive Gilead regime: 'Myself is a thing'" (66). Even as she narrates her story, she repeatedly expresses a deep-seated hunger for words.

Offred has a cushion with the word FAITH carved on it that has not been noticed by anyone and Offred is described as spending long stretches of time moving her eyes over the letters. She feels that this cushion is the thing she has been allowed to read since becoming a handmaid (57). She finds a message inscribed inside her cabinet, presumably left by the handmaid who lived there before. The message reads: *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum* It means that 'don't let the bastards grind you down' and this phrase becomes a symbol of resistance for Offred:

...it was a message, and it was in writing, forbidden by that very fact, and it hadn't yet been discovered Except by me, for whom it was intended...It pleases me to ponder this message. It pleases me to think I'm communing with her, this unknown woman (52).

This message mitigates Offred's separation by interfacing her to another women who was subjected to the same compelled destiny. These words scribbled by the other women before her entry to the regime sounded rebellious. The language had its own potentiality that made a permanent impression on Offred's mind. She discovered the subversive power of language that

the other woman created and it rekindled her desire to steal back this language. Offred's intense desire to read and write, to express herself through language, is fuelled by this secret message. Offred's craving for language is ultimately manipulated by the commander, who secretly brings Offred to his office for illicit sessions of reading and playing scrabble. The commander's office is described as 'an oasis of forbidden', full of numerous books that are displayed openly, rather than locked away, off limits (137). Offred finds that the scrabble game which once used to be an innocuous board game, is now as tantalizing and illicit as a drug. For her, the prospect of word making was intoxicating and intensely sensual as she says:

I hold the glossy counters with their smooth edges, finger the letters. The feeling is voluptuous. The counters are like candies, made of peppermint...I would like to put them into my mouth (139).

In addition to scrabble, the commander tries to coax Offred by offering her women's magazines to read as he knows Offred's overwhelming desire to have access to reading. In addition to reading material, upon her request, commander also supplies Offred with hand lotion, another banned substance for handmaids. These gestures show subversion of Gileadean doctrine. She is also secretly allowed the use of pen to write a line in Latin on a notepad. She discerns the power of "pen" and says:

The pen between my fingers is sensuous, alive almost, I can feel its power, the power of the words it contains...just holding it is envy. I envy the commander his pen. It's one more thing I would like to steal (174).

Thus, the handmaid is intelligently pursuing her passion of stealing the pen or, in other terms, the power of words. On the other hand, whenever she is in commander's office he keeps on gazing at her with a sensuous look. His scrutiny is curiously sexual, "making Offred feel naked and exposed" (184). For Offred, it is an opportunity to quench her thirst for words. Atwood's vivid description of Offred's language-lust and the intense pleasure Offred feels while reading, explains the interconnectedness of body and language. During these illicit meetings, Offred is able to step beyond the rigid confinement of the handmaid's existence by using lotion, making conversation, playing with words, and reading magazines. "Women are significant, active, multidimensional and not mere objects of desire and pursuit with no say in the matter" (23).

Though fleetingly, she steps beyond the reductive role of a walking womb. By emphasizing the sensuality of language, the linguistic expression of bodily desires and the pure pleasure of

word-making, Atwood subverts the oppositional logic that isolates the language from bodily experience .

Offred realizes the power of her body and word and hence, utilizes her body as a wellspring of energy that further helps her to affirm her subjectivity. She uses her body as a captivating device:

They touch with their eyes instead and I move my hips a little, feeling the full red skirt sway around me. It's like thumbing your nose from behind a fence and teasing a dog with a bone held out of reach, and I'm ashamed of myself for doing it, because none of this is the fault of these men, they're too young. Then I find I'm not ashamed after all I enjoy the power, power of a dog bone, passive but there (22).

Offred comes to term with the power of her body. She thinks herself as “a queen ant with eggs” and “the vehicle” of others hope (135). Offred taps her objectified body to restore her subjectivity. She now turns out to be more basic as she would see it of her body and in this way empowers herself to transform her bodily resistance to thinking and to the use of language. Professor Kanika Batra rightly observed in her paper how women should make a mobility from her malign state to a state of dignity and the observation is befitting for the endeavour what Offred makes in violating the norms of the regime as she, according to the notion of Batra attempts "to reclaim publicness rather than retreat into the false protection of private domain” (Batra:20).

Offred effectively opposes the Gileadian control by censoring the present and modifying her past. She has been introspecting and reproducing her past and additionally her present under her submissiveness. In this perspective, she has been a story-teller , an author of her body, even before recording her story into the tapes. The composed body along these lines gets converged into the composition subject, and everything begins with Offred's affectability to her past recollections of her daughter and her spouse, and emphatically goals to escape from her present confinement. The cushion embroidered with the word, “FAITH”, revives Offred's sincere faith in her life as a woman. Although she is the realm of man's dictatorial world (Gilead), yet she feels proud to be a woman. So she exclaims: “Oh God, king of the universe, thank you for not creating me a man” (182). Offred's memory of her past sustains her and keeps her alive. She remembers her mother, an ardent feminist, who had participated in pre-Gilead times in many “anti-porno” and “pro-abortion” movements in the hope of creating a women's culture, i.e. sexual and social freedom. She recalls better times and speaks to her

mother intrapersonally: “Can you hear me? You wanted a woman’s culture Well, now there is one It isn’t what you meant, but it exists Be thankful for small mercies” (120).

She expresses her anguish that sexual repression is intensifying and women’s struggle for equal rights is still bleak. She feels that her mother’s hard-core feminism in its own way can be as repressive as the “Aunts” who represent anti-feminist forces. Therefore, she proclaims: “I didn’t want to live my life on her terms. I didn’t want to be the model offspring, the incarnation of her ideas. We used to fight about that” (115-16).

Thus, Offred is not an embodiment of her mother’s radical feminism. She is “anti-militaristic” as she is neither retaliating nor compromising in her attitude towards male misogynous attitude. She slowly advances in her consciousness towards liberty, and finally, breaks the Gileadian subjugation order. As Offred says: “I’m tired of this melodrama, I’m tired of keeping silent...” (275). With the help of Nick, the chauffer of commander, Offred is able to connect with underground network that helps her to rescue. As Malak puts it, “from being a helpless victim to being a sly, subversive survivor” (15). The regime that claims to absolute authority in the state is resisted by the lie with the presence of May Day Resistance group and Offred’s escaping from the clutch of the police state. Nick, the Private Eye of the commander and the accomplice of the underground May day resistance group came in the “black van” to help Offred escape from the confinement of Gilead regime. Nick calls Offred with her real name and says: “It’s May day Go with them” (275). Howells says: “Stubborn survival continually subverts the regime’s claims to absolute authority, creating imaginative spaces within the system and finally the very means of Offred’s escape from Gilead” (Howells: 69). Out of the four basic victim positions mentioned in Atwood’s *Survival*, Offred is “a victim” but she refuses “to accept the assumption that the role is inevitable” (Atwood: 37).

Finally, Offred chooses her oral act of storytelling to resist the patriarchal authority in order to reconstruct her subjective identity. In her tape recordings, Offred tries to reintegrate her identity as a subject, as she refuses to be accepted merely a body within the reproductive system of Gilead. As she stresses, “I am alive, I breathe, I put my hand out, unfold, into the sunlight” (18). The handmaids are confined to feminine roles, and are, thus, deprived of their individual identity in the Gileadean society. Offred realizes her transformation and speaks to the mirror on the wall of hall : “I can see it as I go down the stairs, and myself in it like a distorted shadow, a parody of something...” (9). Therefore, Offred tries to retain her identity by voicing her silence. Through out the novel, we find that Offred is clear in her mind to re-create herself: “I wait I compose myself Myself is a thing. I must now compose, as one

composes speech”. What I am must present is a made thing, not something born” (66) what Offred is determined to recreate herself through her own voice. She was being dictated by the men of the regime who function as a touch stone to evaluate the dictates of what is right or what is wrong. Simone. De Beauvoir in her famous document, *The Second Sex* has voiced the same concern toward the subjugation of all women what is quoted in Younger's article as:

De Beauvoir believed that woman wasn't born a woman rather she becomes one, in that under the aegis of femininity. she is in fact following the dictates of an ideal, largely created by men, to ensure that man keeps his place as top dog in a patriarchal society. As such, men become the standard by which women are measured against (and invariably don't match up to), and woman is reduced to a passive object, whose beauty regimes and supposed feminine attributes confine her to a life devoid of action and thought. Society, being codified by man, decrees that woman is inferior; she can do away with this inferiority only by destroying the male's superiority. In order for women to free themselves from these shackles they need to be made aware that they are there in the first place (Younger: np).

Thus, Offred tells her story to reconstruct and rediscover her power from the subject position. Storytelling becomes the only possible tool to reclaim her body, reconstruct her subjectivity and reaffirm her existence as an individual. As Howells (1996) states, “her storytelling in a society where women are forbidden to read or write or speak freely affects a significant shift from ‘history’ to ‘herstory’” (126).

Language becomes the tool of her body to resist and to reconstruct her subjectivity. Her resistance starts with the revision of verbal control “Offred”, an indication of male dominance is transformed in her mind to “off red,” meaning getting rid of the handmaid's sign of red colour. Another incident of this resistance is when Offred violates the Aunt's lesson where she emphasises that the handmaids are not to think, where as, she does not stop not only thinking, but also she is perturbed to break free of the clutches of her present sordid state. Offred in her bed at nights keeps on thinking about her past and compares it to her present. Her secret conversation with herself becomes a monologue. Thus, the restriction exercised by Gilead regime on her body and language forces her to reconstruct her individuality through imagination, reflection and resistance.

As pointed out by Howells that, “in the text, Serena Joy (wife of commander) is taken by Offred as an important inner space, giving Offred enough privacy to appropriate her

imagination” (41). Serena Joy’s image of the garden reminds Offred of her past life. She says: “I once had a garden I can remember the smell of the turned earth” (22). The garden symbolically becomes Offred’s companion and temporarily liberates her from loneliness which she feels in Gilead: “ I wish this story were different I’ve tried to put some of the good things as well. Flowers, for instance, because where would we be without them” (279)? Further, Serena’s garden arouses her desires which were passified by the Gileadian norms as Offred describes:

there is something subversive about this garden of Serena’s Joy’s, a sense of buried things bursting upwards, wordlessly, into the light, as if to point, to say: whatever is silenced will clamour to be heard, though silently (161).

The moment Offred sees Serena’s aesthetic garden, she is able to hear her “silenced” body. She notices her body voluntarily responding and arousing her sexual desires which were “buried” in Gilead. This vigour to express her desire urges her to surpass her limits and enjoy the vibrant nature around her: “winter is not so dangerous. I need hardness, cold, rigidity; not this heaviness, as if I’m a melon on a stem, this liquid ripeness” (162). Howells in this regard has aptly noted:

Offred’s text corresponds to Cixous’s, where images of desire originate from the human body and the natural world; Offred has become the very speaking subject to constitute a feminine alternative language, *écriture féminine* in Cixous’s terms (1).

Further, Cixous defines such a female subjects as :

I am spacious, singing flesh, on which is grafted no one knows which I, more or less human, but alive because of transformation Write! And your self- seeking text will know itself better than flesh and blood, rising...with sonorous, perfumed ingredients, a lively combination of flying colours, leaves, and rivers plunging into the sea we feed (358).

Moreover, at times when Offred used to play scrabble secretly with the commander her oral speech showed signs of similar form of feminine alternative language. For example, while playing Offred describes those boxes of words as candies, which she wishes to put into her mouth. Offred’s comparison between the two words, boxes and candy, seems to reinforce Helene Cixous’s metaphor of women’s seizing language, “to make hit hers, containing it,

taking it into her mouth” (Howells: 139). Offred’s sudden outburst in laughter after the game and commander's plea for kiss can be compared to Medusa’s Laugh:

Then I hear something, inside my body I’ve broken, something has cracked, that must be it noise is coming up, coming out, of the broken place, in my face...If I Let the noise get out into the air it will be laughter, too loud, too much of it...My ribs hurt with holding back, I shake, I heave, seismic, volcanic, I’ll burst Red all over the cupboard, mirth rhymes with birth, oh to die of laughter (6).

As Howells claims, “Offred’s body is capable of seismic upheavals in what is her most ebullient gesture of resistance to the commander, her secret outburst of laughter after their first forbidden game of scrabble” (139).

Through “writing” her voice, Offred appears to recover two of her fundamental components. i.e, body, and the discourse on her body and in turn, both these two components transform her identity from the object of abjection to the stage of subject. Offred’s recordings is cut short, and thus, the plot of the novel lacks the traditional ending: “I have given myself over into the hands of strangers, because it can’t be helped. And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light” (307). As Lomax comments: “May correspond to a piece of feminine writing which is open-ended, full of detours, and concerned with pluralities and ambiguities” (13). The ending of the novel is representative of Offred’s predominant self-seeking process through her voice. Cixous in her hypothesis of *écriture féminine* invalidates the concept that biological sex determines an individual's social and cultural identity. Rather, she advocates the notion of ‘bisexuality’ which asserts that femininity is not linkend with biological sex in patriarchal law.

Further, she claims that some men don’t stifle their femininity and some women strongly crave for their masculinity. Seller acknowledges Cixous’s concept of ‘bisexuality’ and is of the view that, “women should write their bodies and unconscious desires and women’s writing always challenges the rules of (linear) logic, objective meaning, and the single, self-referential view point decreed by masculine law” (Seller: 4). The oral narrative of Offred in the tape recordings represents *écriture féminine* and it also transforms the handmaid’s identity thus, resonating sellers view. The oral tale becomes a means to transform and redefine her identity. As Offred confesses:

This is a reconstruction. All of it is a reconstruction. It’s are reconstruction now in my head, as I lie flat on my single bed rehearsing what I should or shouldn’t have

said, what I should or shouldn't have done, how I should have played it If I ever get out of here. Let's stop there I intend to get out of here. It can't last forever (4).

Offred develops her own outlook by narrating her story. She records her experiences, reactions, and feeling according to her own stand point. The germination of her perspective is the beginning of her renewed self. The very act of thinking and voicing her story is revolutionary in a state where women is denied of voice. Offred herself confesses: "What I need is a perspective. Perspective is necessary. Otherwise, there are only two dimensions... otherwise you live in the moment. Which is not what I want to be" (185). Moreover, "what Offred sets before us in this autobiography is her desperate struggle to reconstruct her being" (Grace: 196). Offred observes one of the handmaids, Janine and discovers: "people will do anything rather than admit that their lives have no meaning no use, that is no plot" (227).

This proves that for Offred, her experiences are crucial to her life as these experiences make up the story of her life which gives meaning to her life and affirms her existence. Thus, she becomes more sensitive to redefine her individual identity. As David S. Hogsette points out, "writing, or in her case speaking out, validates an individual's existence; it proves the writer/speaker was, at some point, or still may be, alive" (269). For Offred, existence means to express. Therefore, she strives to narrate her story. Her narration empowers her to reintegrate her potential in order to reclaim women's histories. Thus, by narrating her story she recovers her's and other women's voice. As Kauffman claims, "the entire narrative is a polyphony of distinctive female voices" (227). In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred seems to be the replica of Medusa as Medusa's strength manifests in her laughter. Similarly, Offred's oral narration of her story symbolizes her strength. Offred's transfiguration from a sexual object to an individual subject reflects Medusa's image, who transforms from an object of sexual violation to a powerful, female subject.

