

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**

**Redefining Gender in Margaret Atwood's *Bodily Harm***

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Masters of Arts in English**

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**February 2009**

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### **Acknowledgements**

The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the support and encouragement from my respected teachers and friends. I would like to express my deep sense of gratitude to my thesis supervisor Mr. Ghanshyam Bhandari, lecturer at the Central Department of English, T.U., for his scholarly guidance, genuine suggestions, warm response and constructive suggestion to bring the present dissertation to this shape

I am grateful to Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma, Head of the Department of English, T.U., for his cooperation in completing this dissertation. I am also indebted to the teachers Mr. Shiva Rijal, Mr. Rajendra Panthee, Mrs. Anju Gupta, Mr. Harihar Gyawali, Mr. Sadan Raj Adhikari, Mr. Pam Gurung, Mr. Deepak Giri and Mr. Shankar Subedi for their gracious response to my queries that evolved during his 'arduous' project.

Words can not convey the depth of my gratitude to my father Dev Bahadur Banset and mother Gayatree Devi Basnet for their moral and economic support throughout this thesis. Similarly, I am thankful to my brothers Krishna, Ram and Hari Babu and sister Parvatee, sisters-in-law Talsa, Tara, and Brother-in-law Dev Bahdaur Pandey. I would like to thank my friends Binod Geeta, Prem, Madhukar and Dhruva for their continuous encouragement and sustained assistance in bringing this project to completion.

I want to express my especial thanks to my friends Dev Maya, Shanta, Rukmini, Talsa, Gokarna, Madhusudhan and Krishna and respectable brother Mr. Homnath Pokharel whose admirable support always inspired and encouraged me in the preparing of this project. I also thank Mr. Narayan Basnet and Deepak Basnet of Resunga Computer Service for the efficient typing of the manuscript.

Durga Basnet

Feb., 2009

### **Abstract**

The present research is an inquiry on the female character Rennie's quest for her new gender identity in patriarchal social structure in Margaret Atwood's *Bodily Harm*. It focuses on Rennie who is a lifestyle journalist in the course of establishing herself as an independent being. Despite her strength and boldness, the male characters do everything possible to exercise their violence on her. She unconsciously becomes the victim of patriarchy and loses her self-identity. Rennie's involvement with different men and the subsequent betrayal she undergoes give her a lesson that she has been thrown into a nightmare that she had never anticipated. Her efforts not only survive but also comprehend the swirl of events to lead her to the new levels of personal and artistic awareness. She, in the course, gives up her relations with them and emerges a new woman. She regains her lost identity with self-realization.

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## I. General Introduction

The term 'identity' has several faces of meaning. Identity is the "meaning" of an individual on the part of groups or communities of various kinds. Identity involves reference to the essential self, including values of behaviour, attitude, experiences and belief of the individual as a social member rather than a simple reference to mere 'appearance'. This includes not only the individual's evaluative and effective components such as self-evaluation and self-esteem but also the society's recognition of her. It is the conscious woman's 'will' that conceives herself to be and 'will to act' that gives her an individual identity. In this sense, woman is nothing else but what she makes of herself and her identity is first of all what she conceives of herself. It is the meaning the individual assigns to herself.

Gender is not necessarily defined by sex but it is the study of individuals in the ways they are brought up in a particular society/culture. Gender identity refers to the separate identity of man and woman and tries to analyze those situations in detail which otherwise would not have created. The concept of gender is based on stereotypes of male and female behaviour that are often associated with female sex.

This research basically talks about female identity. Women are suffering from traditional concept of being deficient or defective in the phallogentric culture. Patriarchal social structure views man as rational, independent, active agent, self, consumer aggressor whereas women as irrational, independent, passive recipients, other, consumed, victim. Man is seen as a hunter and women as hunted is the binary logic in a patriarchal order. We have become more conscious to the harmful disintegration to which women have long been subject. They have to accept the traditional rules assigned by the society. But, women have always carried that strong

desire to protest against the patriarchal capitalist society. Critics of the patriarchal binary thought "created a list of oppositions such as Day/Night, mother/father, active/passive which can be analyzed as a hierarchy where the "feminine" side is always seen as the negative, powerless instance" (Mor 104). Many female writers articulated their feminist voice against the consumerism and commodification of women through their writing.

Before the 1920's, women had virtually no rights. they couldn't have their own property and they were treated with little or no respect. Women were expected to stay at home and take care of their husband and children. Most women worked as clerks, nurses, schoolteachers and other traditional female occupations. Women began to grow very frustrated and they realized that something had to change. Feminism asks for sexual equality that include sexual difference. Feminism is a doctrine related to images and ideas advocating women's rights for the equality of sexes, identity and freedom. Feminism tries to redefine women's activities, works and goals from a female perspective. It emphasizes on the centrality of women's position, against their being neglected to a secondary position in the society. It demands equal rights and opportunities for women in a political, economic, social, psychological and individual sense. Women are just as worthy and valuable as men. Feminism is a belief that women and men are inherently of equal worth. Feminism is therefore a critique of patriarchy.

Early feminist and primary feminist movements are often called the first-wave feminists. The first wave feminism in the United States occurred in the 1920's when women fought for the right to vote. The second wave-feminism started in 1960's with the sexual revolution. This wave of feminism is sometimes referred to a women's liberation. This involved the reproductive rights (such as birth control and abortion) as

well as equality in the workplace and female representation in the government. Many believe that this wave of feminism is still in place today. The third wave feminism (1990s Current) is a continuation of the second wave, but is a response to the perceived failures of the second wave.

Today women have more options than ever. More and more, women are going to college and working outside the home. In the mid-1960's birth control became popular and in 1972, the supreme court decision of *Roe-V. Wade* gave women the right to choose whether to carry a child to term. Now women can go out of the house and do the creative works like male. Atwood is the one of those female writers who mostly created female protagonists who are forced to remake themselves, through courage and self-reliance in their attitude and relationship with others and the world around them.

In her novel, *Bodily Harm* Atwood shows how the heroine of the novel, Rennie struggles to find her identity, both as a woman and as a person to define the limits of her body are mixed. Atwood chooses main character, Rennie who is the opposite example of feminist ideal. Though, Rennie a professional lady, earning money for herself and has her own existence, she suffers from identity crisis. Sometime, she goes through a crisis about her femininity and sometime she feels herself empty and nude. She always wants male company to support her though she is capable in herself that puts her identity in question. Rennie, is a victim by the patriarchal capitalistic society; everyone wants to take advantage instead of their help to her. Atwood shows here that single and professionally independent women are not totally free of the patriarchal order; they actually internalize it unconsciously that puts her identity in crisis.

