CHAPTER 2

Technology and Human Behaviour:

Consumerism and Identity Crisis in Atwood’s The Edible Woman

2.1 Technological Brain: A Leap Forward in Human Evolution

Human brain is not static. It is dynamic. It keeps evolving through the evolution of human culture, and civilization, science and technology, literature and philosophy. The growth of science and technology has affected the human brain immensely in the recent past. The contemporary human exercise of consumption, expansion and oppression are the embodiment of a technocrat society. The plight of man is not one of mere external oppression but it is of innate, inborn nature born out of his own ability to preserve his sanity and integrity in a technological world. The evolutionary process of the brain unravels many age-old mysteries surrounding human behaviour and emotion. Human brain has a property called ‘Plasticity’ which enables it to change in its external environment. The modern technology has affected our processing, comprehension and brain functioning. It has enabled to vastly explore the ethical dilemmas that are part and parcel of this new era.

The organization and function of the human brain are being rewired to adapt to increased demands placed on it by media and technology, including cell-phones, digital cameras E-mails and Internet among others. This technologically driven change in the brain is the biggest transformation in the last few years. The technology has made possible a multilevel reality but, the most serious consequences is that it constantly challenges our ability to focus our attention forcing us to do more than one thing at a time and often to vacillate between competing or conflicting interests. Our ability to multitask at the degree demanded by modern technology does not come without a price and
this price is paid in terms of losing mental peace, freedom of thought, individuality, identity and even ones sanity. The changes in our brain brought about by technology might offer the challenge of retaining our freedom and sense of identity.

There has been a change in our attitude that is all embracing and that we barely notice. We have moved from a culture based on words and feelings to one based essentially on images or pictures. This is probably one of the biggest shift in the story of modern man, but we take it almost for granted. However, the primitive parts of our brain are still fuelling our emotions, our fears, our anger and our impulse to destroy. So instinctively, the humans are nervous about the new culture of icons, pictures and images. This creates an internal conflict between the primitive and technological brain. The rejection or acceptability of technology, the ability or inability to assimilate modern technology divides the humans into ‘Digital Natives’ and ‘Digital Immigrants’.

Margaret Atwood devotes considerable attention to the interaction between technology and human behaviour. Atwood focuses on multicultural corporations and culture of consumption as a by product of technology in her first novel *The Edible Woman*.

The female protagonist Marian MacAlpin, in Margaret Atwood’s *Edible Woman*, serves as an excellent study of a young woman caught in the maze of modernity typically critics have read. The edible woman is either an optimistic celebration of female “liberation” or a materialist–feminist protest. But Atwood reflects a more complex picture of capitalism and female subjectivity in the 1960’s. By varying structural and narrative form within the novel and by using *anorexia* as a discursive technique, Atwood constructs states of paranoia, decomposition and schizophrenia to emphasize the dynamic nature of the capitalist – system – its exploitative disposition as well as its potential to
release female desire from systemic constraint. Edible woman is an imaginative transformation of a social problem, an exposure of women’s continuing conditions of entrapment within their own bodies and within social myths. Under a series of comic mask, Atwood explores the relation between consumerism and the feminine mystique where one woman’s resistance to consume and to be consumed hints at a wider social malaise. Young Marian, becomes increasingly disillusioned with her job and her fiancé to the point where inner conflict finds its outward expression in an eating disorder whose symptoms resemble anorexia nervosa.

Marian is trapped in a unique position both the victim of her society’s obsessive consumerism and its unwilling advocate, not herself aware of the mundane evil of her activities. The connection between her roles is dynamically exploited through a series of interrelated image patterns. Marian explores the choices that are thrown open to her in the contemporary world, unable to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion. As she pursues her job as a surveyor with Seymour surveys; she observes, “The company is layered like ice-cream sandwich, with three floors: the upper crust, the lower crust, and our department, the gooey layer in the middle” (The Edible Woman (EW) 19)¹

Marian’s predicament typifies the situation of women in male-dominated society and implicitly enshrines Atwood’s criticism of patriarchal hegemony and gender specific role – models. Marian has no freedom in her work and she feels forbidden to do what she likes. She sees no future with Seymour surveys, the stratified market organization, where all respectable positions are held by men. She knows she would not be given adequate pension after a lifetime of unrewarding work. This seems to be an outrageous infringement of her personality. Moreover Seymour surveys proscribes marriage and pregnancy of women in employment. It regards marriage and
pregnancy as acts of disloyalty to the company. Puzzled with her work life she seeks for alternatives in her immediate surroundings. Alan Dawe observes that “The edible woman is a novel about choices”.  