In the Gilead regime, where access to language and thinking is considered illegal, Offred manages to get the access to it and she becomes ravenous for reading and writing. The commander in his personal secret meeting with Offred allows her to read and write during the game of scrabble. During these meetings she intensely desire to possess a pen. As Offred recall that the moment when she holds the pen in her hand appears so much seductive that she feels like stealing it against the Gilead rule. As she recounts:

The pen between my fingers is sensuous, alive almost, I feel its power, the power of the words it contains, pen is envy, Aunt Lydia would say, quoting another center

motto, warning us away from such objects. And they were right, it is envy Just holding it is envy. I envy the commander his pen It's one more thing I would like to steal (186).

Offred's renewed relation with her body and access to language gives her a sense of power. With this regained power, Offred acknowledges the passive role she was playing as a handmaid. Thus, Offred with her continuous oscillation between her past and present, develops a feeling to retain her identity and her real name. She feels an urge to regain her own body like old time,s and thus, she begins to resist the Gileadian norms through various bodily actions and attempts. She unwillingly sways her hip to entice her commander or stimulates a sense of sensuality, unwillingly though, so as to manage a little scope to hold the pen and access to reading. She starts with stealing something from the sitting room, as she reveals, "I would like to steal something from this room. I would like to take some small thing, [] secret it in my room" (80). Next she wants to "steal" Luke from her past and bring him into her present room because she wants to disobey the Gilead regime by expressing her sexual desires:

I want Luke here so badly. I want to be held and told my name I want to be valued, in ways that I am not; I want to be more than valuable. I repeat my former name; remind myself of what I once could do, how others saw me I want to steal something (97).

Offred comes in terms with reality and realizes that it is impossible to meet Luke. So, she wishes to satisfy her needs from Nick. She confesses her real name to him and satisfies her sexual desires from him. This too is Offred's bodily action of resistance against the powerful Gilead authority. Ultimately, through her audible narration she is able to voice everything related to Gilead- her past and her life at Gilead. Thus, offred's oral recording turns to be a tool of resistance against patriarchal society. She reconstructs her identity by narrating her story.

The handmaid continuously finds her strength through language, creative ability, memory and above all, her bodily acts and struggles to discover a technique to assert her identity and status as a subject against the powerful patriarchal hegemony. Offred's potential to link her body and language, self-sufficiently conceptualize, characterize and express her epitome and remakes her personality against the male look. Offred's ability to reconcile body with language, realization of her corporeal autonomy and her power to narrate, empowers and redefines her identity. She is able to liberate herself from the male representation of her

identity. The oral narration of the protagonist in the novel serves as a means to resist the patriarchal norms forced on handmaids in the Gilead regime. Offred not only resists but subverts the state's hegemony by writing, thinking freely and expressing her desires, which is banned in the regime. Thus, it is through her renewed relation with her body that empowers her and urges her to redefine and emancipate herself thereby; she gives voice to her silenced voice, experiences and thoughts.

The novel states that the language is a powerful device as it is the language through which Gilead exercises its authority, i.e. by banning personal language and implementing an official language and it is the same language only through which Offred is able to reclaim her subjective individual identity by narrating her story orally. Offred is scorned to be viewed only as an object of sexual pleasure and child-bearing machine. She feels that as an individual she is qualified to have full autonomy over her body as well as mind. Offred redesigns her lost body through the content of her tape recordings, as she inhabits the story as an allegorical body. Thus, Offred reclaims her body and reconstructs her identity through her bodily resistance embodied in narration as Howells observes: "The narrative serves to 'chronicle' her own 'shifts in perspective' under Gilead's influence, which eventually 'effects change in her imaginative conceptualization of herself'" (138). It is only because Offred is able to realize the potential of language that she is able to re-acclurate and recreate herself.

At the end of Offred's narrative, Atwood uses some historical notes which complete the tale. The contents of the "Historical Notes" sound quite interesting. They just don't add to the entertainment value but reinforce the point of marginalization of women and the background of the regime. Atwood ends her novel by a male retelling Offred's experience in Gilead. Her story is told by Professor James Darcy Pieixoto in his lecture at the "Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies" which was impaired with sexist play on words and haughty remarks. He enlightens the play on the specific words namely, "tale" and re-names it as the women's resistance. Pieixoto's speech exhibits his misogynistic views. He **inquires** Offred's reliability as an informed storyteller by expressing: "She appears to have been an educated woman, in so far as a graduate of any North American college of the time may be said to have been educated" (387).

He proliferates Offred's loss of personality in Gilead by saying: "Our author was one of many and must be seen within the broad outlines of the moment in history which she was a part" (387). Pieixoto seems to treat Offred's struggle superficially. He appears to be least bothered about Offred's plight as he also held the same patriarchal values to evaluate a woman. He is

concerned with collecting information about commander. He prefers to go through some official papers of commander rather than looking at her poignant narrative. The most inconsiderate admission he makes is ,“it was up to Professor Wade and [himself] to arrange the blocks of speech in the order in which they appeared to go” (383). This implies that Offred’s tape recordings has been exhibited and compherended by a male who is biased against Offred and supports the norms and structure of Gilead regime. Though, Pieixoto uses Offred's narrative to satisfy his own needs in the same manner as the men of the Gilead Regime utilized the Bible to fit their personal objectives .

Yet, the fact that Offred’s text exists, substantiates her victory and her resistance in reshaping her identity. Atwood’s belief that “using language can liberate oppressed women” (Hogsettee: 273), resonates Cixous’s concept of *écriture féminine*. Here, it is not important that how Offered’s tale is manuplated by a male perception, rather, it is crucial to note that Offred has voiced her silence and emancipated her identity: “I am, I am I still, am” (361). Offred proves to be a creative non victim by telling her story. According to Atwood, Offred can be defined as an artist of her identity as the author describes an artist as:

It has always been one function of the artist to speak the forbidden especially in terms of political repression. People risk imprisonment and torture because they know there are other people who are hungry for what they have to say. Inhabitants of concentration camps during the Second World War jeopardised their already slim chances of survival by keeping dairies; why? Because there was a story that they felt impelled to tell, that they felt the rest of us had to know (Atwood’s emphasis) (350).

Offred's creative act of narration enables her to librate and recompose her identity as she composes and reconstructs her story. Writing empowers Offred to concoct her own language to oppose the suppression, as Althusser considers language to be a “ break through to the ruling ideology, it also allows one to recreate and even change the reality because reality is expressed and perceived through language” (139). Offred’s move to write from her body, her own voice emanating from the tortured body and then reconstructing her identiy from the language out of its exclusive experience, echos Cixous's comments on women’s writing and the new language they have to embrace:

Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes and rhetoric, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse (Cixous: 99).

In a state like Gilead where words are completely banned, even the public signs are replaced with symbols and images. The sign boards used at shops are composed of pictures and images rather than words to indicate the items in the shops such as, “Loaves and Fishes in Fishmonger’s- 'a wooden sign' with 'fish with a smile and eyelashes” (212), Language becomes an instrument that enables Offred to narrate her story, which in turn transforms her identity. Thus, Offred’s text is an insurgency against sexism. The handmaid in the process of narration not just expresses her experiences, thoughts and desires but also excercises full autonomy over the language as she adds new dimensions to the words and their meanings according to her choice. In her narration, she keeps on shuttling between her past and present without following a linear pattern.

Hence, her narration becomes *écriture féminine*. As Cixous emphasizes that, “feminine writing is highly stylized,” never simple or linear” because the feminine writer “doesn’t deny her drives”: “she lays herself bare” (Cixous:396). Again she points out that by “sweeping away syntax”(399) in the writing it “becomes utterly destructive,” “volcanic,” capable of cutting through and subverting the official discourse (Cixous: 401). Consequently, she concludes that this “new insurgent writing” (Cixous:395) liberates one from the subjugation of the authoritarian doctrine she further adds:

...it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico- theoretical domination. It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate(Cixous: 397).

Offred’s writing obviously relates to the 'new insurgent writing' that Cixous encourages. Her narration is non linear and the language she uses is multi-layered with gaps in the expressions. She uses the word with multiple connotations and gaps that make it powerful from specific direction to multiple indirections. Professor Smriti Singh in her paper also justifies such skillful use of language as liberating force: “True freedom and equality can be established only when we see the gaps in the use of language and stop acting like the mimic men , blindly following the language of men” (185-198).

For instance, she defines the word “chair” as : “ I sit in the chair and think about the word chair. It can also mean the leader of a meeting. It can also be a mode of execution. It is the first syllable in charity. It is the French word for flesh; none of these facts has any connection with the others” (1).

Thus, she freely experiments with the language and gains authority over language. Offred did this experiment even during her secret meetings with the commander when she played scrabble. She used to compose the words through its sound example “larynx” and “gorge”. She could even compose words which were not even known to the commander such as, “Zilch”. This creativity of experimenting with language and creating new words gives her the sense of empowerment over commander. As Conboy states about the nature of the scrabble that:

Represents in miniature the narrator’s text: she employs many words which reflect her bodily restrictions or desires (larynx, zygote, limp...); then she liberates herself as she shapes and tastes the words that she can substitute for those that have been out in her mouth (‘Blessed be the fruit’... (Conboy:356).

Offred at one point in the novel confessed that she wanted to steal something, and finally, she fulfills her desire by stealing words and recreating them according to her choice that ensures her empowerment:

I would like to steal something from this room. I would like to take some small thing, the scrolled ashtray, the little silver pillbox from the mantel perhaps...hide it in the folds of my dress or in my zipped sleeve...Every once in a while I would take it out and look at it It would make me feel that I have power (103).

Offred’s writing endorses Cixous’s concept of *écriture féminine* by exhibiting her incessant control of her own story: “ she gives three diverse portrayals of her date with Nick, three records of Luke’s flight and frequently questions her own words and depictions” (Katz, Roy: 130). She intentionally does this in her narration to offer some sort of freedom of comprehension and feedback that vouches her authority and her power over the language. Thus, she empowers her narrative, violates the conventions of Gilead, and ultimately, the narrative becomes her weapon to subvert the authority of the regime. It also enables her to subvert the norms of Gilead and develop renewed relations with her body by rewriting her story. As Conboy highlights this point : “Offred makes the body her book, one which she both reads and writes in a new mode” (355). Offred’s narration certainly recasts and rejuvenates her identity. As Anzaldúa states that women or anyone subjugated by the dominant culture or authority should “write to record what others erase, to become more intimate, to preserve oneself because the act of writing is the act of making soul,...the quest for the self” (Anzaldúa: 319).

Thus, we find that Gilead not only enforces silence on the handmaids through language but also restricts their physical, social and psychological movements. The very thing that is denied to Offred is the freedom to speak up, be heard which finally becomes the medium through which she defines herself. Offred realizes the centrality of language to the process of self-realization and the struggle for equality. Language as an ability to speak, to tell one's own story is at the heart of Offred. Thus, the language which is initially an intimidating tool to silence Offred, is ultimately transformed into a liberating phenomenon. As Carol Beran observes: "Offred's power is in language" (71).

Therefore, she eventually works her way to freedom through language which is officially denied. She associates herself with the underground May day Resistance group and ultimately, escapes from the Republic of Gilead to the underground female road to tell her tale. Thus, she is "forcefully reduced to orality, to keeping her diary by speaking into a tape recorder" (Klarer:132). She recites most of her tale in the present tense, giving it the immediacy of direct experience. Offred's voice on cassette tapes serve as records of an emergence from silence. As Verwaayen comments: "she 'acts' through the power of her words through her memory, and voice which resist the ideology of repression" (Verwaayen:46). Thus, she fights by breaking the imposed codes of silence and inscribing herself into history. As Cixous says:

...an act that will be marked by woman's seizing the occasion to speak, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based on her suppression (Cixous:338).

The manuscript of *The Handmaid's Tale* is a reconstruction of voice recordings of Offred. It is through "such technologies that Offred commits her most subversive act: she reports her narrative"(Caminero-Santangelo: 33). She uses language : as 'revolutionary potential' as 'subversive weapon' to reclaim her individual identity and to overthrow absolute authority of the Republic of Gilead. Thus, *The Handmaid's Tale* is designed to illustrate how language can be deliberately cultivated to question the power structures. Hence, *The Handmaid's Tale* is, undoubtedly, Margaret Atwood's premier example of *écriture féminine* what the protagonist has put into practise. In order to portray that even under strict physical, personal, social and psychological hegemony, Offred manages to regain her language. Atwood in this novel counts on Cixous's metaphors of "white ink/ mother's milk for female writing" (Siksu, 2006:77) or *écriture féminine*. An oration by a protagonist revealing patriarchal order from a female gaze and then documenting it as audio tape recordings in order to retain the vitality of her experiences; it is a revolutionary act on the part of a dystopian heroine. As Offred braces her

personality which was shaken by Gilead standards, and her language being an integral part of her identity; she turns out to be noticeably more grounded, vibrant and more powerful. Fortunately, she has not lost her will to overcome, nor she has remained passive like other women. She is one among those heroines of all the ages to bear the torch of freedom whenever there is oppression and subjugation against women. Such examples galore in the history of human civilization. She is also a mouth piece of liberal feminism as she believes in human freedom and all women are to be treated as human beings first before any gendered identity.

A woman must not be looked at through a male gaze and with what suits a male taste, rather, she should have her absolute autonomy as to decide her own course of action. Offred has not given up being subjugated. She gathered enough strength, used her human intelligence and fought back. Her oration proves to be revolutionary as free use of language was banned in Gilead regime. Thus, her narration displays her revolutionary urge. Offred surpasses the strict rules of Gileadian authority by exploiting her language to denounce the dominance of regime and by expressing her sexual desire and making relation with Nick. Offred subverts the accepted social dictum enforced on her and proves the potential of language. Her sexual desire for Nick is also her language of autonomy as so far she was only a body with a womb, an exposure for erotic pleasure of the dominant males and finally, she was used as a passive tool of sexual gratification of the males as a wordless ritual! She had no say to it except tolerating the torture passively as if she had no desires, no mind, or pleasure and pain. Her appeal to Nick is the expression of her self assertion and through him she achieves the larger goal of removing the shackles of slavery.

Offred as well as other handmaids discover unofficial means to interact among themselves in the Red Center, the brothel Jezbel, and during the strolls outside the officers homes. It is exactly this female talk that keeps them mentally and physically alive in the state where they are physically, sexually and psychologically exploited and abused. They were rendered underprivileged for the right to read, write and educate themselves except parroting the dictates as desired and designed by the authority. Offred with her narration not just finds an equation to recover her identity; additionally, she finds the method for safeguarding her narration for the era's to come so as to set an example of a kind of protestation of the past occasions. Her narration, as an incident of the past, engraves on the pages of history as "her-story" and will turn to be the part of the social inheritance for the future generations. Offred relocates herself from the confined space to open free space from which she and other women in the novel were sequestered.

Margaret Atwood through *The Handmaid's Tale* mirrors Cixous's idea of *écriture féminine* wherein, Cixous claims that writing enables woman to "return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display" (Cixous:395). Offred's story fills the gap between her dismantled body and her smashed self and makes them one. Thus, her narration becomes instrumental to reconstruct and liberate her body, which had so far been detracted from her, rendering her voiceless and frail. By portraying her story, Offred reproduces her body and recreates her identity. Atwood through her protagonist (Offred) advocates the dynamics of language and body to reframe identity. In the novel, Atwood uncovers the power of language and its quality of empowering and liberating the heroine to reclaim her self-autonomy, and thus, reconstruct her subjective identity in an authoritative patriarchal society. Offred the protagonist of the novel do not let herself to be defined by the language of the patriarchal figures rather, she uses her body to retain herself and write the language of her own which is free and autonomous.