Rennie goes through a crisis about her femininity. She undergoes a breast surgery at first. Breasts have been a symbol of fertility for ages and of femininity in our society. It is believed that the main purpose of female beings to get marriage and give birth. Women harmed in this part of body will question her femininity. She feels herself no more a female. It is hard for her to make love with her boyfriend who also seems to see her differently since he learns about her breast tumor. He neglects her body because this seems strange, distant and different. Rennie has the feeling that he denies her body. In doing so he denies her femininity. It is the crisis of her feminine identity.

A woman needs a man to be herself and to define herself. It is a part of patriarchal order that feminists want to eradicate. Being dependent means being chained and unable to live without an upper power. Atwood in this novel subverts the traditional notion of gender by showing female character in the quest for her new gender identity in patriarchal social structure with self-realization. At the end of the novel, she is forced, to face many of her weaknesses and she is ultimately able to reach out and connect, making her a survivor. She reconstructs her 'self'.

Margaret Atwood is a Canadian poet, novelist and critic whose works often feature women examining their relationships and society. Well-known feminist novelist in English, Margaret Eleanor Atwood was born in Ottawa, Ontario in 1939. She is an eminent and internationally famous novelist, poet, critic and politically committed cultural activist. In 1961, the year that she graduated, she had her first book published, a collection of poems entitled *Double Persephone*.

She is best known, however, for the novels in which she creates strong often, enigmatic women characters and excels in telling open-ended stories which dissect contemporary urban life and sexual politics. She actually writes simply as a woman,

not as a feminist fighting (with) men. She said in an interview: “I am a writer who is female and therefore I write a lot from the point of view of a woman. In other words, I don’t see myself as a woman who is writing to promote certain things” \*Cited in Bonnie Lyons. Page 221). Atwood's novels are social satiric as well as identity quests of women around the world of commodification. Her typical heroine is a modern urban woman often a writer or artist always with some social-professional commitment, fighting for self and survival in a society where men are all-too-friendly enemy but women are often complicit in their own entrapment. She examines the relationship between men and women along with individual and society, nature and civilization.

Her first novel, *The Edible Women* (1969), won international acclaim. This novel reflects a more complex picture of capitalism and female subjectivity. *Edible Women* is about both resistance against consumerism and rebellion against culturally constructed forms of femininity. It is a materialist feminist protest novel. Atwood illustrates how women can use their bodies as a object of resistance against the system of oppression designed to control those bodies.

Margaret Atwood voices strong feminist themes through her writing. In her several books the female protagonist is a representation of every woman who is victimized and minimized by gender and politics. Her novels are eye witness accounts which focus on contemporary political issues. Her novels that illustrate her strong feminist views are *The Edible Women* (1969), *Lady Oracle* (1976), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and her most recent novel *Alice Grace* (1996). She won the prestigious Booker prize for her novel *The Blind Assassin* (2000) a saga of family tragedy. These novels portray the strength and proactive nature of women as they struggle with inequality.

Her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *Motion Picture* (1990) won a governor general's literary Award Canada's highest literary honour. "The Handmaid's Tale" is an anti-utopian fable about the future of one woman's story of her life as a Handmaid in the Republic of Gilead. In the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* Gilead is a society in which women are denied any form of power. All the Atwood's novel's are filled with the theme of feminism and they warn us about the dangers of accepting the victim role in the consumer society.

Her novel *Bodily Harm* tells a tale of victimized woman Rennie who has to struggle both internally and externally to overcome obstacles. Ann Howells writes in her book about Atwood:

From this "Post-operative" angle she scrutinizes social myths of femininity, medical discourse on breast cancer and most significantly, the rhetoric of pornography. This novel is emphatically not about bodily pleasure but about *Bodily Harm*. (106)

Two terms sex and gender are used interchangeably showing that sex and gender are two ways of looking at same division which assumes that female sex automatically belongs to the corresponding (feminine) gender and vice-versa. Which is not true. Sex is a biological difference between women and men which is universal obvious and generally permanent. It describes the biological, physical and genetic composition with which we are born or sex is a biological determined differences between men and women that is universal.

Gender is the social difference between men and women that are learned changeable overtime and have wide variation within and between culture. Gender (cultural sex) describes the socially constructed ways of being woman and man that is the gender division of labour. It changes according to culture, class, time and place. It

refers to the comparative or differential roles, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men in a given society.

Gender is a term referred to the parallel and socially unequal division into femininity and masculinity. The socially constructed aspect of difference between men and women are concerns of gender studies. Gender studies showed that there was cultural variation in the construction of gender and in the roles of men and women. Gender is not necessarily defined by sex (Natural sex) but it is the study of individuals in the ways they are brought up in a particular society/culture. Gender is socially constructed roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women in given culture/society and location based upon their cultural structure. Gender is learned behaviour, not permanent that change, over time. It is social construct, independent of biology. The study of gender should be the study of masculinity and femininity, the relation between the sexes as well as social position of women and the recognition of historical and cultural differences and changes rather than universal analysis.

Women writers should fight against gender by writing on their own because it is only the remedy for that inferiority complex. This will lead to degenderization and then to desexing which gives birth to a unique culture of women. A large portion of feminists are especially concerned with the social, political and economic inequality between the sexes. Feminists believe that males have historically dominated the females to express their identity and role in the society. The prevailing notion of woman's nature is nothing more than just a concept of patriarchy. Women have nothing 'womanish' by their birth. It is patriarchal society which has defined woman always in reference to man. Patriarchal definitions have based on essence – not existence. These definitions are monopolistic because man always defines a woman

negatively. Man is always pre-occupied with the notion of the superior. It is man who defined woman.

*Bodily Harm* published in 1981, a stunningly bold and swift work. Actually, *Bodily Harm* is no different from previous Atwood novels is that it follows a character trying to break free from her past and grasp onto a brighter and more promising future. And yet, *Bodily Harm* takes this idea a step further by criticizing and questioning the actions of our own westernized culture. This is Atwood's fifth novel and it has received a lot of criticisms in fascinating ways. It is the story of a victimized woman who crosses the obstacles and ultimately become a survivor. She struggles both internally and externally to gain her own self-identity. David Lucking remarks that "*Bodily Harm* is self-deconstructing novel, to use an unwieldy but perhaps useful term. When Atwood says that her book takes the components of the thriller genres and then pulls them inside out, as you would a glove." It is clear that the process she is describing mirrors that through which her protagonist is "turned inside out during her climatic moment of vision in the prison" (290).