The first alternative comes as Marian’s room-mate Ainsley. Though they live together in “Symbiotic adjustment”(16) but they differ on the issues of marriage and motherhood. Ainsley works as an electric toothbrush tester. Ainsley disapproves of marriage and opts to become an unwed mother. She says: “The things that ruins families these days is the husband”(40). She wants children by choice rather than chance products of emotional entanglements and hence is in search of a strong, handsome and intelligent man for her child. Marian rejects this choice, for the idea of bringing forth a designer baby would be a mechanical and cold blooded act. Ainsley on the other hand allows herself to be seduced by Len and becomes pregnant by him but later on she reverses her views on marriage and single unwed mothers. She marries another man Fischer and ultimately accepts the traditional role of a wife and mother. This reversal of thought makes her consumable in the marriage market against which she had professed.

The second alternative available to Marian is that of Clara, her married friend, who is struggling to survive an organized marriage. Clara gets involved in a succession of pregnancies. Marian feels sorry for her state and obviously rejects this option as well: The babies had been unplanned: Clara greeted her first pregnancy with astonishment that such a thing could happen to her, and her second with dismay, now during her third, she had subsided into a grim but inert fatalism (EW p. 36) Marian assesses this choice as futile for this would mean she would be mentally, economically and socially dependent on her husband.
A third choice is represented by the three office virgins, Lucy, Emmie and Millie, "The trio of perennial blondes," Marian rejects these artificial blondes because they invite victimization.

Marian rejects all three role models, Ainsley (the scheming female), Clara (the earth mother) and three blondes (the office virgins) occupy the victim position and serve as objects of carnal desires of men both within and outside the legal framework of marriage. She assesses different root course of exploitation and oppression of women which also illustrate their various attitudes towards their own status as women.

In her pursuit for stability and contentment Marian looks upon Peter, her boy friend and later her fiancé’ to fulfill her objective but little does she realize that peter, a law graduate is better recognized for his purchasable hobbies. Peter needs a wife to complement his collection of knives, guns and cameras.

He likes Marian as she never demands anything from him. The reason why he is drawn towards Marian is that:

I can always depend on you. Most women are pretty and scatter brained but you’re such a sensible girl. You may not have known- this but I’ me always thought that’s the first thing to look for when it comes to choosing a wife (EW p. 89)

In course of time Marian discovers that she has let herself be sold as some kind of dispensable commodity. The image of peter as the hunter and herself as the hunted enters her mind.

Marian finds herself reduced to a mere decorative piece. She becomes progressively objectified and divided in the marriage market, she becomes an “other” an object as she turns from subject to object consumer to consumed, she loses her capacity to perceive. Peter looks upon her as a commodity. He
wants to get a couple of shots of Marian alone in order to show “red” on a movie slide in the “Zero hour” of the party. Marian feels like a lifeless statue meant for commercial display. She finds Peter aiming his camera at her, clicking it in a blinding flash of light. Marian aptly likens her face to a “vastly spreading and papery and slightly dilapidated: a huge billboard smile, feeling away ion flops and patches.” (EW p. 244)

When she decides to marry Peter she visualizes herself as a victim ready to be consumed and devoured in the role of an obliging wife. Atwood emphasizes on Marian’s commodification and Peter’s role as a probable consumer. When Marian accepts the marriage proposal there is a marked uncertainty, in search of certainly, that one notes in her behavior. Atwood plays on a typical metaphysical conceit to describe the horror of Marian’s position: 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”(EW p. 183). Quite apposed to the two lovers in John Donne’s “The Good Morrow,” who reflected in each other’s eyes and became united in mutual love. This is a recurring image where Peter’s eyes have been characterized as a tool of the hunter capturing his prey. This sequence may be likened to the one where Peter is narrating an incident to Marian’s friend Len, in the Bar across Park Plaza Hotel, about the ‘rabbit’ whose “guts” are “dangling from the trees”. Marian strikes an empathy between herself and the rabbit and “in dithering mazes of panic” She begins to cry. This sets the pattern for the engagement party of Marian and Peter. In the party at Peter’s apartment, Marian sees herself as distant and detached, as a “tiny two dimensional small figure…….. posed like a paper woman in a mail – order catalogue.” “A consumable item fluttering in the white empty space.” Marian avoids both the camera and the mirror that would fix her image, trap her “indissolubly in that
gesture, that single stance, unable to move or change.” Her body begins to reach her future role as Peter’s consumable private property gradually Marian becomes so obsessed with the idea of losing her identity that she starts avoiding food. As time passes she resembles a case of ‘anorexia nervosa’, the neurotic syndrome that compels one to avoid food as a means of reconciling unconscious conflict between asserting her particular identity and relinquishing control over her body to become thin, thus fitting into the image prescribed by her society. One may identify here Marian’s insecurity regarding her image, her desire to become thin and attractive so that the society might not reject her as old and dull. Marian’s neurosis is Atwood’s way of bringing forth the uncalled pressures of technology, the forces that can drive a normal human being to a state of insanity where on loses control over oneself. Marian’s inability to eat though looks like anorexia nervosa, yet it actually differs quite markedly from the clinical diagnoses as summarized by Noelle Caskey in her historical account ‘Interpreting Anorexia Nervosa’.³ The image of food being transformed into a living thing is significant. As Marian’s body rebels against one food after another she realize that “this thing, this refusal of her mouth to eat, was malignant, that it would spread; that slowly the circle now dividing the non-devour able from the devour able would become smaller and smaller, that the objects available to her would be excluded one by one” (EW p.153) It reflects Marian’s feeling that she ought not victimize other living thing which in one way or the other is an outcome of any consumerist society.