Thus, *The Handmaid's Tale* is a challenge to traditional values. It is also a recognition to the victimized women of the societal structures that cause women's oppression are arbitrary. Therefore, any kind of oppression is a subject to change. In this way, Offred tells us in her cautionary tale that women should understand themselves and express their own languages that can be a tool to survival and that remains as a canonization of feminism. Offred, the handmaid never stops "judging her world, reading its rewritten language for fractured signs of hope" (Barkowski : 158). She triumphs as the author of her own story.

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THE BLIND ASSASSIN: WRITING AS A SELF ASSERTION OF IDENTITY

Women have been oppressed for centuries. The oppression has not only been practical, i.e., referring to everyday practices, but also symbolical through the use of language. The sixties has been an active decade for women's liberation movements in all spheres, including discursive practices. The study of discourse by French intellectuals has proved that language tended to represent male standards which promoted female submission and repression. Thus, it was difficult for women to emerge as an individual identity. Language becomes an empowering or liberating agency that enables women to reclaim power over their bodies, achieve self-autonomy, and thus, reconfigures their identity in the society. Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* (2000) is one such novel that portrays writing as an empowering and liberating agency for females.

The present chapter seeks to delineate how female revisits and reformulates her Image through writing her own discourse in which the female protagonist in the *The Blind Assassin* uses writing as a tool of empowerment. As Arora et.al asserts in her paper that, "It elaborates on the vicissitudes of life of Iris, the female protagonist of Atwood. She appropriates her voice to fight back against the oppressive patriarchal forces that are instrumental in her harassment and subordination" (475). The proposed study is significant as it focuses on retelling of the history of the self through the use of language that comes from the exclusive experiences of women and free from any male dictates. This ensures a woman to assert her identity while pushing her to the centre, and in turn, it is recognised as subject.

The methodology applied in the present study is analytical and deconstructive. Extant feminist literary theories have also been contrasted contextually. The study endeavours to show that women have been capable of identifying their unique potential and their writing back can overthrow patriarchal hegemony. The study also attempts to show that Iris, the protagonist, by conquering her body and then writing from it, defeats her silence and deconstructs her identity over the social structure, which, so far has prioritized and propagated binary division of male/female and in which the female is always viewed as the 'other'. Atwood destabilizes and deconstructs the gendered identity prevalent for women so

far by letting the protagonist write her memoir which paves her way to transcend from the subordinate position of victim to that of independent subject with distinctive identity. The voice that emanates while writing from the body has made explicit so many truths that otherwise would have remained unnoticed, hence reconfiguring Self.

Margret Atwood's, Booker Prize (2000) winning novel *The Blind Assassin* spans over the decades between the First World War and the present millennium. Although the plot of the novel is set in Canada primarily and it is narrated from the present day, it covers events that span the entire 20th century and moulds several narratives into one story. Focusing on a woman attempting to unravel the mysteries of her sister's death in 1945, it pulls the reader into a complex narrative related to a novel published by the deceased character and a story within the story. Through the protagonist, Iris Chase, the readers are pulled into her sister's mysterious world as the book explores the patterns of oppression that surrounds female characters in the novel and to the female community at large. It emphasizes that female writing as an agency can ensure self-autonomy.

The novel begins with Iris Chase recalling her childhood with her long-deceased sister Laura, who perished in a car crash back in 1945. The two grew up in a small town in Southern Ontario. Although, they were fairly well-off, their mother was dead and their father, Captain Norval Chase, was an injured World War-I veteran who struggled with depression and alcoholism. Iris later on married a Toronto based businessman named Richard Griffen, a cold and ruthless man with political ambitions. However, she was haunted by her sister's mysterious death for whole life ,which is reflected through the novel within the novel written by Laura before her death and later published by Iris.

The novel within the novel takes the form of a Romantic novel about the real life of Chase family with an over lay of fiction. It focuses on Alex Thomas, a young political radical, fugitive, and an author of pulp science fiction who intersects with both Laura and Iris in mysterious ways. This novel itself contains a story within the story that takes the form of one of Alex's own stories which is the eponymous of *The Blind Assassin*. Reading this eponymous fiction is like a story of an Arabian Nights that contains the inspired tale of a cruel society where slavery, child abuse, and ritual sacrifices are common, and the blinded children who become the killers, working against the interests of the tyrants takes the charge of the system.

The novel unfolds as a gradual revelation illuminating both Iris's childhood and her life in the present day before it begins unfolding the mysteries of both the sisters' lives around the time of the Second World War and the story that led to Laura's suicide. As the events of the novel within a novel become more obviously inspired by the real events in the sisters' lives, it becomes clear that the protagonist of the novel within a novel is assumed to be Laura, but the story is actually based on the life of Iris. While Laura did have a romance with Alex Thomas, it is revealed that *The Blind Assassin* was actually written by Iris, based on her affair with Alex in which she sought to escape from her unhappy marriage to Richard Griffen. However, she and Alex were torn apart when Alex was killed in the war, and Laura committed suicide being unable to bear the shock. Iris chose to publish the work in Laura's name as she found her life absurd without her husband and her sister who were her emotional moorings.

The book exposes the truth regarding the facts of Iris' marriage. While mourning the death of Laura, Iris acknowledges through her late sister's diaries that her husband Richard had been assaulting Laura. He had been coercing Laura admonishing her to be silent of his ghastly act, or else, he would hand over her fugitive boy friend Alex to the authorities. Iris decides to flee with her young daughter Aimee, leaving Richard at bay. She threatens to reveal her husband's dirty act of molestating her sister Laura. He also forced her sister to get an abortion. Although Iris does escape her monstrous husband, it costs her most of her friends around and creates an estrangement between her and her daughter Aimee. Aimee was still in a puzzle thinking the rationality of her mother's pulling her away from her father even at her adult stage. Richard later commits suicide, being unable to digest the fact that Alex Thomas loomed so large in the hearts of both the women whom he viewed as his property. The book ends with Iris passing through her old age. Her reality of life, however, is found in a personal history, which she leaves to her granddaughter.

Structurally, *The Blind Assassin* is a three-layered novel. The first layer is the layer of Iris Chase's Memoir, the second is the inner layer of Chase's Science Fiction and the third is the layer of cultural domain. The central story of the novel is the diary composed by Iris Chase in her old age. The main story encompasses two more stories within it: one is the romance fiction written by Iris under the disguised name of her sister Laura. This romance fiction is about the anonymous lovers whose characters are uncovered as Iris and Alex Thomas at the end of the novel. The second story is that of a science fiction narrated by Alex Thomas about the conciliatory virgins. The plot of the novel is complex as Howells points out that, "there is continual blurring of borders not only in fiction and Iris's real life

memoir, but also between Sakiel-Norn fantasy and the lives of two lovers in Toronto” (165). The novel has triggered a good number of critical responses due to its unique structure.

Ruth Parkin Gounelas has studied the aspect of psychoanalysis of duplicity in the novel. She argues that the novel is positioned between conscious and unconscious minds. According to her, it is an endeavor to understand what occurred between Iris and her sister, Laura. Iris is ignorant that she has one way or the other submitted a loathsome demonstration of brutality bringing about Laura's demise. It hollows out her story and abandons her like an exhausted shell or, a skeleton whose bones throb. Vanitha in *Shifting Balances in Margaret Atwood's The Blind Assassin* (2007) finds out the magic realism as a mode of writing in post-colonial mental frame work. As a postcolonial writer, Atwood brings the magic, intuitive and mythic world view of the ethnic past of the settlers back to the centre, thereby creating a space to voice the voiceless. The confrontation between objectivity and subjectivity marks a shift of interest from the things to its image. Chung hao Ku (2004) in his study *Eating, cleaning, and writing: Female Abjection and subjectivity in the Blind Assassin*, explicates women's transformation from the position of object to the stage of subjectivity with an emphasis on the stomatic and literary limits. It centres on the power dynamics of food and eating.

Sharon Rose Wilson (2003) studied the blindness and survival in Atwood's selected novels. Sherrill Grace in her book *Violent Duality* (1994) is concern with Atwood's violent duality. She looks at Atwood's dynamics of violent duality as a function of the creative act. Coral Ann Howells (1984) in her writings discusses Atwood as a poet, a colonial writer and a feminist. She talks about the national identity and environmental issues related to ecology and pollution as they are reflected in Atwood's fiction. Coral Ann Howells calls *The Blind Assassin* a “strangely striated novel, in which there is continual blurring of borders not only between fiction and Iris's real life memoir, but also between the Sakiel-Norn fantasy and the lives of the two lovers in Toronto” (165). Sullivan L Dale portrays *The Blind Assassin* (2009) as the mystery of Godliness. Pauline Das (2004) analysed the three layered structure of the novel. He compares the three layered story to the three levels: mind, body and matter. where, the men are considered to be minds and the women to be bodies. According to Puline this hierarchical distribution defines woman's place as above “matter” but below ‘mind’ (57).

Andrews in his "A Review of *The Blind Assassin*" (2002) explores the significant themes in the novel. According to Ruth Parkin Gounlas (2004), "The novel is full of things, sharply visualized things with colour and texture smashed over the pages, often in a gratuitous, wasteful way" (685). Subhadra Bhaskaran studied "The intersection of History and Fiction in Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* and Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*" (2003) shows the historicity of the text and textuality of history. Zai Whitaker (2001) argues that the success of *The Blind Assassin* is "Naturally the story and the language, first, but there is also a kind of strategic hiding and unravelling, a crouching and springing" (26). Lorna Sage reviewed the "sisterly love and betrayal of Iris and Laura" (7).

The present chapter discusses *The Blind Assassin* in the light of *écriture féminine* as from the literature review, it is observed that there has not been any considerable work on the topic. Thus, the study explores that how writing serves as an avenue for self-assertion of female identity justifying *écriture féminine* in the novels of Atwood. The study focuses on the female writings in the novel in order to delineate that woman can rewrite histories and can mould their identity and self- autonomy by writing in their own language.

Before I discuss how female writing in this novel could reconfigure female identity, and rectify the symbolic order, I will very briefly address Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine* while touching upon the points that justifies the hypothetical ground for the chapter.

In her political declaration "The Laugh of the Medusa" Cixous, however opposes to define *écriture féminine*, but she mentions its two facets: first, *écriture féminine* is an approach to reclaim the female body from phallogocentric belief system as she claims "[b]y writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display" (250). Secondly, in Cixous's view, *écriture féminine* is a tool to voice differences, "[a]n act that will [...] be marked by woman's *seizing* the occasion to *speak*, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based on her suppression" (250). In other words, Cixous opposes the traditional concept where writing is generally treated to be exclusively men's privilege. She claims that *écriture féminine* is rather bisexual. It can equally be used by men and women. Emphasizing the synchronization between a pregnant woman and her fetus, she claims that *écriture féminine* is needed "to achieve harmony between self and m/other and acknowledgement of differences" (254, 262).

Therefore, what Atwood attempts through her protagonists is a distinctive language by women that enables their empowerment. The same attempt is made by Cixous through her scholarly essay. Even all the feminist or humanist writers in the preceding eras have vouched that women must rise to the occasion against the age old patriarchal hegemony and a counter discourse in the form of women writing can serve the purpose. In this regard, Anita Singh in her observation regarding women writing in contemporary Indian English fiction notes the characteristics of woman writing as:

They celebrate their defiance of norms and boundaries and expose its constructed nature, They vocalize their experiences and thereby delegitimize the culture of silence. They question deep structures of sexual politics. They aim to create a resistance discourse. They deconstruct myths that demonize women. Their writings flaunt a valorization of their bodies. This 'womanspeak' inserts the hidden narrative of women's sexuality into the typology of culture. Their recognition of the radical interconnectedness of beings. They are alert to an ecological consciousness which underlines their writings (Singh:15).

So, the concern of Cixous's *écriture féminine*, Atwood's inspiration on women writing for Canadian women, traits of Indian women fiction and so forth echo the commonality of expression across the major parts of the world.

Helen Cixous's idea of *écriture féminine* (female writing) has a colossal effect in the development of gender identity. Waugh explains it as, "a uniquely feminine style of writing, marked by disruptions in the text, gaps, silences, puns, rhythms and new images" (335). Helen Cixous along with Irigaray, and Kristeva developed their concept of *écriture féminine* on Lacan's theory and thus, bifurcated language at two phases i.e, semiotic (pre-symbolic Phase) and symbolic order. According to them masculine language represents the symbolic order and is thus, it is straight, coherent, legitimate and sensible. On the other hand, *écriture féminine* speaks from the domain of semiotic and is thus erratic, unfathomable and conflicting. Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva believe that the world is organized and comprehended through language.

Thus, according to them gendered identity is constructed through language. Further, they are of the view that language is predominantly masculine and hence, represents patriarchal norms. Therefore, they proposed that to reconstruct a social structure free from binary divisions it is necessary to deconstruct the order and law of language and hence, Cixous

suggests that in order to challenge the logocentric ideology new feminine language is needed. She is of the opinion that this feminine language would in turn subvert the patriarchy that oppresses and silences women. Cixous further relates her concept of *écriture féminine* with Derrida's theory of 'Difference', according to which, "meaning is not produced in the static closure of the binary opposition" rather is "constructed through the potentially endless process of referring to other absent signifiers" (Moi: 103, 104).

Cixous proposed the idea of "the other bisexuality" to redefine women's identity (Cixous and Clement:84). As Moi notes that as "opposed to the classic concept of bisexuality, she defines the other bisexuality as, multiple, variable and ever-changing, consisting as it does of the non-exclusion either of the difference or of one sex" (107). Accordingly, she recommends that either sex can claim feminine writing. The critics accentuate that by subverting the patriarchal stereotyping women should celebrate their difference. As Moi says, "the other bisexuality doesn't annul differences but stirs them up, pursues them, increases them" (Moi:107). Cixous advocates that *écriture féminine* is a tool for women to overthrow patriarchy.

The Blind Assassin, a multi-layered story, encompassing three narrative strands creates feminine language through the different female writings. One is the principle story (Iris's memoir) and within the principle story are two stories i.e, a romance fiction and a science fiction. Alongside these parallel accounts there are reports from news sections which give information about the significant occasions of the city Port Ticonderoga in Toronto. Karen F Stein calls the structure of *The Blind Assassin* as "Russian wooden doll," i.e., "nested series of stories; and like the nested dolls, one story hides another until it is opened to reveal another one surprisingly similar to it" (Stein:135).

On investigating the novel, it is observed that the novel is permeated with female writings as almost all the female characters possess a piece of writing. From Adelia's scrapbooks and cookbooks, Reenie's legacy of Adelia's cookbook, Laura's scratch pad, Iris' diary to the hyper printed engravings on the walls of a ladies' washroom, the female compositions serve to shape a female group, in which the women characters reflect their own individual identity and characteristics against the patriarchy. Writings on wash room walls in a public domain contrasts their roles in domestic sphere and public sphere and thus, they reflect their opposition against the symbolic order of male domination. Though they have different view points as some of the writings reflect the tone of patriarchy, yet it is altogether

female writings that reflect their creative energy. For instance Iris's grandmother Adelia is an :

Angel in the house who obeys the austere Victorian decorum, nourishes her husband with fine art, and takes good care of every trifle in the household. However, when plied into her culinary mannerism: her sly eating in bedroom, her odd scrapbooks, and her quaint cookbook: she actually possesses a witchlike personality underneath her angelic façade. Even though Iris never literally meets her grandmother, she believes that Adelia, while avoiding being seen devouring food in public, must have a tray sent up to her room where she eats it with ten fingers (61).