The situation presented in the *Bodily Harm* is an extreme one. The story revolves around female character to show how Rennie struggles to find her identity both as a woman and a person. Mrs. Gladys Zilndel views this novel as a struggle to define the feminine identity. She undergoes a breast surgery even if it does not show when she is dress up. She has faced the misunderstanding of the people telling her that she is only being capricious. She also says that:

a woman needs man to be herself and to define herself is part of a patriarchal order feminists worked to eradicate. Because being dependents means being chained, unable to leave without an upper power and therefore recognizing this power, Atwood chooses as main

character. Rennie, who is the opposite examples of a feminist ideal.

(10)

In the same way Naun Grzywacz comments this novel as a "Thriller genre." He comments that "choosing the vocabulary of the traditional thriller, the blurb on the back notes that Rennie "is confronted by a world where her rules for survival no longer apply." Inside, the reviews continue in the same vein and include on which is particular suggestive of the male erotic of the thriller genre (5).

D. Bertola feels hard to believe this author won a Booker Prize. He says:

I found this book entirely lame. I am surprised that the same person who wrote *Blind Asian* (Booker Prize) wrote this. Most of the plot was left hanging in the air with no explanation at all. Sex scenes were fortuitous thrown in where the timing required it. I didn't like the main character. I don't think she learned anything from her adventures or grew as a person. I see nothing at all to recommend this book, irritating from beginning to end. (22)

Lazza also doesn't take this book the best one. He adds *Bodily Harm* is certainly not the best work by sometime brilliant Margaret Atwood.

Justine while reading this book finds out the reality that:

Atwood points at is the male violence against women which seems to have been brought out to counterbalance women's recent self-assertion. Although this is not wholly true in Rennie, as we have just seen, this self-assertion is understandable when we take women's progress in the last few decades. (7)

Many critics have criticized and evaluated this novel from various point of view:

*Bodily Harm* is quest of women's identity in patriarchal capitalistic society. It is a

exploration of rebirth of a women, Rennie. It justifies the protagonist of Margaret Atwood's novel *Bodily Harm*. Rennie regains her lost identity due to her self-realization. In which, all the misfortunes happen to her are caused by male figures and how the body matters for women is being broadly analyzed. The discourse has given us a perspective to observe and analyse the novel in a meticulous and scrupulous manner. It has enabled us to understand the condition, mental state, intellect and the feelings of female and their urge to bring out significant changes in the society so that a woman will live as free individual human being. At the end of the novel, she is able to realize many of her weaknesses and faults that puts her identity in crisis and she herself reconstructs her 'self'.

## **II. Feminist Perspectives on Quest for Gender Identity**

### **Gender, Sexuality and Female Identity**

Sex is a biological term which makes a man different from a woman due to his physical construction and genital organ that is brought from birth. Gender is a psychological and cultural term which the individual learns from the society in the process of socialization and is not the same in every society. It differs from society to society and culture to culture that creates a distinct feature and a separate identity to an individual. "Sex which we carry from birth and is biological is universal (Same all over the world) and cannot be changed (except by surgical method) whereas gender is socially constructed and is not the same throughout the world" (Luitel 2).

Gender is socially or culturally constructed behaviour of individual man and woman and can be changed according to the need and desire of individual and society. Gender is the social significance that sex assumes within a given culture and for the sake of argument we will let social and cultural stand as an uneasy interchangeability- then what, if anything is left of 'sex' once. It has assumed its social character as gender.

If gender consists of the social meanings that sex assumes, then sex does not accrue social meaning as additive properties but rather is replaced by the social meaning it takes on; sex is relinquished in the course of that assumption, and gender emerges, not as a term in a continued relationship of opposition to sex, but as the term which absorbs and displaces 'sex', the mark of its full substantiation into gender. (Butler 436)

Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* argues that gender definition and gender identity are necessarily relational between genders-to the extent, that is that in any gender system,

female identity or definition is constructed by analogy, supplementarity, or contrast to male or vice-versa.

"Gender studies" stands in a usable unmarked relation to another rubric, "Feminist Studies". Feminist studies might be defined as the study of the dynamics of gender definition, inequality, oppression and change in human societies. "To the extent that gender is thus at the definitional center of feminist studies, "gender studies" can sometime be used as an alternative name for feminist studies euphemistic only is not specifying, as the "feminist" label more than implicitly does, how far inequality, oppression and struggle between genders may be seen as differentially constituting gender itself. Women's studies today is commonly defined at least in practice by the gender of its object of study" (at my university, for instance, the women's studies programs will not cross-list courses unless a majority of the texts read are by women).

"Gender Studies" actually is the study of gender, its most substantive and intellectually respectable meaning make it co-extensive with "Feminist Studies" and gender criticism co-extensive with feminist criticism. The charting of a space between something called "sex" and something called "gender" has been one of the most influential and successful undertakings of feminist thought. "Feminist charting of what Gayle Ruth refers to as "sex/gender system" (Traffic 139), the system by which chromosomal sex is turned into and processed as, cultural gender, has tended to minimize the attribution of a persons various behaviours and identities to chromosomal sex and to minimize their attribution to socialized gender constructs. The purpose of that strategy has been to gain analytic and critical leverage on the female disadvantaging social arrangements that prevail at a given time in a given

society, by throwing into question their legitimize ideological grounding in biologically based narratives of the "nature" (274).

The category "gender" is one of the key terms that have been used by the feminists. They view this category as the strongest instrument of patriarchy through which women have been controlled, exploited and discriminated. Masculine and feminine are not natural categories rather they are socially and culturally constructed. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1997) marked,

an important stage in political feminist writing on literature. she used to term 'Patriarchy' (rule of father) to describe the cause of women's oppression. Patriarchy subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male. Power is exerted directly or indirectly in civil and domestic life, to constrain women. She borrows from social science the important distinction between 'sex and gender' which refers to culturally acquired sexual identity. (137)

Millett Further opines that,

sex is biologically determined and gender is psychological concept for her male authors are compelled by their gender to reproduce the oppressive sexual politics of the real world in their fiction. this approach would not do justice for example to Joyce's treatment of female sexuality. Not only mailer but also some feminists have seen Millett as holding a one dimensional view of male domination: She treats sexist ideology as a blanket of oppression which all male writers inevitable promote. (139)

Patriarchal gender roles are destructive for men as well as women. For these roles dictate men to be independent, strong and women to be emotional and dependent.

Manhood is directly linked to the economic success a person achieves in a society. If one fails to get economic success, either one has to sustain one's manhood being sexually active and being aggressive which are really destructive or one is unmanned in a patriarchal society. Moreover, men are supposed to be in a financial control and women should be economically dependent in a patriarchal society. In this way, women's exclusion from economy and other sectors from society is "sexist" which means it promotes the belief that "women are internally inferior to men" that is called "Biological essentialism (84). Women's degrading and subordinated image is reflected in the women's position in the major public sector of the society. Women are poor because of their marginal importance and participation in the economy.