2.2 The Politics of Eating and Female Identity

The novel’s central imagery, as evident from the title, is that of woman as food, as object, as a consumable commodity. The theme is a woman’s Endeavour to attain humanity and a human identity. This task assumes more broad dimensions in a world flooded with endless choices and vivid options. A
woman's search for identity is a common theme with most writers in feminist writing. However Margaret Atwood stresses on the challenges faced by a woman to embrace a new socio-cultural setup which forces her to behave mechanically leaving behind her dreams, hopes and aspirations, most importantly her identity as a human. Seymour surveys, the place where Marian works, is projected metaphorically as a trap and Marian realizes that she is literally and metaphorically trapped. As she ponders over the three floors of the department, she compares it to the three layers of the ice-cream sandwich (EW 19) what puzzles Marian is what would be her outcome in this four month long association with Seymour surveys and where is she heading to as she puts in “What, then, could I expect to turn into at Seymour surveys?” (EW 20) The imagery of three layers depicts a metaphoric parallel for the woman’s place in patriarchal society. The men are mind and women are bodies. This is the received categorization. This received distribution defines woman as above ‘matter’ but below the ‘mind’ and Marian is faced with the dilemma of what she is the ‘become’ As she says: “I couldn’t become one of the man upstairs; I couldn’t become a machine person or one of the questionnaire making ladies that would be a step down” (EW 20). Her problem therefore is of ‘becoming’ which is both a metaphysical as well as a socio-political problem. At the metaphysical level Marian’s quest is for a meaningful human identity; at the socio-political level, her quest is to become neither a man nor a machine but a woman, with an absolute as against a relatively defined identity. The consumer world which Marian inhabited and is inhabited by in turn, appropriates Marian’s identity and reduces her to a ‘in between’ thing or a mind-less body. Peter, Marian’s fiancé, not only emblematizes the archetypal male, imperialistic and subjugating but also internalizes the consumer – ethics of the male world. For Peter, Marian is “the kind of girl who wouldn’t try to take over his life.” (EW p. 61). However it does not imply that he would not try to take over hers.
On the contrary, Peter, the hunter, armed with his camera, his gun – substitute, wants – lo forever fix Marian in an image of what she should be. Peter’s eyes have been characterized as the tools of the hunter capturing his prey: “He glanced quickly over at me, his eyes narrowed as if he was taking aim” (EW 81).

*The Edible Woman* (1969) deals specifically with the relation of the sexes in a consumer society men viewing women as commodities or as property to enhance their social status. The heroine of the novel, Marian MacAlpin, a seemingly ordinary. Capable young woman, who works for a consumer survey company and is engaged to a handsome, upwardly mobile young lawyer named Peter, whose hobbies are hunting and photography. Marian becomes obsessed with the idea that she is just another of the objects in his world to be captured and photographed and made into a trophy or something to be consumed. She listens to Peter describing to Len about shooting a rabbit……

Linguistically, the prey is female. “So I let her off and wham. On shot right through the heart……. I picked if up and Trigger said, “You know how to gut them, you just slit her down the belly and give her a good hard shake and all the guts fall out.’…….. Trigger and me had the old cameras along, we got some good shots of the whole mess.