Here, as opposed to the common picture of a quiet entertainer, Adelia is delineated as a snatching savage in Iris's creative energy. As a matter of fact, Iris's unconventional romanticization of her grandma is not baseless in the light of the fact that Adelia's peculiar scrapbooks and her incantatory cookbook sell out her strange internal identity to the perusers. Adelia's cookbook looks more like a reference book of witchcraft than a collection of recipes. Rather than depicting " [t]aste and pleasure" (181), it elaborates on the elements of drinks. An outré amalgam of science and witchcraft, drug and home life, this cookbook even starts with an obscure memorial by John Ruskin: "Cookery means the knowledge of Media and of Circe and of Helen and of the Queen of Sheba. [...] It means that you are to be perfectly and always ladies- loaf givers" (181).

While perusers of this memorial may gaze bewilderingly at the odd association between those fanciful vamps and typical tasks of cooking, the "Piece providers" with whom Adelia distinguishes is really "possessed of arcane and potentially lethal recipes, and capable of inspiring the most incendiary passions in men" (82-83). Remarkably, this "loaf giver" picture is without a moment's delay that consols and exasperates . It is consoling in the light of the fact that one is furnished with nourishment by a righteous holy messenger in the house. It is exasperating as it aggravates that the sustenance brought by a witch, can be lethal. In this sense Adelia, with her "cat-ate-the-canary smile," is actually "the queen of Sheba" (182). Though she seems to be a liberal woman in appearance, but she is basically a tyrannical woman at heart. Adelia's spiritualist scrapbooks and dazing cookbook infers her lopsided connection to the symbolic order. As Mary points out , " her naming of everything according to her desire is an act that explicitly transgresses a privilege usually exclusive to men (8).

At the point when Adelia starts naming according to her choice, assuming responsibility of the designs, Adelia, however, a weak woman in patriarchy, now turns into a sovereign who summons divinities in her creative energy. Reading the angels and the Medusa in contraposition, the eyes of hers “are blurred now, softened and porous, as if they have cataracts” (45). Further, her look and feelings are described as “a lovely impervious gaze, the snakes writhing up out of her head like anguished thoughts” (58). In the event that the blessed messenger is simply the social side of Adelia that is delicate, inclined to visual impairment while the Medusa must be her instinctive side which is cool, petrifying, blasting with power. Surprisingly, while her heavenly appearance gives Adelia a cover behind which she can disguise her self, the mythic picture of Medusa, together with the Queen Sheba, is her pith as given picture that suggests Cixous's idea of giving in *The Laugh of Medusa*. Adelia redefines herself as a name provider and a creator. She feels herself to be a giver and productive person that she would like to distribute her “gracious largesse” (182).

Adelia through her cookbooks designs a culinary science to counter the patriarchal discourse and Reenie her heiress from her cookbooks transforms kitchen from local space of host and visitor to an ideological area of huge eaters and non-eaters. For example, at the Avilion party, when Reenie presents dishes gained from Adelia's cookbook, everybody at the table eats “with such a thoughtfulness and vigour [that m]astication [is] the right name for it-not eating”(186). When everyone at the table is eating contrary to ordinary housewives, whose most prominent wish is to satisfy their visitors, then Reenie “keeps tabs on who ha[s] eaten what” (187). Reenie's reconnaissance of the eaters at the gathering changes the art and activity of cooking of a specialty of taste to an area of intelligence.

In the chapter *Avilion*, Atwood describes Adelia's character as a “heavy lidded, handsome woman”, that “was smooth as silk and as cool as cucumber, but with a will like a bone saw” (59). Atwood's use of textual language in this section frames Adelia's feminine beauty in an overly masculine light. By calling Adelia “handsome,” an adjective that typically has a masculine connotation, Atwood separates Adelia's character from other more feminine characters in the novel. By describing Adelia's character as “cool as cucumber”, Atwood is referring to Adelia's socially “smooth” nature, which is also characteristic of male behaviour. Atwood is referring to Adelia's strength and determination by comparing her will to that of a “bone saw”, a gruesome and powerful tool that is primarily used for amputation. Atwood's use of textual language here appears to be

characteristically stereotypical male dominated that helps to foster Iris's need for freedom and identity through writing.

Adelia's effect on Iris's character becomes more readily apparent towards the end of the chapter, when Atwood describes Adelia's influence on her grand daughters. The text reads, "and so Laura and I brought up by her. We grew up inside her house; that is to say, inside her conception of herself. And inside her conception of who we ought to be, but weren't. As she was dead by then, we couldn't argue" (62). In spite of the fact that Adelia died before Iris was conceived, she influenced Iris's character greatly. Her notoriety and heritage stayed interminable in the family even after she passed away. Adelia's exquisite "taste", affinity for culture, well-kept home, and stories depicting her strengths as a woman remain preserved in the heart of her family. Adelia's history is a story of freedom and strength, a story that Iris seems to be generationally patterned after.

Along with Kitchen, women's washroom in the novel is also presented as a place exclusive for females. The washroom is a private cubical inside an open space where women of all ranks and file come together and converse at times. This is also a secure place for women where every one comes together, exchange minor conversations and even though it is open to all, this private space turns into a local space for them. On one hand a washroom is open to all women of the area, on the other hand, a kitchen is meant specifically for the women of a house and thus serves as a patriarchal confinement. So, a washroom, against a kitchen becomes a crossroad in the network of female communication. As the location of the novel is set in a tourist city. This washroom becomes a place to congregate different views shared by women that are seen inscribed on the washroom wall.

The female writings on the washroom wall are not as secretive as Adelia's or Reenie's compositions. Rather, they are recorded so that the other women can read. Henceforth, whether they are apothegms, notices, accounts, maxims or tirades, these engravings show the multifarious female perception (however the majority of them are influenced with the ideas of phallogocentrism). The communication among females through the inscription highlights the multiplicity and heterogeneity of *écriture féminine*. Though most of the inscriptions on washroom walls are female writing still some of them appear to be reflecting the male centered communication and the same view of women representation is echoed in Basu and Patnaik's article that states: "When women were in control of their stories they attempted to fulfil patriarchal expectations" (10).

Some of the typical requests on the walls tend to limit women in writing any subjects with taboos. Some kind of denials and restrictions on women by women are visible. In this manner, it is doubtful that despite the fact that women are permitted to talk now in their little compartment, the majority of them are so mentally programmed by the phallogocentric rationale that they perpetuate the same patriarchal belief system on other women. In any case, the last sentence, voiced in the name of Laura, reverses this phallogocentric rationale. Even it is written disrespectfully against God. For instance the first set of inscription is an argument between eating and killing. The first sentence is in pencil:

“Don’t eat anything you aren’t prepared to kill”.

Then, in green marker: “Don’t kill anything you aren’t prepared to eat”.

Under that, in ballpoint, “Don’t kill”. Under that, in purple: “Don’t eat”.

And under that, the last word to date, in bold black lettering: “Fuck Vegetarians-
“All Gods are Carnivorous” Laura Chase.

Thus Laura lives on (84).

As explained by Chung-hao Ku in his paper titled “Eating, Cleaning, and writing: Female Abjection and Subjectivity in Margaret Atwood’s *The Blind Assassin*”, that the speaker of the last inscription seems to take the first two lines as a defence of vegetarianism: line three and four could be read more broadly in the light of a spiritual path such as Buddhism (or as parodying such paths) (102). However, the second line of the above quote can be taken as an assertion against the killing of human beings or in other words, assertion against flesh eating. Thus, the first two sentences can be perused as: *Don’t Eat People You aren’t Prepared to Kill*, and: *Don’t Kill people You Aren’t Prepared to Eat*. It is shocking to note that the first assertion when given certain emphasis, advocates slaying and the second assertion can be explained as the practice of human nurturing: “*Let people live till one has to eat them*”(Ku, Chung-hao: 105).

Thus, it is observed that though both the assertions are anthropophagous yet, both of them deals two opposite concepts of death. The first statement accentuates the brutal act of killing before eating whereas, the second statement approves a conservation of life regarding killing as apprehensive but inevitable ending of human life. In short, while the principal assertion endorses the act of anthropophagy just for the sake of self gratification, the second statement permits it just when it is important to one's own survival.

The initial two sentences create uncertainty between killing and eating. One way it is justified that one needs to kill in one's own hand for eating the flesh as that would create a

sense of the pain an animal undergoes when slaughtered. The next one is a message of peace as killing unduly is sheer inhuman. On the contrary, when it is applied for women as writing by women, it is the same phallogocentric attitude reflected on the inscription as the message attempts to stop women from any killing and eating. Precluding women from slaughtering and eating anything is one sided and an injustice against women. On the off chance, if one doesn't execute or eat, how might one survive? Despite the fact that vegetable lovers claim that they don't live on meat yet vegetables are also living things.

Thus, the assertion '*Don't Eat*' can be considered sympathetic advice and at the same time, it can be self-immolative. Further, while the preclusion of executing resounds with God's order: "you shall not murder", the next sentence mischievously reveals its irrationality. That is to say that, if '*Don't Kill*' is proscription and symbolic of the masculine law that gives orders without any explanation, then the following command : '*Don't Eat*' is a pervert, a semiotic counterpart, a feminine voice that questions the rigid and imprudent idea. While the female voice taunts the manly command mentioned earlier, this is not to induce a dualism, but rather to contradict the sovereignty of phallogocentrism. Since, to be distinctive does not really mean to be opposite.

Hence, the assertion "*Don't Eat*" counters phallogocentric ideology *via* an ironic imitation and dethrones the symbolic order by an articulation of difference, hence, exemplary of Cixous's *écriture féminine*. Similarly, the last assertion: "*Fuck Vegetarians- 'All Gods are Carnivorous,'*" seems to be a retrained thought vociferating at the monopoly of patriarchal voice . Unlike the earlier assertions, the last statement is completely free from phallogocentric logic, neither does it follow the same structure. Science fiction story of Iris (in the name of Laura) completely appears to be a feminine voice. Thus, the female writings on the washroom wall can be seen as a spectrum of female voices. In this spectrum some female voices delineate complete dependability to the symbolic order where as some of the voices show resistance to it.

The third assertion '*Don't Kill*' is ostensibly a facsimile of the symbolic order. Whereas, the last two writings voice the difference(s) more clearly. As a part of *écriture féminine*, these female writings inscribed on the wall of washroom are, what Cixous terms as 'The sexts': "a privilege of voice: writing and voice are entwined and interwoven and writing's rhyme take each other's breath away through interchanging, make the text gasp or form it out of suspense's and silences, make it lose its voice or rend it with cries" (Newly Born Woman: 69, 92). As the quote "All Gods are carnivorous" seems antagonistic towards the

sacrifice of virgins in some religions, the last inscription literally contradicts the duplicity of religious authorities by exposing their anthropophagousness beneath the preaching of 'vegetarianism'.

Thus, the last two female inscriptions sprout the seeds of *the ecriture feminine*. The enigma of the last sentence lies in the mysterious signature of Laura found in one of the inscribed writings. Inscription of Laura's signature appears to be mysterious as it seems impractical for a person to imprint signature on the wall of women's washroom after she has been dead for a considerable length of time. Secondly, if the signature marked in the name of Laura actually belonged to someone else. The natural question appears that who she was? Laura's signature proves that either someone must have associated herself with Laura or she may have by-passed death and appeared in some spiritual form. The first assumption appears to be more credible.

Therefore, whatever the case may be, but Laura's signature on the wall proves that she is still alive after her death in the mind of someone. According to Zizek, "if the dead 'were not properly buried, i.e., [if] something went wrong with their obsequies', they may rise from the graves 'as collectors of some unpaid debt'. In other words, "[t]he return of the living dead, then materializes a certain symbolic debt persisting beyond physical expiration" (Slavoj: 23). However, here the 'symbolic debt' what Laura demands is actually what the symbolic order owes to women. By declaring Gods as 'carnivorous,' Laura not just uncovers God's infringement of his own decree against executing, it also exposes the falsification of all religion.

However, physically dead yet profoundly more capable, Laura now turns into the incorporeal 'Name of the Mother'. As Ku, Chung says, "She becomes alive once again: she rises above death since she can't die. Blaming the ruthless religious framework, Laura has been revered and has transformed into a feminine symbol parallel to the 'carnivorous Gods.'" (Ku, Chung-hao: 106). Further, in the exploration of female writing(s) in the novel, it seems that "Silenced women become a motif in the homonym story within the novel *The Blind Assassin*, whose authorship has been attributed to Laura Chase. There "Girl children had their throats cut and their blood drained out to replenish the five waning moons, so they would not fade and disappear forever." (30). Also "(...) it became the practice to cut out the tongues of the girls three months before they were due to be sacrificed. This was not mutilation, said the priests, but an improvement- what could be more fitting for the servants of the Goddess of Silence?" (31).

Thus, the message underlying this abhorrent practice can be interpreted as a desirable aim for a civilized culture to have women without voice of their own; patriarchy controls, guides and manipulates the females in the society and it is the time as Atwood suggests, women must speak her language. It is a message which goes hand in hand with Cixous's idea and what has already been touched upon in foregoing passages that, women need to create a language of their own in order to liberate from men's control and manipulation. This language or writing would subvert the patriarchal use of language that so far exercised on women subtly.

Similarly, the girls figured in the story both Laura and Iris were without any voice during their lifetime. Both sisters have suffered the abuses what Richard has exercised on them. They even could not communicate their pain and anguish to anyone. However, Laura has managed to communicate symbolically through her notebooks:

History was blank, except for the photograph Laura had glued into it: herself and Alex Thomas at the button factory picnic, both of them now coloured light yellow, with my detached blue hand crawling towards them across the lawn (...). French had had all the French removed from it. Instead it held the list of odd words. Alex Thomas had left behind him in our attic, and that : I now discovered Laura had not burned after all. *Anchoryne, berel, carchineal, diamite, ebonort...* A foreign language, true, but one I'd learned to understand, better than I ever understood French. *Mathematics* had a long column of numbers, with words opposite some of them. It took me a few minutes to realize what kinds of number they were. They were dates. The first date coincided with my return from Europe; the last was three months or so before Laura's departure for Bella Vista (516).

With the reading of Laura's notebook, Iris realizes the fact that Richard has raped her sister several times: "How could I have been so blind"(517)? Laura's channel of communication with her sister has been through messages that need recodification. For example, on the occasion when Iris meets Reenie at Betty's Luncheonette to talk about Laura's whereabouts, the latter says:

"(...) she wanted me to say she left you a message."

"A message?"

"She left it before they took her off to that place. You'd know where to find it, she said" (459).

Laura might have used this method either because Iris does not trust Laura completely as Iris says, " Laura could be fabricating (...) Laura could be suffering from delusions" (458)), or due to the fact that Iris, according to Laura, needs to discover truth by herself. Otherwise, she would have never understood her sister: " How did it happen?" I whispered. 'Who was the father?' Such a thing called for whispering. 'If you don't already know, I don't think I can tell you,' said Laura" (501).

Iris has also found Laura's messages "although not in words" (464) (but in pictures) before, but only while reading her sister's notebooks she seems to be able to fully decode them. Laura manipulates photographs in order to express herself. As previously stated, Laura has found this method of communication more efficient in the long term since Iris tends not to believe her, as in the moment when Laura confesses to Iris the fact that Mr Erskine "only wants to put his hand up my blouse (...) "or under my shirt. What he likes are panties" (169) and her sister suspects: "she must have made it up, or misunderstood" (169). Laura's main concern, then, in altering the colours of the pictures is to attach a transcendent signification as to what the photographs merely depict, especially to make Iris open her eyes to reality. She adds different colours to the pictures she takes in order to show real self, the soul of the people represented in them. As Michelle Hoefhan Lin has written in this regard that:

In *The Blind Assassin*, the photograph does not reflect memory and reality: instead, it alters both. In other words, the photo can become detached and independent from reality, or independent from a reality, supposing there is a pre-existing reality. Though these alterations, the novel challenge the photographic medium as a reliable imitation of the world (16).