Women fail to achieve economic independence until and unless they are also expected to run the home and this domestic work is unwaged. And even when they escape from the worse effects of sexual harassment at work, women will not be taken seriously as workers in a culture that sees them primarily as "sex objects" (Brysen 197). Radical feminists are of the opinion that women's suppression and economic Marginalization are not merely caused by the capitalism class rather the economy is seen as an important tool to dominate and control women. Modern feminist writings in the united states took their impetus from the civil rights, peace and other protest movement. At present many feminists are questioning the patriarchal institution, 'family' which is of course a central part of society's power structure and whereby the 'women' are explored. The first powerful blow on patriarchal structure come from the famous work, *A room of ones own* (1928) by Virginia woolf has explored the situation of women writers explaining how women are imprisoned with in the domestic premises and are stopped from tying the pen. She further explains, woman has always faced social and economic obstacles to their literary ambitions. Her basic focus lies on

the fact of women's financial dependency that hinders them from being creative and intellectual like man. She attacks that a patriarchal society has prevented women from realizing their creative possibilities. She asserts that libraries can be locked but freedom of women mind can not be locked. Barratt presents a Marxist feminist analysis of gender representation, first, she applauds Virginia Woolf's materialist arguments are materially different and influence the form and content of what they write. We can't separate questions of gender stereotyping from their material condition in history. This means that liberation will not come merely from change in culture. Secondly, the ideology of gender affects the way the writings of men and women are read and how canons of excellence are established. Thirdly, feminist critics must take account of the fictional nature of literary texts and not indulge in rampant moralism by condemning all male authors for all the sexism in their books and approving women authors for arising the issues of gender. Nevertheless, women can and should try to assess their influences upon the way in which gender is defined and represented culturally (140)

Patriarchal society has created the dichotomy where women's association with the passive body and men's affiliation with the active mind is believed to be the outcome of the conventional gender roles. The patriarchal stereotypes of women have a common denominator. It is considered that the women as human beings are "Substandard; less intelligent, less moral, less competent, less physically, psychologically and spiritually (96). These stereotypes have been severely criticized and questioned by many feminists. Simone de Beauvoir in her seminal work *The Second Sex* argues that there are not such things as 'feminine nature (319). Moreover there is "no physical or psychological reason why women should be inferior to men," yet women have always been considered as second class citizens

(319) Since gender stereotypes are mere construction of society. They can be challenged and changed in any time and space. At present, some of the feminist women are challenging the old images of women and building new ones. Women are not only fighting for equality rather they have been seeking independence, self-affirmation, self respect and pride in womanhood.

Sexuality has gained prominence as an important principle of social and culture institution since 1980s. A number of influential theorists see the "exclusion and marginalization" that we see with regard to sexuality as equally to the way western culture is constituted as other structural exclusion (Bertens 218). Foucault in his famous book, *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* relates sexuality with discourse, knowledge and power. He describes sexuality as relations that are continuously and locally produced and productive at every level of modern culture through "The task of padding everything having to do with sex through the endless will of speech (qtd. in seaquake 279). Fiona Tolan views, increasing second wave feminists turned to an understanding of 'sexuality as a culture construction" and a "political choice" rather than a "biologically determined position" (331) Tolan further says that the radical lesbian theorists by refusing heterosexuality women could totally undermined patriarchy. Likewise, for a good many lesbian feminists the subversiveness of mainstream feminism didn't extend to sexuality.

Lesbian feminism has originated from the mainstream feminism itself. Although the mainstream feminists questioned traditional views of gender, they failed to question the traditional views of same sex relations. As a result, lesbian feminism turned away from mainstream feminism to pursue its own separate path. Lesbian studies emerged in the 1980s as a kind of annex of feminist criticism before acquiring disciplinary independence. Lesbian feminism is a politics, a theory, an ideology, a

point of view, and a way of life, Lesbian feminism postulates that lesbianism is more than a sexual behaviour or lifestyle: it has rather political implication and ramifications. Because the oppression of women is based fundamentally upon their position within the patriarchal family and because the heterosexual relationship is structurally unequal (151). Furthermore, Lesbian feminism addresses the issues related to both sexism and heterosexism. In other word, lesbian feminists must deal with "the psychological, social, economic and political oppression fostered not only by patriarchal male privilege but by heterosexual privilege (323).

Generally, a woman whose sexual desire is oriented toward women is known as a lesbian. Hans Bertens views a lesbian as "a woman who has felt a strong and lifelong attraction to other women" (219). 'Lesbianism was a matter of choice – a political, anti-patriarchal choice" (220). For some theorists, to underplay the sexual dimension of lesbian experience is to underplay the most unique and liberating lesbian life. "In bonding with one another sexually and denying men access to their bodies lesbians deny patriarchy one of its most powerful tools; heterosexuality", says Lois Tyson (326). Adrienne Rich's understanding of many aspects of women's bonds as constituting a "lesbian continuum" ("Compulsory heterosexuality" 79), this history, found in its purest form in the work of Lilian Faderman, de-emphasized the definitional discontinuities and perturbation between more and less sexualized more or less prohibited, and more and less gender identity-bound forms of female same-sex bonding. Insofar as lesbian object choice was viewed as epitomizing a specificity of female experience and resistance (277).

New perspectives have emerged from the "sex wars" within feminism over pornography and sadomasochism which seemed to many pro-sex feminists to expose a devastating continuity between a certain, therefore privileged feminist

understanding of a resistant female identity, on the one hand, and on the other, repressive nineteenth-century bourgeois constructions of a sphere of pure femininity. Such challenges arose as well from the reclamation and relegitimation of a courageous history of lesbian trans-gender role-playing and identification (See E. Newton: Nestle: Hallibaugh and Marage; Case, de Lauretis, "Sexual Indifference").

Patriarchy always privilege heterosexuality because patriarchy and heterosexuality are inextricable linked together to enhance the patriarchal values and norms. Thus, patriarchal society always suppresses other types of sexual orientations including homosexuality and other. Moreover, sexuality has also been entangled with women's depression and alcoholism. In the essay, "Clinical aspects of sex-role stereotyping", Gloria K. Litman, names alcoholic woman as "fallen angel" for she "has violated popular stereotypic conceptions of what is considered suitable and appropriate feminine behaviour" (116). The role of women has been equated with the establishing function of wife and mother. The drunker women seem to present a special threat to patriarchy. Moreover, women who are addicted to alcohol and other addiction are considered to be the great threat to the patriarchy.