Marian is overtaken by irrational terror and tries to run away from this situation. The image of the female rabbit as a prey is particularly horrifying to her for she draws a parallel between the she-rabbit and herself. The victimization of the rabbit serves as symbol of victimization of female body. The sense of being captured as an image and captured by Peter’s camera is so deep-rooted in her psyche that it drives her to abnormal behaviour. The fear of being fixed in an image, of being devoured by Peter.
The plot reaches the climax when Peter arranges the cocktail party on the occasion of their betrothal. The artificiality in the consumer society manifests itself in Marian who is found in an elaborate coiffure a “daring” new red dress, a girdle, heavy make up, and gold earrings; all this on peters demand. She looks at her own image as reflected in the mirror which seems to mock 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 take, like soft, pinkish – white rubber or plastic, boneless, flexible........(EW 229)

During the course of the story Marian repeatedly “escapes” her relationship with Peter by seeking out Duncan, a graduate student studying literature that she meets while performing survey for her job.

Marian comprehends that Peter is a threat to her individuality, her very identity. J.Brooks Bouson says: “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.”

The anxiety and emotional unrest leads Marian to Duncan. In Duncan she looks for support, safety and shelter. Duncan is like an animal living on the margin of civilization: He tells her he is not really human but comes from “underground”. The escape from party thereon marks the end of her forthcoming marriage. Marian feels as if she is being shot by Peter’s camera and escapes to spend a night with Duncan, But running away with Duncan does not resolve the central dilemma posed by the novel. However she becomes a helpless victim of Duncan’s lust.

In the edible woman Atwood explores all four victim position as occupied by woman in a patriarchal, capitalistic consumer society. The
protagonist Marian moves through three of the four positions. At the beginning there is a vague acceptance of the victim position. Duncan takes advantage Marian's credulous and gullible nature. He seduces her by posing himself as an innocent "Virgin" who needs to be introduced to sex. He recites the theory of unreality of matter and explains it to Marian to exploit her both emotionally and physically. According to Duncan: "..... if we went to bed, god knows you're unreal enough now, all I can think of is those layers and layers of woolly clothes you wear....."(EW 202) After seducing her ' Duncan remarks:

   It's no use. I must be incorruptible... I don't exactly know what's wrong. Partly I don't like not being able to see your face... (EW 253)

   This statement reflects Duncan's attitude towards Marian in particular and woman in general. One could sense his absolute disregard and disrespect for women.

   It is like degrading humanity itself. He is a lustrous beast who victimizes women for carnal pleasures. Marian is too late to observe the deceitful nature of Duncan. This unpleasant encounter with Duncan completely shelters Marian. She decides to stop eating altogether. Her refusal to eat grows out of her unwillingness to be eaten in turn.

   How does a woman negotiate the boundary between her need to be an independent individual and her need to her part of the society?

   Marian "can't quite fit in the man (Duncan) at the Laundromat or account for [her] own behaviour "(EW 103) Later Duncan plays a significant role in Marian's fictive journey towards achieving self hood by enabling her in a profound way, to see herself in a relation to herself as well as the world around her differently. Duncan functions to reflect Marian's passivity and powerlessness, yet his dependence - complex is a consciously worked out strategy to exploit others. In Marian's case on the other hand, her passivity and
naively becomes a tool of her victimization where the lets herself to be victimized. Duncan, however, relates her inability to eat to her inner rebellion—“You’re probable representative of modern youth, rebelling against the system.” (EW 209).

As her awareness’ of victimization heightens she feels an urgency to emerge out of their identify crisis. As T. N. Dhar comments:

Her beliefs and modes of thought are out of a strenuous lest till, after being battered in body and psyche, she finally passes into a state of “raised” consciousness.

Marian perceives Peter as a victimiser who directed technological assault on women by means of a camera. She sees in him a “homicidal maniac with a lethal weapon in his hands” (EW 246) The image of peter as a hunter upsets Marian emotionally. Peters civilized manner are a perfect disguise to his exploitative strategy.

As she becomes increasingly oppressed by her victim status, Marian finds it difficult to eat. She identifies herself with things consumed. A steak makes her think of the cow diagrammed in sections for the butcher and she reflects in turn her own cow like position to her fiancé observing “now that she has been ringed he took pride in displaying her” (EW p.176) But after escaping from the party and having eaten nothing for days, Marian makes a large cake in the shape of a woman and invites peter to eat it. “You’re been trying to destroy me, haven’t you, she says. “You’re been trying to assimilate me. But I’ve made you a substitute, something you’ll like much better” (EW p.271)

While Atwood concerns herself with de-constructing gender politics in the Edible woman, she does not adopt an extremist stance as a feminist. She views Marian as responsible for her victimization for she allows others (peter
and Duncan) to exploit her. As Linda Hutcheon remarks “As both a Canadian and a woman, she protests any tendency toward easy passivity and naivety; She refuses to allow either Canadians or women to deny their complicity in the power structures that may subject them.”