Laura has altered two photographs of Iris's wedding: one was clicked at the wedding party and the other is the formal click of bride and groom. In the first one, Winifred and Richard "had been coloured a lurid green (464) symbolizing their shared greed and their conspiracy in Richard's rape of Laura. Iris had been given "a wash of aqua blue" (464) signifying her blindness to what has been taking place in front of her eyes (i.e. Winifred and Richard's evil deeds) and Laura is painted with "a brilliant yellow" (464), representing her innocence and untouched nature. However, on seeing the transformed photographs Iris fails to interpret those added colours: "what did it mean this radiance (464)? For radiance, it was as if Laura was glowing within, like glass lamp or a girl made up of phosphorous" (464). In this respect, Hoefhan Lin also explains:

Since colour refers to, a opposed of conferring, meaning, it runs the risk of being misinterpreted because it can represent a multiplicity of meanings. Iris does not interpret yellow as innocence. Iris's failure to decode this message is not simply an indication of her blindness, but it is also indicative of the failure of the visual medium alone as a vehicle to convey messages, to convey any set of codes, to represent the truth. This failure also demonstrates the subjective process of vision: what one person sees in the photo, the other may not (23).

The second photograph is of Iris and Richard only and in this photograph, "Richard's face had been painted grey, such a grey that the features were all obliterated. The hands were red, as were the flames that shot up from around and somehow from inside the head, as if the skull itself were burning"(464). In this picture many symbolic features can be observed and decoded: considering Laura's attachment to religion, the flames can be related to Richard's evil nature and the fact that the flames come from the skull may be described how deep Richard's evilness is rooted in him. It was his intellectual dishonesty and evil design as he inflicted injury on Laura ,both mentally and physically. His grey face and features might mean Richard's dark nature and his red hands tell about his crimes. Red also symbolizes the blood that he subjected Laura to bleed during his atrocity upon her. As Iris wisely writes: "Laura had strange but very definite ideas about which colours were required (...). If there was a picture of someone she disapproved she'd do the face purple or dark grey to obliterate the features" (161). Although Iris here seems closer to an accurate interpretation of colours, she still seems not to be able to fully understand as what colours referred to in Laura's pictures.

Another prominent message is that the photograph in *The Blind Assassin* is the one Elwood Murray has taken at the button factory picnic. The description of the original photograph taken by the journalist appears in the "prologue: Perennials for the Rock Garden" of the novel *The Blind Assassin*, It describes Laura, Iris and Alex "sitting under a tree" (6), Alex being in the middle of both sisters. Later in the novel, the photograph is deconstructed by Laura, attaching different meanings to it. It becomes fragmented: one with Alex and Laura, and the other one with Iris and Alex. The only remaining body part of the missing sister in each of these fragmented pictures is the intruding hand: " The sight of Laura's light yellow hand, creeping towards Alex across the grass like an incandescent crab, gave me a chill down the back of my spine" (225).

Both the sisters' intruding hands mark the triangle among the three characters, i.e. Laura is implicitly present between Alex and Iris, and Iris too is, interfering between Laura and Alex, even though Laura's Love for Alex is apparently unreciprocal. Again, the examples analysed as to those photographs are of female resource. These are the symbols of communication to voice family secrets which could not have been transmitted otherwise, since the female voice has not been taken into account.

Other than Adelia's scrapbooks and cookbook, Laura's note pads and the hyper printed engravings on the walls of women washroom, Iris Chase's diary is the most vivid and dependable account and evidence in the investigation of female writing(s) in the novel *The Blind Assassin*. Iris' journal, is really a confession that the language leaves so many clues about the history of the Chase family. The language Iris leaves what in Frank jaw's words , “celebrate[s] the process of conversion from an object of contempt to an object of acceptance” (qtd. in Cheung: 238). While there are, as Chin says, “oozings of viscous putrescence and luminous radiant guilt” (Cheung: 238) between the lines, the greater part of Iris's real injury despite Richard's sexual viciousness and her disgrace as a mother who leaves her little girl ,are sublimated and solidified in her language.

Unlike her romance fiction written in the name of Laura, Iris's memoir reveals all the indecent incidents of Chase's family like Iris's relation with Alex, illicit birth of her daughter, and her husband's oedipal love with her sister Laura. All the happenings are so painful and shameful that every thing is not possible for her to confess, and hence, she took recourse to writing and that too in the name of Laura, her deceased sister. She is able to voice all of her hushed encounters. By composing a diary she is able to confide herself from the falsehoods, recovering her 'self'. Iris in her memoir retrospects her past life spent as a child with her parents and grandparents. Iris's recollections shuttles between her past and present and all the more firmly with her sister Laura, who committed suicide at the young age of twenty five . She writes her memoir to explore the reason of Laura's suicide which in the long run ends up unfurling the determinants responsible for womens' conditioning, that makes them marginalized, mute and passive objects.

By rewriting the events of her life through her memoir, Iris, “appropriates her voice and writes her untold story, thus becoming a subject that shapes instead of remaining an object that has been shaped by patriarchal assumptions” (Koyuncu: np). Atwood undermines and disintegrates the binary oppositions where women are always treated as other. She empowers her female protagonists with the power to resist and subvert the patriarchy.

Fiona Tolan rightly remarks that the novel is “profoundly concerned with representations of female body, female victimization and female power, where women are presented as the product of the patriarchal culture dominant in the first half of twentieth century in Canada” (Tolan, Fiona : 78).

Madeleine Davies also analyses the “constructions of the body in Atwood’s work” and identifies the “recurring corporeal tropes of incarceration, disembodiment, alienation, disease and abuse” (Davies:58) Furthermore, since Iris claims Laura as her “collaborator” (513) in composing the romance fiction in *The Blind Assassin*, therefore, Iris and Laura appear to be perfect representations of each other. Here, while Laura encodes her predictions, Iris deciphers them. From this point of view, Laura's demise seems to be a blessing in disguise for Iris as she provides her the opportunity to manipulate words to construct the truth . Though Laura is not physically present , yet she is never absent in Iris’s memoir. As Iris says: “what I remembered, and also what I imagined, which is also the truth. I thought of myself as recording. A bodiless hand, scrawling across a wall” (512); Iris always feels that she is writing not only with her own hand but also with Laura’s hand. As Iris often mentions, “[Laura]’s the round O, the zero at the bone. A space that defines itself by not being there at all” (409). Iris’s belief is that her writing is coordinated effort with Laura. Thus, Iris not only acts as the mouthpiece of her dead sister, additionally, she also starts a dialogue with Laura as the other.

Writing memoir helps Iris to reconfigure and rediscover her connection with the other. Richard sexually harasses Iris and her sister Laura. He is the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. He also demonstrates prejudiced and male chauvinistic attitude. Iris in her memoir states, “When he married me he figured he’d got a bargain- two for the price of one” (617). Thus, girls are treated just as sexual objects which are to be traded for sexual pleasure and use. Therefore, Iris after marrying Richard feels merely as, “beautiful trophy groomed wife” (Stein: 142). Richard treats Iris as a toy and harms her for his beguilement and joy without being pestered that she was impassive towards him as she feels appalled, “to his night-time activities, even repelled by them” (454).

As Greer asserts that woman has been conditioned to believe that her identity exists in her body and thus, is abused and dominated by man on account of her sexuality, she is the “showcase of wealth and caste,” Richard slips “into relative anonymity, as “handsome is as handsome does” (Greer: 64). Iris finds her marriage to be a, “a decorous and sanctioned violence”(44). Richard afflicted her body with, “bruises, purple, then blue, then yellow”

(44). He joyfully claims, “how easily I bruised...prefer[ing] conquest to cooperation, in every area of life.” He continues that, “he favoured thighs, where it wouldn’t show” (454-455). Iris’s status was that of docile pet with Richard and she was dictated only to comply with his summons and requests without dissent and her main function as stated in her own confession that, “job was to open my legs and shut my mouth” (407).

In this context, Catherine Mckinnon rightly writes that, “it is through social objectification of women that socialization of gender takes place where women are seen as sexual objects meant to satisfy men’s needs”. Such socialization of women through male gaze throws women to the margins, “women come to identify themselves as sexual beings, as beings that exist for men...and internalize a male image of their sexuality and as their identity as women” (Mackinnon: 531). Thus, “the method that is used to subjugate women is the objectification of women in sexual terms; the male perspective on society is dominant one... the relationship is founded on gender hierarchy in which men are dominant and woman are subordinate, socially, economically, politically and sexually” (Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon : 121). Richard even goes to the extent of associating women with the imagery of fruits considering Iris and Laura as an object of consumption. He says, “women could be divided into apples and pears, according to the shapes of their bottoms. I[Iris] was a peer, he said but an unripe one. That was what he liked about me-my greenness my hardness” (390).

At other places women are compared to materials or gadgets as he asserts that women are like, “Boats...busted car engines and broken lamps and radio’s- items of any kind that can be fiddled with by men adroit with gadgetry, and restored to a condition as good as new” (83). Germaine Greer comments on this fact and writes that, “if a woman is food, her sex organ is for consumption also, in the form of honey pot, hair- pie, and cake-or jelly-roll” (297). Iris discards Richard forever after Laura’s death and moves back to Avilion with her daughter Aimee. Her personality transforms from that of a needy, submissive, and household spouse to that of a self-reliant and empowered business woman. She reconstructs her self as a subject and resists being an object of male gaze. She is able to liberate herself physically and financially from the masculine confinement.

Now she is not dependent on the money, “from Richard and from...Laura’s estate. She starts her trade in second hand artefacts, “in a modest way... with few pieces of animal jewellery from Richard” (620). Iris’s involment in the trade of relics greatly groomed her personality. Her status transforms from an object position to a dynamic subject position

and thus, she could redefine her identity beyond male gaze. Iris is able to reclaim her subjective identity only by writing her memoir. She subverts the patriarchal order by writing herself through her body, which promotes, “male discourse of power in contrast to female discourse of moral superiority, but physical weakness and fragility” (Stein : 137). She rearranges her position and resists being a pawn of patriarchy as she retrospects, “ I was sand, I was snow-written on, rewritten, smoothed over” (455) and then she says, “A tabula rasa, not waiting to write, but to be written on” (57) .

After her transformation into an independent personality she expresses herself as, “my hand has taken a life of its own” (457). Bouson compliments Iris by saying that she, “assumes power within the culture that has silenced her and manipulated her social identity. Iris presents herself as more multidimensional than she was assumed to be by her culture” (Bouson: 69). Iris composes her memoir in the name of Laura just to hide her identity. In her writing, she narrates her extramarital relation with a low class refugee. In the memoir she also masks her identity with that of Laura as the elite class (patriarchy) confines the composition and production of such writings.

Since female wrtings are interpreted through male ideology and women are viewed as weak, docile, bereft of any creative talent or intelligence, Iris could not risk her identity through authorship as it would be difficult for her to survive in the society as the prevailing social condition goes by. Already her novel creates shock waves in the personal and professional life of Richard. Thus, the dishonour engendered due to the publication of Iris’s novel ruined Richard’s life and he died due to brain haemorrhage. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson note that, “women’s autobiography” presents “visible formerly invisible subjects” and women “speaking from this position [of universal man] proffers authority, legitimacy and readability” (433). Iris’s memoir becomes a replica of Helen Cixous’s concept of *écriture feminine*. According to Davies the heroines in Atwood’s fiction are believed to be “coded bodies” (Davies: 60).

He further says that the protagonists (bodies) display the torture and abuse inflicted on them because of their deformed existence merely as bodies. Iris confirms Davies’s view when she recognizes the wounds engraved on her body by her husband’s sexual enmity as, “a kind of code, which blossomed, then faded like invisible ink held to a candle. But if they were a code, who held the key to it?” (455). Atwood portrays Iris’s body as an object which can be moulded and used as per the prerogative of patriarchy. She lives on the desires and directions of others. She has no right to corporeal autonomy and hence, she is

the subject dependent on others to be defined, hence, object and she is to survive as mute spectator of as body and flesh. It is only by, “seizing the occasion to speak” (Cixous: 250) that Iris renounces her, “shattering entry into history, which has always been based on her suppression” (Cixous: 250).

Cixous contended that women can resist and overthrow patriarchal abuses by their writings. According to Cixous female writing is, “the passage towards more than self, towards the other (Cixous: 112). All three pioneering scholars on the issues of women namely, Krestiva, Cixous, and Irigarary are of the view that language lays the foundation for gendered identity and language is predominately masculine and represents the patriarchal order and law. Therefore, women by breaking their silence and expressing themselves through writing can liberate themselves from the confines of patriarchy. As Davies also emphasises Cixous's view when he says, “women can, produce a female language and female texts capable of challenging historical and political constructions of subverting the dominant linguistic order, and of representing themselves” (Davies: 59). In *The Laugh of Medusa*, Cixous highlights this notion and writes that woman must write in order to liberate themselves from the subordinated position of the *other*:

woman must write herself: must write about woman and bring woman to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies...woman must put herself into the text- as into the world and into history- by her own movement “(Cixous: 245).

Cixous appeals woman to “break out the snare of silence” (251) and to speak of their experiences and desires. According to her, it is only through “speech” that woman can refuse to be confined, “into accepting a domain which is the margin or harem” (251). Cixous asserts, “the speaking woman is entirely her voice; she physically materializes what she is thinking; she signifies it with her body” (qtd. in Toril Moi: 112).

In this manner, women can free themselves from the patriarchy and its standards. Women by voicing their silence in their own language can empower themselves. Woman's social identity as the *other* derates her to the status of silent and submissive object. Women can embark her subjective and dynamic identity only by realizing her potential and exercising her corporeal autonomy and writing from it can assert her identity. By writing her memoir Iris leaves a message for her granddaughter Sabria who has been forcefully snatched and taken away from her by Winifred Griffin. By portraying her story Iris frees herself as well

as plans to set the ground for Sabrina her grand daughter to investigate her personality. She writes , “the story of how” Sabrina “came to be” (521).

As Michael emphasises Iris’s intention and says, “she[Sabrina] can construct her own identity –since for both women the production of a more liberating and multifaceted identity requires the unearthing of aspects of their lives silenced by socially sanctioned representations of them” (Michael: 102) . Iris in her memoir confesses to Sabrina, “ your real grandfather was Alex Thomas, and as to who his father was, well sky is the limit...your legacy from him is the realm of infinite speculation. You are free to reinvent yourself at will” (513). Along these lines, Iris entrusts her memoir to Sabrina and sets the path for her to recreate and reclassify herself freely according to her yearning.

The memoir of Iris voices feminine experiences and redefines the status of women into the formerly male-cantered symbolic order. As Cixous sanguinely claims in the beginning of her essay *The Laugh of the Medusa*, “when [w]oman [does] put herself into the text- as into the world and into history- by her own movement, female subjectivity will emerge through those very abject realms of domesticity, crystallize through women’s own writing” (Cixous: 243). Resonating Cixous view Iris says, “the urge to write is often provoked by a lack of witnesses: “ At the very least we want a witness. We can’t stand the idea of our own voices falling silently finally, like a radio running down” (95). Iris’s memoir is *écriture feminine* that eliminate the backbone of the symbolic order in the novel *The Blind Assassin*. The act of writing helps Iris to overcome her conflict between self and other. Moreover her writing has paved the way for Sabrina to create her own identity rather than being an object to be defined by male gaze. Iris by writing crosses the border between phallogocentrism and *écriture feminine*, redefining herself as a “giver” (Cixous: 243) that celebrates the differences.