Despite these various criticism of different critics about feminism and feminists most of the writers and critics share the same assumption about the patriarchal domination and sexual difference. Male-centered western society is totally dominated by patriarchal norms and values. Feminism is a belief in the social, political and economic equality of sexes. "Some have argued that gendered and sexed identities, such as "man" and "woman" are socially constructed. Women realized, sex is determined by anatomy whereas gender is constructed by culture, the omnipresent patriarchal biasness of our civilization. Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second*

*Sex* says "one is not born but rather becomes women". So, women started to show their dissatisfaction through writings in poetry, fiction and essays and other genres.

### **Feminism and Female Resistance**

Feminism, in its most transparent definition is the belief in the full potential of women and the equality of the sexes. But the matter is much more complex than that. Feminism may signify a political position, a theoretical methodology, a personal lifestyle or a mode of interpretation. Feminism re-emerged, first, as the political agenda of the women's movement, which included a liberal or reformist wing devoted to changes in social policy (including equal pay for equal work, legalization of abortion, improved child care facilities and so on) and a radical wing, which proposed a throughgoing revolution - the exact - nature of which tended to be vague or utopian - as the only solution to women's oppression.

There is no consensus over the origin of the word "feminism," although the best guess is that it entered the English language from France in late nineteenth century during what is now called the first wave of feminism. Feminism, a social and political movement, basically concerns with culture, political and economic practices and inequalities that discriminate against women. It seeks equal rights for women giving them equal status with men and freedom to decide their own career and the life patterns. Moreover, as a social movement tries to achieve "equality between the sexes" by extension of rights for women.

Feminism is a doctrine related to images and ideas advocating women's rights for the equality of sexes, identity and freedom. It tries to redefine women's activities, works and goals from female perspective. It emphasizes on the centrality of women's position, against their being relegated to a secondary position in the society. Feminism is also described as an ideology that seeks to liberate women from the subordination

of men and to reconstruct society in such a way that patriarchy is eliminated. It is in search of such culture which is fully inclusive of women's desires and purposes. In that respect, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* describes the word feminism, "The belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men, the struggle to achieve this aim" (446). M.H. Abram in his *Glossary of Literary Terms* brings some issues indicating what is feminism and what is masculine and merely the culture constructs generated by the omnipresent patriarchal biases of our civilization. Western society is pervasively patriarchal male centered and conducted by male perspective (290).

Feminism conjures up various images and ideas regarding the women's issues. It is a perspective that seeks to eliminate the oppression, inequalities and injustices imposed upon women. Before the 1920s women had virtually no rights. They were treated with little or no respect. They could not have their own property and they were expected to stay at home and take care of their husband and children. They were made kitchen creature and enclosed within four walls. If a woman did choose to work outside of her home, there were few jobs to choose from. Most women worked as clerks, nurse, school teachers and other traditional female occupations. Women in the past were considered as inferior, second class, subordinate and peripheral position in society. They were expected to serve men physically, sexually and mentally. They were made for them. They were not only victimized by male supremacist ideology but also were doing unjust to them due to the lack of consciousness and awareness. Men always defined as the first, nature, subject, one, practical with soul whereas women second, supernatural, object, other, emotional and soulless. Patriarchal definitions have been based on essence-not existence. These definitions are monopolistic because men always defines women negatively.

Aristotle declared that "The female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities. A woman to be an unfinished man. In Rousseau's view women should be educated in the way that they could please and complement men properly and St. Thomas Aquinas believed that woman is an imperfect man; when Donne wrote 'Air and Angle' he alluded to (but did not reflect Aquinas theory that form is masculine and matter feminine, the superior, galike male, intellect, impresses its form upon the malleable, inert female matter. In Pre-Mendelian days men regarded their sperm as the active seeds which give form to the waiting ovum which lack identity till it receives the male's impress (Raman Selden 135). Man is always pre-occupied with the notion of the superior. The fact is that it is man who defined woman. The prevailing notion of women's nature is nothing more than just a concept of patriarchy. Women have nothing womenish by birth. It is patriarchal society which has defined women always in reference to men. Patriarchal myths of women are based on binary opposition like man and woman that create central position for male. Such myths are based on seduction, femininity and eroticism. Myths are false; they block the way to transcendence to women and insist that they should remain silent and serve men.

Women began to grow very frustrated and they realized that something had to change. They focused their critical eyes on the hierarchy that had been prevalent everywhere placed men in center and marginalized women. Within same room one is privileged and other endures, sorrows and sufferings. The inequality is a by-product of social, values, religion, man made culture and the common consent of human beings which has created a gulf in between two sexes. Due to the culture and norms of society, they were gifted with higher place. The notion of patriarchy has determined almost entirely is the nature and quality of the society, its value and priorities, the place and image of women within. Though the condition of women still remains

same, feminist political movement emerged in 1960s with an aim to enhance the status of women both in theory and practice; somehow succeeded to elevate women's status. Women, after this movement try to break the prevalent tradition that women are inferior in comparison to male ideology.

Legislators, preists, philosophers, writers and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of women is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth. The abstract notion of 'equality' receives lip-service but demands for real equality with usually be resisted (136). Women writers and women readers have always had to work against the grain. The seventeenth century also saw more women writers emerging, such as Anne Bradstreet, Lady Mary Worth, Bathsua Makrin and Margaret Cavendish, who depicted women's changing sales and made please for their education. English restoration provided new opportunities for women in the arts. The most important feminist writer of the Enlightenment was Mary- Wollstonecraft, often characterized as the first feminist philosopher. *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) is one of the first work that can unambiguously be called feminist, although by modern standards her comparison of women to the nobility, the elite, the society, caddled, fragile, and in danger of intellectual and moral slath. Wallstonecraft stands as a whole against patriarchal society and its domination over female. She views that:

Patriarchal society, traditional education system and the sentimental novels teach to be submissive, sentimental and emotional which restrict them from power of judgement and power of reason. Women read such novels and make an ideal picture of male and female in their mind. (397)

She advocates that mind does not know sex and blames that society views for women in the role of convenient domestic slaves and luring mistress by denying their

economic independence and encouraging them to be docile and attentive to their look to the exclusion of all else.

In America, Margaret Fuller, in her well-known book *Women in the Seventeenth Century* depicted how women have been marginalized in our society. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century J.S. Mill writes a pamphlet entitled *The Subjection of Women* in which like Wollstonecraft and Margaret Fuller seeks more equality and greater freedom for women.