Atwood’s intension is not only to expose complicity but also explore the possibilities of combating patriarchal structures of power and domination that disallow an individual to survive in the society with a claim of dignity and equality. Atwood here shrewdly explores the dilemmas experienced by her generation. Coming of age in the early sixties, Marian MacAlpin instinctively rejects the conventional formulas for marriage and success embracing instead the possibility that reality and identity are fictions, culturally imposed illusions. This radical break with the assumptions and values is further explored in her next novel *Surfacing*. Marian’s powerlessness, therefore, Atwood implies, is self-inflicted and is in effect, reprehensible and undesirable. If Peter’s – the male’s – imperialistic designs are condemnable, Marians – the formula’s self-willed subservience is no less blame – free. Atwood, this way exposes one fact that woman is as much implicated is the processes that perpetuate male hegemony as is man – As the woman protagonist in Atwood’s novel *Bodily Harm*, rennin Wellford realizes towards the end of the novel, “Nobody is exempt from anything.”

Marian’s loss of individuality is indicated by the silencing of her inner voice. Marian’s loss of inner autonomy is accompanied by a loss of physical appetite and the loss of “first person singular “(EW p.308) voice in the narrative structure. It is a critical commonplace that when she becomes objectified, passive and acted upon, she loses her narrative voice her story is narrated in the third person (Centre of consciousness Technique.) throughout part II, which suggests Marian’s objective and hence enlarged perception of her
situation. In part III the narration once again changes over to the first person mode which implies a re-discovery and re-vision of self.

Marian realizes the futility of starving herself to death. She begins to see both Peter and Duncan in their true colours and recognizes her complicity in her victimization. She realizes how both Peter and Duncan have exploited her and how she had allowed them to "eat" her. She is made a victim of symbolic cannibalism. Marian gradually but painfully learns that woman in the contemporary society is reduced to a commodity meant for male consumption. She recalls the nude and semi-nude advertisement that exploit woman for publicity, advancement and prosperity. As she rejects this victimization she bakes the cake - woman to expose the true nature of Peter and Duncan. She says: "The price of this version of reality was testing the other one"(EW p.271) she bakes the cake - woman in her own image, the way she viewed herself artificial and objectified in the engagement 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.7

Howell rightly asserts that the woman - shaped cake is "Marian's perception of woman's condition and fate as decreed by the feminine mystique so that her cake - looking is both a gesture of complicity is the domestic myth and also a critique of it."8

Marian offers the cake to Peter when he comes to demand an explanation for her sudden disappearance from the cocktail 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 “like much better. This is what you really wanted all along (EW p.271)

His symbolic gesture is suggestive of Marian’s release from what George Woodcock calls “emotional cannibalism”.

Shocked at this unanticipated behavior by Marian, Peter leaves the place without eating the cake. When Marian offers the cake to Duncan he eats it and Marian accompanies him in this act. Marian’s eating the cake puts an end to her withdrawal from food. This gesture is symbolic of her empowerment. Emma parker has explained that Marian’s act explains how consumption is related to power. By baking the cake and eating it too Marian eats her way into the world. She emerged out of her conflict with a renewed knowledge of herself. The cake eating episode is a symbolic guidance of the development of her thought and broadening of her vision. This indicates her refusal to become a victim. Marian asserts that she cannot be manipulated by people like Duncan and Peter. She reaffirms the fact that cake is edible but a woman is not. As Sharon Rose Wilson puts it: “By baking, decorating, serving and consuming the cake woman image Madden announces to herself and others, that she is not food.”

Gayle green comments that Marian’s cake woman is “A gesture of defiance, a way of saying “no” to a system that defines women as commodities and devours them.”