Atwood in her *The Blind Assassin* portrays the kitchen and the women’s lavatory not only as domestic confinements for women’s chores but also she portrays them as the crucible where silence is voiced. Here, the author very realistically shows the stark reality of women's limited freedom, their limited space in the society and family. Majority of women across the world spends their whole lives in these confinement. The kitchen and the back yard of homes are similar to *Harem* of the Arabian community which is considered to be sacred, but this is again a linguistic reality created by patriarchy. Any thing suits the dominant ideology becomes a sanction against the other. Here, the kitchen or the Harem as the secure place for women is male design. Despite being in the confinement

, Iris could speak through a specific language as the author realized that the only way out to this dead lock is to create a new language, free from patriarchal design.

It is witnessed from the analysis of the text of *The Blind Assassin* that Iris, without writing, has no identity of her own. As a child, Laura defined her. She was Laura's sister. As a wife Richard defined her. She is Richard's wife. It is customary in majority of the societies to identify a woman in conjunction with a male relation or identity, be it father, brother, husband and so forth. However, in her old age after the death of Laura and Richard, Iris realizes that she has no identity now and hence, she acts upon to create her own identity. Without Laura and Richard, she creates it by her writing that speaks of her inner life, the hidden recesses of mind and things that ought to be told but could not be confessed due to fear of patriarchy. Iris is able to form her own perception of herself and of her family. As she exclaims that writing is not for the enjoyment of others. Writing is personal; it is a part of one's own.

“The only way you can write the truth is to assume that what you set down will never be read. Not by any other person and not even by yourself...you must see the writing as emerging like a long scroll of ink from the index finger of your right hand; you must see your left hand erasing it.” (138).

Iris's memoir was a confessional outburst of her sordid past. Writing such memoir serves two purposes: one can undergo a self-transformation and its a way to reclaim the past in a new light. Lukic observes in her paper on "Eva Grlic: Between Scilence and Speech" that, "women's autobiographical writing, which promotes female subjectivity and gives voice to those who used to be silenced" (Lukic: 175). Iris trapped in male hegemony attempted to resist by her writings which apparently might not have impacted on the society except her self-transformation as, "Confession produce self-transformation; each act of confession alters the view of the central protagonist offered to the reader by the confessing narrator" (Lukic : 180). Similarly Iris's writing also helped to alter reders view of her identity while pushing her into the subject position.

Iris says that the ink used to write comes from “ the index finger.” This imagery proposes that writing is a part of people just as the blood running through veins. The metaphor also suggests that writing is a painful process that draws out what is necessary for life. Iris through writing her memoir seems capable of both defying female silence and getting in control of her own subjectivity. Iris finally achieves transcendence and a voice through her

writing and the text, at the same time, becomes the only source where to find Iris as she exclaims, “By the time you read this last page, that-if anywhere-is the only place I will be” (538). No one can repress or silence her anymore; her text has made her free.

She is thus, able to claim subjectivity through the writing of her book, her own literature: “then, I’ll tell you a story. I’ll tell you this story: the story of how you came to be here, sitting in my kitchen, listening to the story I’ve been telling you” (537). Iris now has learned the fact that self is permanently made and re-made, and this is what she wishes to transmit to Sabrina, this is the other legacy to her granddaughter: “you’re free to reinvent yourself at will” (530). Kate Lilly’s observation in her paper as to the fact that maternal advice helps a woman to negotiate her gendered role as she states that:

Positioned at the acute threshold of life and death, manuscript and print, maternal advice is particularly concerned with the ethics of gendered everyday life, addressing the interlocking domains of self and other, private conscience, and civic conduct (177).

In the similar vein, by liberating herself through her autobiography, Iris also encourages Sabrina to explore her identity reconstructing herself independently as to who she is and as to the way she was told to be by Winifred. Iris’s memoir is not just an account of hers and her sister Laura’s life, it is much more than that. Her memoir is a collective voice of women to reconstruct their identity. Memoir no more remains the personal experience of Iris as she pens down the inscriptions on the washroom wall as part of her memoir. The memoir has abstractly turned into a choir where women voice their desire and wrath thus, voicing their disparities out of the rigid phallogocentrism.

In the event that Iris’s memoir is an ensemble that voices women’s distinction, it additionally engraves femininity into the male-centered symbolic order. In spite of the fact that the objective of *écriture* female is not to mutilate men, but rather to exist together with them, we don’t see a genuine fellowship amongst man and woman toward the end of the novel *The Blind Assassin*. Iris’s joint efforts with Laura and her sacrifice for Sabrina may foresee another kind of self-persuasion to restriction. In this manner, when the relinquish subject in *The Blind Assassin* is rehashed it is apparent that despite the fact that “[t]here is a history of female sacrifice in the Chase Family” (Stein:146), Iris is the one who sacrifices herself for another woman (Sabrina) rather than for a man (Benjamin, Norval, Richard, and Alex).

As per Cixous's concept of feminine economy that states: "she doesn't try to 'recover her expenses.' She is able not to return to herself, never settling down, pouring out, and going everywhere to the other." (Qtd.in *Newly Born Woman*: 87). Iris's sacrifice for Sabrina is selfless. On the other hand, the men (Benjamin, Norval, Richard and Alex) in Iris's life are selfish as they demand sacrifice in the dominance of phallogentrism. For example, in the name of marital relationship, familial responsibility. They actually ask sacrifice as a submission to patriarchy and hence they don't deserve it.

In the novel *The Blind Assassin*, Atwood's female characters are engaged in acts of self-representation. Adelia's eccentric scrapbooks and cookbook, Reenie's inheritance of Adelia's cookbooks, Laura's romance fiction and notebooks, the various inscriptions on the wall of women's washroom and Iris's confessional memoir, all are the means through which the female characters in the novel write and rewrite their own life stories and thus, "writing becomes in their hands the one means to insert the female body into the public realm, to restore balance of gaze that constantly identify it as an object and not subject of sexual desire" (Singh:16-17) that enables them to construct and deconstruct their individualities. As Sarup has written in *Identity Culture and The Postmodern World*: "It is through representation that we recognise ourselves" (45).

Thus, writing serves as an avenue in the process of empowerment of female self in the novel *The Blind Assassin*. Both Iris and Laura in the novel invoke space based memories that introspect their lives from childhood to their present. These, apparently arbitrary memories become political, as they create a feminine language that not only assigns the protagonists their identity, but it also becomes a part of the society as *écriture féminine* as it empowers the women. Since the narrators seek to expose the discourses and subjects that caused their under-estimation and submission, those memories thus, serve to give voice to their silenced female bodies which have stories to tell. They also provide a renewed sense of their selves through the self-quest performed during each writing process; as Cixous has claimed: Writing is a privileged space for transformation (Cixous :113).

Laura's personification through the signature on the wall of women's washroom and as the creator of the romance fiction is in itself a resistance to the patriarchal hegemony. *The Blind Assassin* within the novel empowers her to surpass death and add supernatural quality to the female community. Laura's identity is empowered with subjectivity through her creative act of writing. Iris on the other hand, constructs her identity through the narration of her multi-layered autobiography, which she leaves as the legacy for her

granddaughter Sabrina. Iris's body finally transforms into her text after her death, where her own history is inscribed and where no one can repress or silence her anymore. She has set herself free through her text. Iris is, thus, able to claim subjectivity through writing her memoir, her own literature. Thus, the analytical investigation of the novel *The Blind Assassin* in the light of *écriture féminine* portrays that female writing shapes and reconfigures the identity of women that not merely draws a line against the other man but also initiates a dialogue. In a nutshell the novel *The Blind Assassin* resonates the concept of *écriture féminine* given by Helen Cixous.

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CONCLUSION

The thesis has made a candid attempt to locate *écriture féminine* as a reposing, redefining and renaming power of women's emancipation and individual identity in the three novels of Margaret Atwood namely, *The Edible Woman* (1969), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *The Blind Assassin* (2000). The study justifies two basic aspects of *écriture féminine*: one, female body, and , the other, female writings that emerge in the selected novels as distinct phenomena and which could help women to assert their identity as subject. Over the course of the previous three chapters, the study has proposed that Atwood's novel comply with the theory of *écriture féminine* of Cixous. The research is attempted to plot a marked influence of the same concept which Atwood's protagonists have demonstrated through their struggle for identity.

Through a chronological examination of Atwood's novels in the preceding pages, it has been observed that Atwood's female protagonists have been engaged in rediscovering their self through body and they have empowered themselves by voicing their silence through their own creative art (female writing). Atwood's articulation of *écriture* is not fictional imagination or rhetorical; on the contrary, she has put forward the social realism, which dramatizes the post-modern phenomenon of anti-essentialism. Contextually, logocentric male authority is subverted and the female as a subject is brought to the fore. Atwood's female protagonists are just not individuals, rather, they are the types representing the social narratives of the entire world in general and the Canadian society in particular.

In each novel, the protagonists are exposed to one or the other societal prejudices; they are subjected to phallogocentric world in the Canadian society and then they rebel from their own individual situations. Atwood induces the characters with a spirit to look into their creative potentialities, their fragmented personality, and finally, they respond back through their writings to cross the limitations and adversities imposed by the society. Thus, the traditional boundaries have been challenged by a protagonist in as much as during the course of journey, all the women characters are found to be influenced by the poststructuralist and postmodern ideologies. Feminism as a theoretical construct influences

Atwood's work . The selected novels are the narratives of feminist thought for, it creates space for women through their distinctive language which challenges the male hegemony through the protagonists's enquiry as to their status in society and the validity of marginal condition. As such, she falls into the category of feminist writer with a difference. Approaches for feminist writers have been broadly to seek a balanced world in which women could find space in society against all inequality of treatment, socio-cultural injustice, and objectification of female body. Though the author has denied her writing as feminist, yet it could be termed as feminist concern.

Her ideology, as a part of *écriture féminine* as well as feminist construct has encouraged not only the protagonists, but also the entire class of oppressed women and adolescent girls at large to explore their own potentiality. They learn to act back through their self expression, though not without paying the price of pain. Their voice becomes the voice of the multitudes that represents all the marginalized voices of women and their movement from a position of subordination to a distinct individual identity through their corporeal language. It is not just the mobility of a selected protagonist of a novel rather, when deconstructed, their voices speak of a language that has overcome the bounds of social constraints and further, echo a universal language bringing *écriture féminine* as a tool for freedom. The women protagonists, here, are on a progression from the margin to the centre, not by discounting anyone, but by striking a balance of being acknowledged as human being with all the due human dignity. Their voice is the narrative of empowerment of female self, a narrative of maternal space as an alternative to patriarchal space.

The fundamental goal of *écriture féminine* is to ensure justful place for women in any society while empowering them culturally, politically and on economic front. It does not seek to undermine or surpass men. Feminine writing avoids appropriation and annihilation. It is feminine in its relationship to the experience and to language. Women so far spoke through a borrowed language as was designed and imposed by the dominant male ideological construct. The concept of *écriture* has close connection with female body and sexuality and it is markedly different from the masculine experience. All the major characters begin their journey as innocent girls, traditional women, housewives and then a creative artist toward the goal of *écriture féminine* . They accept it, unwillingly though, and then discover their true potential through their body and then, writing from it they move to the centre from the margin by countering male writing and experience. Although Atwood

primarily focuses on women's issues, yet she cannot be labeled wholly as a feminist writer. Her concern goes much beyond feminism. She is, indeed, a diverse and elusive writer.

Écriture féminine is a product of post-modern feminist perspective and is also referred to as French Feminism. French feminists such as Jacques Lacan, Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Lucy Irigaray argue that there is male domination in the treatment of women in society and these critics advocated feminine writing to change the male-defined world. According to Cixous *écriture féminine* is liberating, non-linear, polysemic writing that cannot be defined. Thus, écriture féminine is to be understood in its larger perspective as it is not exclusive for the female experience rather, it is mutual cooperation between both the genders. The language of the women and by the women can transform them from their position of object to that of subject as all the realities are perceived through linguistic realities and more and more such writing would bring the repressed feelings into the surface and thus, it would help deconstructing male discourse while creating space for women. Helene Cixous also holds that écriture féminine is a bisexual phenomenon. Therefore, *écriture féminine* demands for a language that originates from female body in order to allow this transformation to happen. Atwood through her protagonist has deconstructed the language of binary division toward restructuring of the existing symbolic order.

As a writer, Atwood's artistic charm lies in her style. She sublimates her words and the voices of her characters in a perfect harmony so that the distance between the author who creates, and the woman who suffers, disappears. She expresses her views on the inequalities of the world. Her fiction enjoys global recognition as it has been translated into many languages. Her works represent personal, social and public expressions of life. Her novels have interconnected themes. She has a unique writing style as she writes the lived experiences of life. Therefore, her writing is non-linear and frequently shuttles between past and present. Her writing is an attack on the pain and injustice meted out to the Canadian women. With first hand experience, vivid expressions and deep concern for marginalized women, Atwood stands as a true ambassador for the writers of her age.

The female characters in Atwood's novel found it very hard to use language as a means for expressing their bodies and emotions initially, as they lived in a patriarchal society and believed that language is a male weapon. Atwood as with Cixous have differed with Irigaray's claims that the masculine is not ready to share the discourse by women.

Atwood's women protagonists act in their greatest interest by discovering an alternative mode of expression and communication, echoing Helen Cixous's view that a woman must write herself and must write about women. All the prominent writers and scholars as observed before are of the view that literature reflects and shapes culture. Thus, literary studies can either perpetuate the oppression of women or help to eliminate it. In almost all the novels of Atwood the female body is portrayed as an object of male gaze and pleasure but by the end of the novel we find that the female characters develop a renewed relationship with their bodies through female gaze. Atwood as an *écriture* feminist empowers her protagonists with the artistic discourse, which in turn, enables them to liberate themselves from the male defined boundaries of body and language. Her protagonists are able to create their corporeal autonomy and redefine themselves as empowered human beings. Women characters in all the novels are expected to be docile. All the female characters, examined in the thesis, undergo some or other forms of subversion. All of them are trapped in patriarchal exploitation and all of them struggle to escape their physical and psychological sufferings by rediscovering their selves.

Hence, the discovery came up as a new language through intellectual and creative writings. It is known that the language acquisition starts at the prenatal stage. So, the language and sensibility of mother lie unconsciously in a child and this unconscious potentiality in a woman breaks the barrier of the male dominant ideology imposed through verbal signs. New verbal signs that emanate from the unconscious, manifest itself as literary text that celebrates *text-joissance*. This is not just subverting phallogentric language or superseding the power relationships; but it is more to the celebration of diversity, multiplicity and a flux. It is, for the Atwood's protagonists, a joyous freedom and a shift to the subject.

The dissertation has amply analysed through fore going chapters how women, in Atwood's novel, reconstructs their self-consciousness by breaking her boundaries free from male-dominated ideologies and such attempts to supersede the otherness or boundaries is not bound against the binary axis; rather, it is in line with Freudian unconscious or Lacanian decentred subject. All the three novels and other related works have been analyzed under the critical scanner of such literary theories and movements. Thus, feminine libido or female unconscious are expressed through the lived experiences of the protagonists, which often draws attention to the various strains of experiences through the body and mind. Atwood has attempted to speak a language that emanates from the woman's body as

écriture and that could express the unexpressed female consciousness. As women are not born women, but they are made women in the society; it was the author's attempt to relax at the woman's position and redefine her space realistically what is termed as her social realism.