Virginia Woolf by writing *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex* (1949) contributed greatly for the worldwide emergence of feminism in the first half of the twentieth century. In *A Room of One's Own* Woolf says:

Women have no literary tradition like that of men. Women also faced social and economic obstacles for the development of their literary traditions. The social and economic obstacles refers to the lack of the "Room". The room encompasses material resources literary tradition (space) and their own language. (133)

Simon De Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex* (1949), established with great clarity the fundamental question of modern feminism, when a woman tries to define herself, she starts by saying,

I am a woman, no man would do so. The fact reveals the basic asymmetry between the terms masculine and feminine. Man defines the human not woman. The imbalance goes back to the old testament. Being dispersed among men women have no separate history, no natural solidarity; they have not combined as other oppressed groups have. (167)

Kate Millett's analysis of Sexual politics of literature in her sexual politics (1969) emphasizes, that women should be given power to develop their personalities, economic status and literary career. She claims that:

Patriarchy is the main cause of women's suppression and it makes them inferior. Patriarchy subordinates the female to the male. The power is exerted directly or indirectly in civil and domestic life, to constrain women. (137)

Millett argues that western instituting have manipulated power to establish the dominance of men and subordination of women in society.

Elaine Showalter is an American literary critic and teacher and found of gynocritics. "Gynocritics" is the term that Showalter invents to describe the study of women as writers in which women are invited to speak for themselves, whatever situation they are in. *A literature of their own: British women Novelist from Bronte to Lessing* (1977) by Elaine Showalter is considered to be a prominent masterpiece of theoretical work on feminism.

She categories the past and present of literary history of women by dividing the three stages of women writers. They are "feminine, feminist and female. The period between 1840 to 1880 is feminine period. This stage marks female voice but immensely influenced by male literary tradition. There was a trend of writing in male pseudonyms because there was no place for female in the literary tradition. They could not revolt against male domination. George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell and Bronte sisters belong to this phase.

Second phase was represented by Woolf clearly demonstrated the determined efforts for political and social equality. Women found their domination in different sides of life and revolted against the male domination. It is the very phase from which

they also got their voting rights. This phase dated from 1880 to 1920 including the writers like Elizabeth Gaskell, Frances Trollope and Alice Schviener.

The third stage is 'female' dated from 1920 to present which seeks to independent identity and existence of women. In this phase the dependency on opposition of being replaced by a rediscovery of women's text and aesthetics. They give up both initiation and protest because females realize that these two terms are the forms of dependency. Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield and Rebecca West were the most important early female novelists in this stage.

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar prominent work. *The Mad Woman in The Attic* (1979) is one of the influential books on historical study of feminism. In this book, they concentrate on the figure of the suppressed female connotes to the realization of female identity. When we observe the development we can find the existence of feminism from the way very earlier literary history. At first females were presented as stereotyping figures. Continuously women writers became conscious and insisted for a literature of their own. Finally there is a radical thinking of the conceptual ground of literary study and try to revise the accepted theoretical assumptions based on male literary tradition.

### **Quest of Female Self**

Feminist theories as other theories are based on the beliefs and interpretations of various thinkers and believes of different ideologies. However the basis of feminist thought theories rest on the point of equality of opportunity beginning from the liberal feminist of early eighteenth century feminists who stressed on equal distribution of resources. The classical liberals believed on the protection of civil liberties e.g. right the vote and property, freedom of speech, religion and association etc. While the later

demanding more on equal opportunity for accumulation resources rather than the interference of free market.

Being a broad concept, feminism covers broader scope and includes different aspects of humanity despite its focus on the entire issues of women, several dimensions have been shown ranging from liberal attitudes and the demand for equal rights for sexes to the radical one voicing out the extreme ideology that tends to theoretically turn the patriarchy upside down. In the 1970s, women started developing a theory that helped to explain their oppression. They began to organize little pockets of resistance to challenge patriarchy. In the 1980s, feminists started disagreeing on the particular issues linked to feminism. Based on their basic ideological demarcation, feminist theories have been distinguished as liberal, socialist Marxist, psycho-analytic, radical, post-modern feminism.

Liberal feminism was most popular in the 1950s and 1960s when many civil rights movements were taking place. The main thrust of liberal feminism is to bring equality among sexes whether it is by welfare approach or by individual freedom, leading to "a compassionate society in which freedom flourishes" (12). Liberal feminism fundamentally claims that they are entitled to some legal and political rights because women are rational beings like men. That's why "liberal feminists argued and campaigned over the last three hundred years for women's right to education, employment, political participation and full legal equality (Bryson 20). The roots of liberal feminism lie on the liberal school of political thought which stresses on the rationality or the justice for the human being (Samira Luitel 91). It aims at gradual changes in the political, economic and social status of women. They believe that women have the same mental capacity as their male counterparts. Both men and women suffer from the unequal division of Labour and are equally suppressed. If

potential women are denied the work force participation and do not get the opportunity to develop their talents men also are denied the pleasure of having close relationship with family, especially wife and children (Samira Luitel 91) liberal feminists don't seek revolutionary changes in society rather want reforms in the existing social structure by a democratic system. They believe that oppression exists because of the way in which men and women are socialized, which supports patriarchy and keeps men in power position. Liberal feminism draws on "welfare liberalism," though it started as "a form of liberal political thought influenced by writers as J.S. Mill" (78) Liberal feminists demand equal opportunity and rights for women, including equal access to jobs and equal pay by creating and supporting acts of legislation. By doing so they challenge the ideology of patriarchy and liberate women.

Radical feminism that was first fully articulated in the late 1960s sees "The nature and ambiguity of "male power" and it argues that men's patriarchal power over women is the primary "power relationship" in human society." Advocates of radical feminism usually clash with the ideal of the liberal feminist because the latter believes that society must be changed at its core in order to dissolve patriarchy, not just through acts of legislation. Radical feminists focus more on women's oppression and claim the whole patriarchal value system characterized by power, dominance, hierarchy and competition detrimental to women's advancement. Radical feminists believe that the domination of women is the oldest and worst kind of oppression in the world. They want to free both men and women from the rigid gender roles that society has imposed upon them. It is the sex-gender system that has created oppression and radical feminists mission is to overthrow this system by any possible means. Some radical feminists even argue that differences in behaviours and attributes between men

and women are biologically determined, not socially acquired and women deserve superior qualities. Radical feminist is essentially "a theory of by and for women" that sees the "oppression of women" as the basic and universal form of domination which is fostered by the institution patriarchy (81). With the emergence of so-called essentialism in feminist thought the radical feminists have been divided into two groups which is identified as radical-liberal and radical-cultural feminists. The radical-liberal feminists believe that women's reproductive and sexual roles and responsibilities often serve to limit women's development as full human beings and longed for androgyny. They violate sexual norms and believe that women should control every aspect of their sexuality because the femininity and reproduction are the things that women's capacity to contribute to society. The radical-cultural feminists refute this idea by saying the worst feature on masculinity and prefer to restore the female/feminine character rather to be male/masculine. They believe that they should encompass their femininity. They oppose libertarian by saying that reproduction is the source of power for women.