Marian wants to become neither a man nor a machine but a woman who guests for a meaningful human identity. Clearly an iced cake is the central metaphor for Marian’s perception of woman’s condition and fate. Atwood describes the ritual as ‘symbolic cannibalism’. The cake is the symbol of the
socialized feminine image which Marian rejects. Eating the cake is an act of celebration which marks the decisive moment of Marian’s recovery from a hysterical illness and her return to the social order. Once again she becomes a ‘consumer’. For it is difficult if not impossible to reconstruct one’s identity outside the symbolic and social order. Duncan displays an indifferent attitude towards Marian’s plight as he is untouched by her sense of identity and individuality. The story of Marian’s self discovery is a frightening vision of struggle for sanity. *The Edible Woman* depicts Marian’s intensifying paranoia as she becomes romantically involved with Peter. Marian initially views Peter as fulfilling the cultures prescribed and co modified image of masculinity; he is “nicely packaged”: he resembles the young well – groomed men in the cigarette ads and the plaid jacketed sportsman in the Moos beer ad. She imagines that Peter’s attempts to have spontaneous sex with her – are enactments of mass – culture fantasies found in men’s magazines. Later on, Marian discovers that Peter’s appearance is deceptive underneath the garb of civility. He is someone whom she had not known or seen, someone whose, real self is a complete stranger to her. She sees “what lay hidden under the surface, under the other surfaces” of Peter, “That secret identity which inspire of her many guesses and attempts and half successes she was aware she had still not uncovered.” Marian thinks Peter might secretly be the Underwear Man’, an obscene ‘, an obscene phone caller who poses as a representative of Seymour surveys doing a study on underwear. Marian ponders over. These ads flaunted on busses, “Society flaunted these slender rubberized women before his eyes, urging, practically forcing upon him their flexible blandishments, and then refused to supply him with any. He had found when he had tried to buy the garment in question. That it came empty of the promised contents.” Marian’s comic paranoid fantasy of the underwear man focuses attention on the cultural co modification of women,
showing how women in contemporary technological societies are treated as objects of exchange and consumption.

*The Edible Woman* depicts Marian’s transformation into consumable female object that Peter desires. During her preparation for the engagement party, Marian goes to the hairdresser’s where she is operated on “like a slab of flesh an object,” white her hair is “carefully iced and ornamented” like a cake. Her body “Curiously paralyzed, “she passively gazes at her “dropped figure imprisoned in the filigreed gold oval of the mirror.” Surveying the “totally, inert women sitting under mushroom shaped hairdryers, their heads “mental domes,” she wonders if she, too, is being pushed towards this semi mechanical existence,” this compound of the simply vegetable and the simply mechanical.”

In the hairdressers scene, *The Edible Woman* dramatizes what Catherine Mackinnon describes as the “thingification of woman who been pampered and pacified into nonpersonhood.” Marian finds her body as “waterlogged” “bulging and distorted.” It seems “somehow no longer quite her own. All at once she was afraid that she was dissolving, coming apart layer by layer like a piece of cardboard in a gutter Puddle.” Marian feels unreal and fake. Anticipating Surfacing paranoid vision of people turning into machines, Marian who earlier imagined that she had a “chrome – plated smile,” fantasizes that as her billboard smile peels away, the metal surface beneath “shows through. Peter on the other hand appreciates this all new looking Marian for now she fits into the male ideal of a glamorized and sexualized feminity. In sharp contrast to Peter’s opinion on Marian’s artificial makeup and customized looks Duncan is not impressed; he rather ridiculer this fake appearance of Marian: “You didn’t tell me it was a masquerade. Who the hell are you supposed to be? He asks Marian. This is Duncan’s strategy of exploitation where he feigns innocence and displays disregard for the artificial modes of life. When Marian creates the
cake - lady. She signifies her own metamorphosis into a consumable commodity. Marian does to the cake - woman what was done to her. She begins to operate on the cake woman, just as she was operated on the hair - dresses, she scoops out part of the cake and makes a head with it, exhibiting her inner feeling that likewise the contents of her head had been "scooped - out after she become engaged to Peter. The cake - woman scene, does serve to rescue Marian from her predicament. After offering the cake to Peter and his refusal to eat it, Marian is cured of her eating disorder, anorexia nervosa; her engagement with peter is now broken and once again she starts speaking in first person singular.

The closure of the novel has continuously perplexed both the critics and the readers alike. There seems to be a seemingly endless discussion over the question of Marian eating the cake herself. Responding to Duncan’s assertion that Marian has returned to "So called reality", by becoming a "consumer" Robert Lecker feels that "Duncan’s’ words suggest that Marians flight is not resolved, and that the plot of the Edible Woman is metaphorically circular."  13 Lecker feels by offering the cake to Peter and Duncan and then consuming it herself, she enacts her female as food role. While Marian’s cake - woman "is a gesture of defiance, a way of saying no to a system that defines woman as commodities and devours them," Greene still finds it "difficult to ice what Marian will be when she grows up, and what she will do what, in the terms of the novel, she will “turn into” Describing the “polities” of Marians act of eating the cake woman, female Bromberg argues that in consuming the cake - woman, Marian is “quite literally joining her subject and object selves...... she has become active again, an agent, a subject, a consumer, rather than a consumable object of exchange traded on the marriage market. But Bromberg asks, “Marian is more self - assertive and healthy, but for how long?” 14 Jerome
Rosenberg feels that while the experiences undergone by Marian "Suggest the possibility of a positive transformation in her life, "She, nevertheless appears to have changed very little" by the novels conclusion.