Social realism as observed the world over is replete with the existential struggle for women as to whether they are to succumb to the pressures of being objectified or to assert themselves against any power relationships. The women characters in the thesis have steered clear the history and social injunctions of specific 'given' or the 'other' and asserted their individuality as *écriture féminine*. They have resisted the masculinist construction of the female body in line with *écriture féminine* by demonstrating that the woman must move beyond masculinist language to recognize the female body for what it to be and not what others constructed it to be. The main conflict that Atwood's women have faced lies in the difference between the way society perceives their body (passive and caring mother, wife and prostitute) and the way they perceive their body and its possibilities (dynamic and joyful human being). Atwood has included all kinds of women in her work who go out and confront their subjugation, and finally they come out with their own identity. One of the most important *écriture féminine* aspects in Atwood's writing is complexity and inability of language to express human emotions and things that are happening to the female body. This theme is discussed and analysed in the select novels. Marian, in chapter two of the thesis; *The Edible Woman: A corporeal Language of Resistance*, has struggled for an appropriate language to voice her resistance to patriarchal atrocities as soon as she was trapped in marriage proposal. The necessary step against oppression comes to her from a confrontation. She is aware of being locked up in a given gender relation in the society in which a sense of inadequacy haunts her self. She endures male domination being bound by tradition as women are socially conditioned to play the second fiddle to men. Marian was reduced to a toy thing in the hand of her husband, Peter, as she is expected to gratify his whims and fancies as and when required, no matter whether she is hurt or not. Peter has the privilege of enjoying sexual gratification even in a place like bathroom to prove his spontaneity and Marian just has to endure stoically. Such circumstances keep occurring in the lot of women protagonists of Atwood's novels because of their lack of independence and an imposed need of gaining trust of male counterparts.

She haunts her authentic self and confronts two selves: one, the inner self and the other, how the society has labelled her. Amid the conflict of these two, she discovers her true

self through body. Thus, the novel illustrates that how Atwood disassembles the patriarchal concept of femininity and offers a new account of the female body. She attempts to re-appropriating the body as she finds language to be a male weapon. Atwood uses the body as the medium of resistance to this male dominated language. Marian's eating disorder is a symbolic bodily act of resistance. Her chaotic mental condition becomes markedly evident after she agreed to marry Peter. Irrespective of her choice, she is taken to salon just because she should look like the way a male wants her to see. Her choice of presenting herself as independent human beings is limited. The salon episode makes it clear that female space is not a place for women to fulfil their aspirations; rather it is a space to fulfil the desires of men. Atwood's dispassionate representation of the beauty salon is an impression of the examination that patriarchy dispenses on the female body. Peter's love making is just a clinical approach as his insensitivity to Marian is fathomed by the movement of hands.

The blinding flash of Peter's camera during the engagement attacks her like a hunter. She screams as it startles her, Marian's body transforms into a corporeal space whose apparent components are exposed to a close examination. Marian's self image is shattered as She realises that she is no longer her real self rather, she is an image of Peter's wife and she has become all that society expects her to be. Marian flees from the engagement defeating Peter's intentions to subjugate her identity. It demonstrates her feminine audacity for her integrity. The intuitive nature of her body protests and begins refusing food. It starts with a rejection of steak and slowly adds on to eggs, cheese and finally breaks down to a few carrot sticks and spoonful of peanut butter.

She is surprised to learn that her body appears to have a mind, a knowledge all its own, a knowledge that is other than her conscious intellect, a knowledge that is centred in her body. As she gradually finds the nature and reasons for her compulsive eating, she begins to comprehend her own particular needs and sentiments. In this discourse, it is the mind that must control the body, yet in Marian's case it is her body overriding her intellect. It is not until she accepts this dialogue with her body that her intellect can take action towards autonomy which is symbolized in the cake baking and eating scene, and this opposition between body and mind becomes evident as her body becomes the battleground in the

struggle towards self-definition. The sudden and strange reaction of Marian's body is her initial step to recapture freedom through *écriture féminine*.

Both the body and the sentiments of Marian have picked up autonomy that continues on an unusual path till she recognizes and coordinates them. When she adjusts and acclimatizes her mind and body, she recovers her narrative power. As she gradually discovers the nature and reason of her eating disorder, she begins to retaliate to the gender biasness by distancing herself from her body. By empowering Marian's body to challenge the gendered binaries, Atwood reproves the harsh polarities that structures the society. Atwood exposes the onerous control that patriarchy exercises on the female body. According to her rather than admitting and confining to the dominating and culturally defined conventions women must re-write them. Atwood's notion of rewriting the culturally coded conventions, in a way resounds Cixous's view that feminine language (*écriture féminine*), operates in diffusive, oppositional manner.

The skilful delineation of female protagonists in the backdrop of current societal trends justifies Atwood's humanistic and feministic concern as she herself acts as an omniscient motivator through the protagonists who prepare themselves a way out of optimism against oppression. Marian realises that she should put an end to acting as a victim. A strong urge churns out for discarding all patriarchal norms. She can no longer expect Peter to be her rescuer from chaos; instead, she should break her silence and voice her feelings. The novel exposes the falsities of mind/body dualisms that alienate woman from her body, and drive her away from her somatic self. In so doing, Atwood proposes a looking beyond the limitations of tags that imposes narrow view on women in society. For Atwood, the body is a means by which woman can assert her existence, and not a manipulated existence defined from masculinist point of view.

In *The Edible Woman*, Atwood employs a corporeal language of resistance. By using the metaphor of eating disorder she portrays that the female body manifests female powerlessness while simultaneously protesting against it. Atwood's consideration of the female body as a site of power and resistance is one of the most crucial and profound statements of her work. The manifestation of protest through Marian's corporeal experience turns out to be life-affirming, eventually leading Marian to regain her narrative with a new eye/I. The author shows that the change has come from within and it extends to the larger women community as it would strengthen an understanding and reconnection

of feminine way of knowing female sensibility among all while bringing value and worth to that knowledge. Atwood claims that literature is not only a mirror, it is a map of our personal geography that consists of shared knowledge, and that this shared knowledge is not a luxury but a necessity. Without such knowledge the society cannot progress. The art of powerful narration is an essential means to establish a culture as well as to share and transfer this knowledge from mother to daughter and from woman to woman. Thus, the novel has been a narrative of female body.

In *The Edible Woman*, Atwood deconstructs the patriarchal concept of femininity and adds a new meaning to the female body. By re-defining the body, Atwood is able to voice women's apprehensions over her subjugative patriarchal encounters and is also able to confront that oppression. The novel uncovers the basic fabrication of female body that estranges woman from her body, and pushes her away from her carnal self. Atwood echoes Helen Cixous view that the body is an avenue through which woman can declare her existence. Eating disorder is experienced as corporeal language of women's liberation. Marian neither wants to be a man nor a machine but a woman who quests for a meaningful human identity. She is able to reclaim her humanistic identity by re-evaluating her body and developing a renewed relationship with her own body irrespective of patriarchal dictates. Atwood employs a corporeal language of resistance in the novel. The author as an intellectual also urges women to empower themselves through positive re-embodiment; women need to re-embody identity by first re-embodiment themselves. Through Marian's physical and mental responses to the changes in her life and her society, Atwood illustrates how the female body can be a possible site for a woman to rediscover herself.

Chapter three of the study namely, *The Handmaid's Tale: Dynamics of Body and Language in Reframing Identity*, delineates how Atwood puts female discourse into practice to empower and liberate her protagonist Offred from the doom of silence, suffering, abuse and mistreatment by the patriarchal system of the Gilead regime. The dystopian fiction, set in the late twentieth century at a time of religious unrest and fundamentalism in United States and out of various religious factions, New England came up as the Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian theocracy. The regime enforces extreme gender roles; women are banned from reading and writing, owning property, and earning money. The birth rate declined there drastically due to venereal disease and environmental toxics that brought down the fertility ratio among the ruling elite class, which led to the practice

of using concubines (Handmaids). They were women slaves who give birth on behalf of their wives.

The story of totalitarian subversion of women's rights and dignity is narrated by Offred, the Handmaid unfolding it through past and present. In Gilead women's bodies are relegated to the realm of national property; their identities depend as per their reproductive capability and accordingly, they are categorised with colour of dress which signify their role in relation to men. This chapter has vivified the condition of women under the authoritarian regime in which women are reduced to sexed bodies to be preyed upon by male, not as human beings; as they are identified by their biological function like child-bearing capability or one or the other way as slaves to gratify the whims and fancies of the ruling class.

In Gilead, women are prohibited from all forms of written language; even, women's spoken words to each other are tightly controlled. The handmaids have prescribed greetings for one another that affirm their reproductive roles. In Gilead, men are placed in a direct position to receive, embody and convey through language, whereas women maintain a marginal position to language. The control of language shaped the gender relations exploring the issues of reproductive exploitation, gender discrimination and objectification of women. Women were objectified as rewards, according to their fertility, to felicitate the men. Thus, women have been reduced merely to bodies, devoid of identity, spatial freedom and autonomy, which creates an experience of disembodiment. At Gilead, femininity is characterized by docility, morality and self-control, besides being submissive and self-abasing. The Women are given measured food so as not to degenerate their bodies with anything as Gilead wants them to be reproductive machines. Disregard of their sexual pleasures and goal of orgasm rendered them as desexualized. Offred's own confession has clearly shown how the Gilead Society has fundamentally changed her perception about her body; her inability to develop her own subjectivity. Her identity is reduced to the pear-shaped womb.

Thus, the novel reflects that the patriarchy is deeply inscribed in the economy of language as the Gilead regime grants men complete control of language while relegating women to the pre-literate sphere. Offred taps her objectified body to restore her subjectivity. She opposes the Gileadian control by censoring the present and modifying her past under her submissiveness. She turns out to be more basic and language becomes the tool of her body to resist and to reconstruct her subjectivity. Her resistance starts with the revision of verbal

control “Offred”, an indication of male dominance is transformed in her mind to “off red,” meaning getting rid of the Handmaid’s sign of red colour. Her secret conversation with herself becomes a monologue.

The restriction exercised by Gilead regime on her body and language forces her to reconstruct her individuality through imagination, reflection and resistance. She slowly advances in her consciousness towards liberty and finally, breaks the Gileadian subjugation order with the help of underground network via the connection with Nick. Offred chooses her oral act of storytelling to resist the patriarchal authority in order to reconstruct her subjective identity. In her tape recordings, Offred tries to reintegrate her identity as a subject, as she refuses to be accepted merely a body within the reproductive system of Gilead. The regime that claims to absolute authority in the state is resisted by the lie with the presence of May Day Resistance group and Offred’s escaping from the clutch of the police state. Offred’s renewed relation with her body and access to language gives her a sense of power. With this regained power, Offred acknowledges the passive role she was playing as a handmaid. Thus, Offred with her continuous oscillation between her past and present, develops a feeling to retain her identity and her real name. Such oscillations depicts the vibrancy and potential of feminine voice.

The chapter shows how the heroine uses the explosive language of subversion to reshape her identity thus, proving that her identity cannot be defined by the language of the patriarchal figures as she uses her body to defend and write her own language (through her tape recordings) which is free and autonomous. The chapter qualifies Atwood as a practitioner of *écriture féminine* and female speech through her protagonists. The handmaid continuously finds her strength through language, creative ability, memory and above all, her bodily acts and struggles to discover a technique to assert her identity and status as a subject against the powerful patriarchal hegemony.

In this perspective, she has been a story-teller, an author of her body, even before recording her story into the tapes. The composed body along these lines gets converged into the composition subject, and everything begins with Offred's affectability to her past recollections of her daughter and her spouse, and emphatically goals to escape from her present confinement. Offred's potential to link her body and language, self-sufficiently conceptualize, characterize and express her corporeal autonomy. It expands our understanding of the space of women in society and Atwood's reimagination of a possible

totalitarian society in future. Hence, Atwood's concern is humanistic and feministic, both at a time.

Thus, writing serves as an avenue in the process of empowerment of female self in the novel *The Blind Assassin*. Both Iris and Laura in the novel invoke space based memories that introspect their lives from childhood to their present. These, apparently arbitrary memories become political, as they create a feminine language that not only assigns the protagonists their identity, but it also becomes a part of the society as *écriture féminine* as it empowers the women. Since the narrators seek to expose the discourses and subjects that caused their under-estimation and submission, those memories thus, serve to give voice to their silenced female bodies which have stories to tell. They also provide a renewed sense of their selves through the self-quest performed during each writing process.

Chapter four of the research titled *The Blind Assassin: Writing as Self Assertion of Identity* shows that Atwood's female protagonist Iris, when faced with extreme of harassment and subordination, appropriates her voice to fight back against the oppressive patriarchal forces that are instrumental in her construction. Iris by conquering her body and writing from it defeats her silence and deconstructs her identity over the social structure that prioritizes and propagates binary division of male/female, where female is always the 'other'. Iris, the female protagonist in *The Blind Assassin*, when faced with the extreme of harassment and subordination, appropriates her voice to fight back against the oppressive patriarchal forces that are instrumental in her construction. Iris, by conquering her body and writing from it, defeats her silence and deconstructs her identity over the social structure which prioritizes and propagates binary division of male/female, and in turn, the female is always relegated as the 'other'.

On investigating the novel it is observed that it is not only Iris who writes her voice rather, almost all the female characters in the novel possess a piece of writing: Adelia's scrapbooks and cookbooks, Reenie's inheritance of Adelia's cookbook, Laura's notebooks, Iris's memoir, and the hyper textual inscriptions on the wall of a women's washroom. All these female writings serve to form a female community, where the subjects do not simply define their self against the symbolic Other; they positively facilitate coexistence with this Other through writing. Retelling of the history of the 'self' through artistic discourse pushes the 'self' of all the female characters to the centre and in turn, it is recognised as Subject. The female writings on the washroom wall can be seen as a spectrum of female voices.

In this spectrum some female voices delineate complete dependability to the symbolic order where as some of the voices show resistance to it. Atwood in her novels creates ambivalence and life-like female characters. Her protagonists possess positive as well as negative qualities. She doesn't want her woman to be manipulative just for the sake of what society expects her to be. She expects her protagonists to lead a normal life as her male counterparts. Therefore, she empowers her women characters with the strength of self-expression that enables them to convert their inferiority to superiority.

As a part of *écriture féminine*, these female writings inscribed on the wall of washroom are a privilege of female voice. The last two female inscriptions sprout the seeds of *the écriture féminine* as the enigma of the last inscription on the walls lies in the mysterious signature of Laura who died long before and hence, impractical. Secondly, the signature marked in the name of Laura actually belonged to someone else. The natural question appears as to the identity of the writer. Laura's signature proves that either someone must have associated herself with Laura or she may have bypassed death and appeared in some spiritual form. The first assumption appears to be more credible.

Therefore, whatever the case may be, but Laura's signature on the wall proves that she is still alive after her death in the mind of someone. However, physically dead yet profoundly more capable, Laura now turns into the incorporeal feminine figure, a sister and some one's mother. She becomes alive once again and has been revered and has transformed into a feminine symbol as she is already dead, yet alive in the society through her writing. Further, in the exploration of female writing(s) in the novel, it appears that silenced women become a motif in the homonym story within the novel *The Blind Assassin*, whose authorship has been attributed to Laura Chase.