Radical feminism has two specific beliefs: women have positive values as women and women are violently oppressed everywhere by the system of patriarchy. Millet (1970) in her book *Sexual Politics* argues that:

Political relationships between men and women exists in all aspects of everyday life and such relationships are organized on the basis of patriarchy, a system of male domination over female. According to her, Patriarchy is the most pervasive ideology of our culture with its most fundamental concept of power. (Samira Louitel 99)

The Marxist feminists mostly draw the ideology of Marx, Engels and other 19<sup>th</sup> century thinker's theory of classicism rather sexism as the cause of women's

oppression. Feminist embracing Marxism was developed as Marxist Feminism in the western world in the 1960s and 70s. These feminist thinkers believe that there is a direct link between class structure and the oppression of women. Marxist concept of material forces, the production and reproduction of social life is much stressed by the Marxian feminists. In their opinion women are unequal to men not because of any conflict of gender interest but because of the working situation of class oppression, factors of property, inequality, Labour, exploitation and alienation. Jane Freedman refers to Moriaros Dalla Costa and Selma Jane's book:

The power and the subversion of the community and notes that women are exploited by the capitalistic system as unpaid workers, undertaking all the domestic works. Childbearing and caring which are necessary for the continuation of the capital system. (86)

Marxist feminists like to challenge the ideologies of capitalism and patriarchy. They believe that the way to end this oppression is to put an end to class and gender.

Socialist feminism emerged as a result of dissatisfaction with the gender-blind nature of Marxist feminist's thought. Socialistic feminist have combined Marxist and radical feminism, the former emphasizing the casual role of Labour and capital and the latter believing the sexual hierarchy is independent of economic class hierarchy. They believe that there is a direct link between class structure and the oppression of women. They believe that although women are divided by class, race, ethnicity and religion, they all experience the same oppression simply for being a woman.

The psychoanalytic feminism is drawn mostly from the philosophy of Sigmund Freud. He has massively brought up gender issues as he talks about the formation of the unconscious of a woman. He further seems to discover the fundamental differences in dream images seen by man and woman and attributes

egoists, ambitious dreams to men and erotic dreams of women Lacan posited 'women' as 'unknowable, as inevitably 'other and excluded from the symbolic.

In contrast Freud and Lacan, Julia Kristeva emphasizes the maternal function and its important in the development of subjectivity and access to culture and language. She doesn't agree with the feminists who maintain that language and culture are essentially patriarchal and must somehow be abandoned. On the contrary, Kristeva insists that culture and language are domains of speaking beings and women are primarily speaking beings. She insists that we need a new discourse of maternity.

In 1960, a revolutionary phase emerged in literary arena to western philosophy led by Jacques Derrida. As the post-structuralism, feminist raised the issue of center and margin. The idea of feminism seeks to study the existence of women in the patriarchal society. Post-colonial feminists argue that oppressions relating to the colonial experience, particularly racial, class and ethnic oppressions, have marginalized women in post-colonial societies. Post-colonial feminists do not present a united front on feminist issues, but can be described as feminists who have reacted against both universalizing tendencies in western feminist thought and a lack of attention to gender issues in mainstream postcolonial thoughts.

In Margaret Atwood's novel *Bodily Harm*, she presents the changing self-perception of her protagonist, Rennie. Rennie is in the quest of gender identity. In the course of novel, she lost her identity'. Patriarchal social structure is the main cause of her lost-identity. Being a capable and self-dependent, she can't save her identity. But at the end of the novel, her lost identity is regained due to her self-realization. It has enabled us to understand the condition, mental state, intellect and the feelings of female and their urge to bring out significant changes in the society so that a woman will live as free individual human being.

### **III. Redefining Gender**

#### **Rennie in the Trap of Patriarchy**

Though Rennie the central character of the novel, acts as a bold, strong and an independent woman, she can not totally cross the patriarchal social rules. Rennie is a typical woman who somehow resists patriarchal norms. No doubt, she has some weakness that spoil her 'self' in the beginning. Such kinds of weaknesses of a woman like Rennie are the social and cultural products. The society where she was born teaches her the norms and rules. Rennie who is surrounded by the problems resists both internally and externally to overcome obstacles. A young woman undergoing deep self-examination after having mastectomy.

The protagonist of the novel Rennie, can not remain untouched with the traditions of patriarchal consciousness. As other women in the society, she is also become the subject of traditional consciousness. In the beginning of the novel, we can see Rennie's arrival at home. She finds two policemen waiting for her inside the room before she enters. She informed that her apartment has had an uninvited intruder and he had left a coiled rope on her bed. There was "a length of rope coiled neatly on the quilt, It was any special kind of rope, there was nothing lurid about it. It was off white and medium thick. It could have been a clothesline" (13). There is an envelope which creates confusion, "The name in the envelope was supposed to be the murderer's or the victims. Miss Wilford in the bedroom with a rope" (13). The mysterious man who leaves the rope on her bed is clearly a threatening figure. He is the exact stereotype of the man who is imposing his presence in a women's life, sometimes violently, without caring about what women think. Right then we come to know that Rennie is a victim. Effectively the rope that is seen as a cold suggestion to hang herself, is also a symbol that she is tied.

The break-in initiates the image of a faceless stranger which hunts Rennie throughout the novel. She is not only disturbed by this break in, but is also more disturbed by the treatment of policemen: A policeman starts lecturing her about locks, about living alone and about safety. Howells further states:

She is a women living alone at the end of an affair and under threat, for her private space has been invaded by a "faceless stranger and the coiled rope on the bed would seem to signify the possibility of a male violent attack. She is a victim and yet in the eyes of the Toronto police she is not innocent precisely because she is a woman. (127)

First, Rennie goes through a crisis about her femininity. She undergoes a breast surgery. She carries a scar that any man will see when she is intimate with him. This point could be seen as a caprice, but a women in this situation not only has to fight the fear that cancer might come back, the fact that she is harmed in her body and femininity. It is one way that she is victimized as a woman because it is a disease that is predominantly found in women. The importance of the breasts needs to be pointed out. Breast have been a symbol of fertility for ages and, then, in our society of femininity. The main purpose of female beings is to give birth. For this reason a woman harmed in this part of her body will question her femininity. Rennie feels weak within and scares a lot due to her diagnosis of cancer. Externally she is victimized by the break-in and internally by the cancer. She thinks her life has changed after the diagnosis. She takes cancer as a sort of betrayal of her own body. She is pessimistic about what they might find in the time of operation. She starts to fear that many things could go wrong as a result of operation. She thinks "may be they would open her up and finds that she was permitted, riddled, rotting away from the inside" (11). We can see the picture of cut-open melon in Rennie's room at the sunset

Inn is like most of the other pictures and products, now apparent as an image of Rennie and in one sense all women. Having been surgically as well as sexually "opened" or violated by men and a reality or malignancy of which she would rather repress knowledge, Rennie fears that the scar on her breast will split upon "like a diseased fruit."