As a reaction to this criticism, Atwood defends Marian's behaviour in the following words: Marian is "acting, she's doing an action, until that point she has been evading, avoiding running away, retreating, withdrawing." Yet on another pessimistic note she states, "the narrative is a circle, Marian ends where she begins." Responding to Atwood's comment Barbara Rigney writes about Marian, "At least she has come to terms with something, has objectified her situation and apprehended it more realistically. The cake thus serves as a reflection, a way of seeing herself as in a mirror, and it expresses a truth not before perceived." In view of Jayne Patterson, Marian's, "fashioning and eating of the cake signifies her recognition and rejection of her former compliant self, culminating in her new ability to respond to her own inner feeling." For Catherine McLeay, the cake" feast" signals "the celebration of Marian's new freedom and even rebirth. "In the view of T.D. MacLulich, at the end of the novel, Marian, "is a whole person again".

Atwood leaves the closure of the novel as open - ended and lets the reader speculate the fate of Marian. It is Marian who eats most of the cake and with gusto. Being a consumer entails empowerment (not eating of in terms of passivity) but this also portrays eating as an act of aggression and participation status quo. The dangers on the one hand of self - consumption whether through narcissism or abnegation and on the other of both subjective and objective co-modification are ever preset. Individual responsibility demands cleaning the system and rising above subjectivity. It raises a question: to what extent do victim or persecutor collude and what are the point of action for a woman/man deeply implicated in a consumer culture that casts them as a passive object.
Atwood's critique is not limited to individual and sexual politics but relates to the political and cultural meanings of apparently individual actions the sign of who is seeking to eat whom, of submission and protest. Marian's relationship with Peter is entirely conformist (she is the food steak, until she withdraws from collusion (through anorexia) and resists commodification. However once she eats the cake she becomes a consumer herself.

2.3 Anxiety, Confusion and Fragmented Psyche.

Multicultural corporations now dominate every aspect of human life. They are the masters of economies, the driving force of globalization. They are the manufacturers of ‘lifestyle, and increasingly the determinants of a uniform culture the world over. Our cultures are being homogenized into a ‘Society of materialism, where success is determined by the amount of wealth one possesses. We have entered into a vicious circle bases on greed, selfishness and competition. We are increasingly encouraged to define ourselves and our relationships through external materialist things – what we do, what we own and how much we earn.

We always want more and are never satisfied with what we have. What is perhaps less evident and more perplexing is the way that these material advances have gone hand in hand with the rise in stress, dilemma, depression and ‘status anxiety’ which directly is responsible for a rise in the levels of distress about self-importance, achievement income and materialistic acquisitions them feelings of deprivation may not look so peculiar, however once we consider the psychology behind the way we decide what is enough, our sense of an appropriate limit to anything for example wealth material possession, even human connections, we never decide independently. It is arrived at by comparing our condition with that a reference group (Peer) and increasingly through the form of consumerist propaganda and advertising. In
this consumer age it is this which is largely responsible for fuelling our material lusts and desires. It is a false assumption that this material acquisition would eventually lead to happiness.

This consumerist culture has also led to the formation of anxious relations especially the relationship between the sexes. There is no longer any absolute value but only functional compatibility. It is a question of asserting oneself, proving oneself. More importantly it is a matter of relating oneself to others or gaining the approval of others; soliciting their judgment and their positive affinity. It is such a network of anxious relations where everyone solicited and manipulates; everyone is solicited and manipulated this is the foundation of new morality.

Atwood through her lead character Marian’s predicament tells us that we are reaching a point where a group is less interested in what it produces than in the human relations within it. The chief aim is more or less to produce relationship and to consume this as it goes along. Atwood’s image of potentially “Edible Woman” in a world of consumerism forms the structural as well as the thematic core of the novel. The exploitative disposition of a capitalist system is sharply expressed by Atwood in Peter’s expectation of Marian:

He was sizing her as he would a new camera, trying to find the central complex of wheels and tiny mechanisms, the possible weak points, the kind of future performance to be expected: the spring of a machine. He wanted to know what made her tick...so it would be according to his brand of logic to go out and buy a book on marriage, one with easy to follow diagrams, she mused.” (EW p.173)
The novel is full of many such examples of consumers and their victims. The ‘Office Virgins’ hunt husbands; Clara is consumed by her body and her own passivity while Ainsley is the consumer the manipulator.

The resultant behaviour also reflects a marked mistrust, a fear of being duped and manipulated by others, the fear of rejection and isolation all which is repressed beneath the myth of a new culture.