Since female writings are interpreted through male ideology and women are viewed as weak, docile, bereft of any creative talent or intelligence, Iris could not risk her identity through authorship as it would be difficult for her to survive in the society as the prevailing social condition goes by. Already her novel creates shock waves in the personal and professional life of Richard. Thus, the dishonour engendered due to the publication of Iris's novel ruined Richard's life.

Thus, the message proves that it is a desirable aim for a civilized culture to have women without voice of their own; patriarchy controls, guides and manipulates the females in the society and it is the time as Atwood suggests, women must voice their own language. It is

a message which goes hand in hand with Cixous's idea and what has already been touched upon in foregoing passages state that, women need to create a language of their own in order to liberate from men's control and manipulation. This language or writing would subvert the patriarchal use of language that has so far been exercised on women subtly. Similarly, to the girls in the story, neither Laura nor Iris has had any voice during their lifetime. Both sisters have suffered the abuses what Richard has exercised on them. They even could not communicate their pain and anguish to anyone. However, Laura has managed to communicate symbolically through her notebooks. Other than Adelia's scrapbooks and cookbook, Laura's note pads and the hyper printed engravings on the walls of women washroom, Iris Chase's diary is the most vivid and dependable account and evidence in the investigation of female writing(s) in *The Blind Assassin*. Iris' journal, is really a confession that the language leaves so many clues about the history of the Chase family. The language Iris leaves that celebrates the process of conversion from an object of contempt to an object of acceptance. Similarly, to the girls in the story, neither Laura nor Iris has had any voice during their lifetime. Both sisters have suffered the abuses what Richard has exercised on them. They even could not communicate their pain and anguish to anyone

The novel has shown that women have been capable of identifying their unique potential and their efficacy of writing back can overthrow patriarchal hegemony. Atwood destabilizes and deconstructs the gendered identity prevalent for women so far by letting the protagonist write her memoir which paves her way to transcend from the passive, subordinate position of victim to that of assertive, independent subject. Unlike her romance fiction written in the name of Laura, Iris's memoir reveals all the indecent incidents of it's family like the incidents of the relation of Iris's relation with Alex, illicit birth of her daughter, and her husband's oedipal love with her sister Laura. All the happenings are so painful and shameful that every thing is not possible for her to confess, and hence, she took recourse to writing and that too in the name of Laura, her deceased sister. She is able to voice all of her hushed encounters.

By rewriting the events of her life through her memoir Iris writes her untold story or 'herstory', thus becoming a subject from an object that was viewed in male gaze. Atwood undermines and disintegrates the binary oppositions where women are always treated as other. She empowers her female protagonists with the power to resist and subvert the patriarchy. Atwood has shown through this writings how female is victimized, tortured,

raped and then left to die and no body remembers them that they were born. It also reflects the female power as against the usual practice of dominating and relegating women to inferior position as 'other' till the first half of twentieth century in Canada.

Writing memoir helps Iris to reconfigure and rediscover her connection with the other. Richard sexually harasses Iris and her sister Laura. He is the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. He also demonstrates prejudiced and male chauvinistic attitude. Thus, girls are treated just as sexual objects which are to be traded for sexual pleasure and use. Atwood as with Cixous appeal woman to break out of their imposed silence. They should articulate their experiences and desires. Speech is the tool that can be used against their confinement. In this manner, women can free themselves from the patriarchy and its standards. Woman's social identity as the *other* derates her to the status of silent and submissive object. Women can embark her subjective and dynamic identity only by realizing her potential and exercising her corporeal autonomy and writing from it they can assert their identity. By writing her memoir Iris leaves a message for her grand daughter Sabria who has been forcefully snatched and taken away from her by Winifred Griffin. By portraying her story Iris frees herself as well as her plans to set the ground for Sabrina to investigate her personality. It is brought to the fore how women by identifying their potential and by voicing their silence can punish and overthrow patriarchal hegemony. Atwood destabilizes and deconstructs the constructed gendered identity for women made by patriarchy, and enables the liberation of her protagonist Iris by letting her write her memoir which paves her way to transcend from the passive, subordinate position of victim to that of assertive, independent subject. It is by identifying her voice and writing from her body that Iris breaks open the long silence and reveals so many truths that otherwise would have remained unnoticed.

Thus, the study attempted to bridge a gap in current scholarship on Margaret Atwood's works by deconstructing gender stereotypes. In Atwood's novels, *The Edible Woman*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Blind Assassin*, the notion of writing is portrayed as a positive and empowering attribute to the women protagonists. In *The Edible Woman*, Marian realises that she has to cease being a reader of Peter's construction and start being the author of her Self. This entails a strengthening of boundaries between her 'Self' and the 'Other'. *The Handmaid's Tale* also foregrounds the affinities between selfhood and the text. Offred's former identity has been eradicated, and her only function in Gilead is that of host uterus. The language of Gilead regime is authoritative truths and it is beyond any

challenge. Offred or any one is not allowed to voice any language other than the imposed language. If the ruth is not manifested in any language, it is not possible to come with any resistance. All the inmates in the group of handmaids knew only the surface truth of the regime handed down to them. But Ofred was a different woman with her potentiality to create an alternative language, where as she was trapped in totalitarianism.

She consequently experiences a fragmentation of identity, which is extended to her narrative in two ways: First her recorded voice is fragmented into thirty tapes while the other is that it is also fragmented because of her uncertainty regarding the nature of truth in a society in which virtually no external information is available. She attempts to attain a coherent identity through *écriture féminine*. Similarly, Iris's fragmented identity is reflected in her fragmented narrative consisting of newspaper clippings, photographs, letters as well as her handwritten memoir. Her narrative, locked away in the steamer trunk, is destined to her granddaughter Sabrina who will be given the key at Iris's death. It is only the self-expression through writing, Atwood seems to suggest, and that can liberate and emancipate women from patriarchy. Iris explains how she collects enough fragments of the past to make areconstruction of it, which must have borne as much relation to the real thing as a mosaic portrait would to the original" (*The Blind Assasian* : 83), but Iris is not interested in the "real thing". Iris, the author, 'dies' by projecting herself onto her writing, and her previous self, as known by Sabrina before reading the narrative, is lost forever the moment she reads it. Iris dies of a heart complication, and when she dies, discourse stops. But 'writing' will begin when Sabrina - and the other readers - start reading Iris's memoirs, the book itself.

A close study and textual analysis of the select novels of Atwood discussed in this dissertation proves that Atwood is a harbinger of Helen Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine*. The protagonists of not only the selected novels but almost all the novels of Atwood embark on personal journey in an attempt to rediscover lost parts of themselves, and strive to regain their personal voice in order to gain their identity. By the end of each protagonist's journey, she has accepted responsibility for her own victimization. According to Atwood, acknowledging one's own victim position is the first step to liberation and emancipation.

Atwood's protagonists prove to be adherent advocates of *écriture féminine* by writing their own script by their own hands. They don't let their male counterparts to define them, rather they give voice to their experiences and desires in their own language and try to fabricate a

distinct identity for themselves. The protagonists in Atwood's novel initially appear to be a weak creature, often exploited at every step by male-oriented society. Yet, ultimately they gain strength because of the struggle they face and turn to be powerful women who have the remote controls of their lives in their own hands. Atwood backs the notion of *Ecriture feminine* by gifting her protagonist an artistic talent which also helps them to express their experiences and voice their repressed self. For example, the nameless protagonist in *Surfacing* is an artist, Elaine Risley, the protagonist in *Cat's Eye* is a painter and Rennie Wilford in *Bodily Harm* is a writer. The author not only explores the stereotypical gender structure created by patriarchy, where women are victimized, oppressed and ruined but her novels also provide women with the solutions as to how to establish their individuality. In fact, her mission is not only to place woman on equal level with the male counterpart, but she also aims at encouraging woman to enjoy and celebrate her femininity and difference.

All the three protagonists under study succeed in their endeavours to express themselves and regain their identity. Through the close examination of the Atwood's protagonists in the selected novels it is clear that these characters succeed in regaining their identity and realizing the power within them by developing a dialogue with their bodies and writing their experiences. Hence, Atwood through her protagonists namely, Marian (*The Edible Women*), Offred (*The Handmaid's Tale*) and Iris (*The Blind Assassin*) under study have proved that female speech is not amputated: on the contrary, they have indicated that the voice of the feminine is vibrant and potentially dangerous for the social apparatus (patriarchy). Female discourse, whether written or spoken is a weapon for her against the unjustly subordinate position in the world they live in. Thus, Margaret Atwood patron the concept of *écriture feminine*.

Atwood's protagonists experience a renovation of their entire self. Like Cixous Atwood contradicted the thought of a stable, stationary self. The novels under review dynamically undermine the possibility of a 'whole' self. Instead, her texts explores multiplicity and heterogeneity. The reconsideration of the protagonists of their self enables them to find a language suitable for them, thus stimulating them to rediscover their voice and reclaim their identity. Atwood's heroines; Marian of *The Edible Woman*, Offred of *The Handmaid's Tale* to Iris of *The Blind Assassin* emerge as creative non-victim at the end of the novel. The common thread that binds these novels and protagonists together is the silence rendered on them in some or the other way and their act of regaining their voice

and identity at the end of the novel. For example, Marian in *The Edible Woman* expresses her voice or protest by baking a bridal cake doll and offering it instead of herself to her fiancé Peter. Offred does so by narrating her story in tape recordings and Iris finds her voice in writing her memoir.

Thus, it is observed that Atwood's women are able to ameliorate their situations through personal, creative expressions. In all the three selected novels, the protagonists come to an important realization that in order to be assertive, they need to have their own voice. They are able to validate the power of language and self-knowledge and thus, are able to regain their individual identity and empowerment. Atwood makes her protagonist realize that one has to dive deep in one's despair in order to find peace and become more powerful. Atwood is of the view that women struggle because they look at themselves as the predefined images of patriarchy. She further says that in order to gain a self defined image, women has to confront to the prejudices of patriarchal society and redefine their relationship to their bodies and voice their own experiences in their own language. These women in discussion, who are considered powerless, struggle to become strong by taking responsibility of their situations.

Atwood seems to be in an agreement with notion of Helene Cixous that, writing the female body is an empowering and emancipating tool for women to reconstruct their identity. Critics like Cixous, Krestiva and Irigaray are of the view that the world is structured and interpreted through language, hence, gendered identity is constructed in language and because the language is predominantly masculine, therefore women is positioned at the margin in the symbolic order. Cixous advocated for reconstructing the social structure by deconstructing the male centric language which prioritizes male hegemony and subjugation of women. She further proposes a new feminine language challenging the logocentric ideology which could subvert the patriarchal binary that oppresses and silences women.

The same concept is toed by Atwood in her fictional journey and she concedes the power of language by equipping her protagonists to regain their empowered identity through the use of language, thus voicing Cixous's notion of *écriture féminine* where she claims that restricting the body and its experience is suffocating breath and speech of a person. It is observed that the protagonists in the selected novels are able to voice their silence only by coming in terms with their bodies and finally, they are able to transform themselves to subject position, though not without suffering. In the novel *The Blind Assassin*, Atwood's

female characters are engaged in acts of self-representation. Adelia's eccentric scrapbooks and cookbook, Reenie's inheritance of Adelia's cookbooks, Laura's romance fiction and notebooks, the various inscriptions on the wall of women's washroom and Iris's confessional memoir, all are the means through which the female characters in the novel write and rewrite their own life stories and thus, "writing becomes in their hands the one means to insert the female body into the public realm, to restore balance of gaze that constantly identify it as an object and not subject of sexual desire.

Through the protagonist Marian, Atwood urges women to empower themselves through positive re-embodiment; and advocates that women need to re-embody culture by first re-embodimenting themselves. Thus, the novel stands out as a journey of young Marian. Her acquaintance with several men and women makes Marian realize and assesses different male strategies of exploitation and the causes of women's oppression. Eventually, she finds a solution from this patriarchal oppression through self-realization and self-expression. Marian endeavours to reconstruct her identity. At the end of the novel she gets transformed from a meek, docile and non-descript woman to a strong individualistic and assertive personality.

The analytical investigation through the lens of *écriture féminine* proves that literary writing by the women protagonists redesign the identity of them that draws a line in so far as it is first hand feminine experience of an individual. It also negotiates with the existing discourse for bringing in a balance that is humanistic and thus, free from gendered reality. Hence, the concept of *écriture féminine* given by Cixous is translated into reality through the writings of memoir, novel, wall writings, audio tapes etc. They all serve a common purpose of mirroring the innate potentiality of women writings reflecting women's cause and concern without offending any one.

Atwood's articulation of *écriture féminine* is not fictional imagination or rhetorics; on the contrary, she has put forward the social realism, which dramatizes the post-modern phenomenon of anti-essentialism. Contextually, logocentric male authority is subverted and the female as a subject is brought to the fore. Overstepping the traditional boundaries by a protagonist or its author might be viewed as an individual ego, but all the men and women are engaged in the larger society informed and influenced by the post structuralist and postmodern ideologies. Social realism as observed the world over is replete with the existential struggle for women as to whether they are to succumb to the pressure of being viewed as objectified entity or to assert themselves against any power relationships.

There have been countless authors who have depicted the theme of women as a victim of patriarchy, but Atwood's interpretation and message is unique. Atwood's women characters are victimized, is more or less a generalised conception but the real essence lies in the way she projects her protagonists to come out of it with much stronger identity. Atwood's heroines transform from a position of victim to that of creators and undergo the metamorphosis from being divided only through creative writing. Hence, the study based on the concept of *écriture féminine* explores how written realm of the imagination becomes an important outlet for the expression and exploration of self not only in the selected but almost all the novels of Margaret Atwood. By offering a artistic discourse as an outlet her female characters, Atwood allows women to have the power to write their histories and reconstruct their own identities. Their attempt was not a dispute or differentiation of gender or sex, rather creating an awareness and environment that could dissolve disparities. Unlike other women activists or writers, Atwood did not go for any demonstrative protest or obvious feminist agenda; her own experience of marginalization is so acute and painful that she put forth those conditions of marginality such as gender constraints, prejudices against women, maltreatment and so forth through her sincere art of storytelling.

Atwood's heroines are all blank pages in the beginning of their stories but succeed in becoming more complete and assertive subjects. They refuse to be patriarchal puppets and recreate their own identities, as Marian in *The Edible Woman* scripts herself through her body language expressed through eating disorder and the act of cake baking, Offred of *The Handmaid's tale* through the recording of tapes of her experiences and Iris of *The Blind Assassin* by writing novel and her memoir. Atwood's each protagonist finds her own means to seize the metaphorical Pen and conquers their fear of being chastised. The heroine of *The Edible Woman* uses her body language to express herself; Offred finds her voice and seizes the ability to speak out by narrating her sordid tale.

The author has attempted to create an ideology of social change by tempering the society through her creative art encouraging women for *écriture féminine* against the ongoing injustice and inequality not only in the Canadian society, but the world at large. The conflict and compulsion with which a woman begins her journey of life, her struggle for space and individuality writ large through Atwood's fiction and hence, her stories can be termed as discourse of *écriture féminine*. Atwood occupies a unique place in the Canadian literature as her message is made clear through the protagonist, Offred that a woman must not stop writing; her subject will find her; and there are always outlets for voices. Offred

recorded her story most sincerely ; she stored it very safely with the hope that some day someone might find it interesting and it might be shared across. Her act of writing and hope rescued her. Every story has a reader and hence, women are not to be locked up in the history of subjugation; they must write.

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