The ability to relate to people, to sustain relationship, to intensify social metabolisms becomes a mark of personality in this new culture. To enter the cycle of consumption is not simply to hoard and accumulate objects and services one pleases, it also means to change one’s being, one’s direction of life. The individual is no longer an individual but merely the expression of multiple relations in a process of shifting interrelationships. He is perpetually redefined by his shifting position in the vicious circle where he is signified in relation to others. Thus an individual becomes diffracted and changeable, which is what Atwood portrays in the characters of Marian, Ainsley, Clara and even Peter who changes his mannerism once he proposes to Marian. We lack a comprehensive, holistic approach to life after creating consumer satisfaction, strong economic and political systems we still fail to conquer our fears, anxieties and destructive tendencies. Everyone wants to dominate everyone, to own, to possess. The greed and selfish motives of a consumerist culture yields to jealousy, rivalry to suspicion and deception. Human relationships here become invisible battlefields where battles are gained through glances, through words, through abstaining from words, indifference and callousness. Families, organizations relationships suffer from cold ward and lack of peace and fulfillment.
Clashes conflicts and chaos mark the contemporary societies. There is an ongoing debate an ideological battle between the scientists and spiritual gurus, the expansionists and ecologists; the technocrats and the environmentalists. The economic structure we have created has further created a social structure where human behaviour is shaped by market and economy. There is exploitation, oppression and domination. The desire for economic expansion, ideological expansion stimulates conflicts, tensions which automatically seep down to individuals and create such pressure that at times individuals are driven to a point of neurotic disorders just like Anorexia Nervosa as signified by Marian the victim of this politics of consumption. Her position is akin to that of a "Digital immigrant" who is not comfortable and is unable to completely absorb the new technological order. Peter, the byproduct of modern technology on the other hand may be described as a "Digital native" One whose brain is physically different as a result of the digital input it has received and absorbed completely such that his brain has rewired itself, responds better, feels little, lives in an artificial reality and recalls lesser. The behaviour of "Digital Native" is basically governed by external forces over which he might have no control or he is unwilling to exert any control. Consequently such a technologically dependent brain refuses to respect the inner feeling and starts acting mechanically. In such a technically conditioned human brain, the non-material dimension such as the soul and conscience are completely overpowered rather subdued. Such people might enjoy material prosperity but may be wanting in cultural, ethical and spiritual dimension of life. The lack of ethical and spiritual dimension leave an individual incompetent to face the bigger challenges of life. The forces that motivate human life are not just material but also spiritual. Spiritual culture is as necessary as the culture of intellect. The spiritual journey is about establishing contact with our being, which is the source of all creativity. Not just material but also spiritual culture.
is as necessary as the culture of the intellect. The spiritual journey is about establishing contact with our being, which is the source of all creativity intelligence, energy and joy. We need ways and means of attaining fulfillment in life while actively pursuing our material aspiration.

Margaret Atwood explores technology and human behaviour as observed in the modern global society. It totally centers around production, consumption, organizations and utilization of knowledge and information. Atwood focuses on the dilemma of the 'Digital Immigrants', their separateness and powerlessness in the world of 'Digital Natives'. She focusses on their shared and un-shared environment and their constant struggle to find new ties to replace the old ones. Her novel *The Edible Woman* caricatures the pretensions of our consumerist society and the machinery that both supports and engenders its absurdities. Atwood suggests that the world is inherently unpredictable due to constantly changing non-linear dynamics of living things. There is no single solution, no easy answers, no guiding paths to the new challenges of human behaviour. Yet she maintains that the solution lies in connecting ourselves to our souls by rediscovering our roots and exploring new techniques of self-motivation which will chart the cultural influences on our thoughts, actions and emotions and help restore and retain our identity as humans.

In *The Edible Woman* Atwood picks up one of the major and perplexing problems of our time, that is 'identity'. Man in the modern society has lost his identity. The present system of economy, education, social interaction and the impact of science and technology has totally confused the modern generation. Atwood depicts that in this state of chaos and confusion man is trying to identify himself with things external. Atwood probes deeply into the value of wealth economy and consumerist society in this novel. She deals with instances of false identity where people identify themselves with their learning and
professional skills, belongings and digital devices. Materialistic values make an individual (like Peter) believe that society at large can achieve happiness and fulfillment by material prosperity alone. *The Edible Woman* is about what happens to someone who has been a willing member of consumer society (Digital native) and then suddenly finds hereby identifying with things consumed (Digital Immigrant).
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10. Parker Emma, "You are What You Eat : The politics of eating in the Novels of Margaret Atwood, "Twentieth Century Literatures 41.3 (Fall 1995) : 367.


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