We can't find Rennie as a whole woman in the novel. The existence of cancer drastically changes Rennie that victimizes her both physically and mentally. She can no longer "assume, the future" (88) Rennie represents all women who, through the influence of culture, have become passive and allow themselves to be taken advantage of by men and whom they are anxious to please. They are capable within themselves but always in search of male supporter. It is social construction that women do not like to live by themselves. Rennie, the lifestyle journalist also wants the male support in her life but when she gets any man in her life she is betrayed by him.

Rennie's submissiveness in *Bodily Harm* takes a different shape which can be seen of her relationship with Jake, her soon-to-be boyfriend. She leads a rather normal life having a pattern, a job and a social life, until she is diagnosed with a breast tumor. After her mastectomy, things begin to go sour between them. He loses interest because she is so passive and accepting of his oppressive and abusive nature. When she was working with Jake, the predator in her life, she gets ready and prepared herself to fulfill the physical desire of Jake. "She wanted to make it easy for him, she wanted to help him along with the illusion that nothing had happened to her or was going to happen" (20). Jake is sometime violent with her and she gets scared of him. She sees him as an object to fear. He seems to long for the time they shared as a couple. Though she never really expresses it. Jake represents the man who wants to take hold of and control her life. He wants to rearrange her life and more strictly, to

open her up. "He was a packager" (103) by profession and Rennie eventually discovers that "She was one of the things Jake was packaging (104). According to his interest, Rennie also changes in "Packing things". Jake, we find the sexual predator. He appears to have quite dominating. He is depicted as a beast ready to pounce, on his prey. Jake himself tells Rennie that "he is an animal in the dark" (117). Rennie allows him to do things that he wants, allows him to package her.

Rennie feels uncomfortable while she sees the picture, Jake puts up in their apartment. One of two pictures Jake puts is "Interpretive of woman 'enigma' which shows a woman tied up by material with her breast, thighs and buttocks showing" (105). It reflects the voyeuristic attitude of men towards women, with overtones of sadistic control. But she leaves them up instead of taking them down. "These pictures made Rennie slightly nervous, especially when she was lying on their bed with no cloths on" (105) It could be argued that Jake is just tormentor in Rennie's life. It seems that he is victimizing Rennie by his rape fantasy. He treats her whatever way he like. He tries to shape her into who he wanted her to be. "Put your arms over your head, Jake said, it lifts the breasts. Move your legs apart, just a little, your left knee. You look fantastic" (105). Rennie says to Jake "sometime I feel like a blank sheet of paper". She thinks of herself as "raw material" (212) for Jake, yet she doesn't feel strongly enough to anything about it. The relationship between Jake and Rennie which is casual and non-binding can't survive for long time. This cancer leads her to break up with him. Jake is frightened and repelled by Rennie's scar. Jake's rejection becomes the supporting point for Rennie to detach from him. When there are problems in the relationship with Jake "She didn't want him to touch her either but he wouldn't admit it" (197).

Rennie is particularly weak, due to what happened to her in the few months following the identification of her breast tumor. It then is not surprising that leads to such bad events without being able to resist. The event in this novel are not there to show adventures, but mostly to trap Rennie. In very short time, Rennie's physical, loving and social life falls apart. She is still alive, but she remains practically alone and empty. Rennie may be the embodiment of the women we all fear to become one day, harmed and helpless, unable to save herself only hoping to be saved. John Berger writes in his introduction to *Bodily Harm*, "A man's presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you. By contrast, a woman's presence . . . defines what can and can't be to her." Rennie is the archetype of the weak women in the world of power-hungry men.

When Jake had seen Rennie in completely sexual terms and left her, she falls futilely in love with a surgeon, Dr. Denial who is seen in contrast to Jake. He possesses,

The healing touch that Rennie comes to obsess about in his hands and her want and need for them to touch her. She did not see hands but or add growth, like a plant or something with tentacles, detachable. She feels in love with him because he was the first thing she saw after her life had been saved. (32)

He is the protector of her life and claims that he is the one who gives another life to Rennie. He is telling her that "he had saved her life" (32). He saves her once from the cancer, could he now reconcile her self with her body? But their sexual encounter, after much handholding and moral dilemmas, doesn't tear her out of the darkness and insecurity that overwhelms her after the operation. She feels that she saved him in some way. Subsequently, she feels violated, victimized, raped once again since in his ordinariness. Like other male Denial still manage to take something of her

which she hadn't expected. He too has 'won'. The fantasy is unfulfilled. Denial can now be paralleled with the man with rope which is unknown. He is the man with the scalpel mutilating the female body. He is the stereotype of an idealized man. Rennie has been treating her body as a machine that needs good repair. She tends to regard illness such as cancer no more than the outward manifestation of some mental disability. Denial tells her that "the body is not separate from the body" (82), neither can the body and its ailments be regarded merely as function of mind.

Rennie wants to run away from her anxiety, pain and disturbed life that's why she makes trip to Caribbean island to write a travel piece. There she meets the man of her imagination. It is Paul who eventually rescues Rennie, who gives her back her body. He fits the image Rennie has in mind though his activities are unclear. Rennie wants everything to be easy. The man to whom she makes physical relation almost unknown. "She's just spent the night with a man about whom she knows absolutely nothing at all. It seems a fall hardly thing to have done" (99). Both of them hardly know to each other. "She likes him, well enough but not too well, she knows nothing about him, She doesn't need to know anything, he knows nothing about her, it's perfect" (99).

Rennie says about Paul

there's only two things that matter, is he nice or is he rich. Nice is better than rich but take it from me, you can't have both and if you cant' get nice take rich. At first I thought, he was only nice. Then I figured it out that he was rich, too. (213)

She thinks he makes her body exist and gives it back to her. She is in search of such man to be complete woman once again. Paul by using his power saves her first and in the return he takes advantage of her. She is used by him unknowingly that's why she

feels lost in St. Antoine that she is ready to follow any obey anyone. She gets involved in something that is not her interest. There, she finds no other way to survive and finds herself in a situation where she depends on men.

Paul, the last male who touches Rennie, reconciles her body and self too is typically a male-power. By taking help from another woman Lora, he makes Rennie give her help to them in their arm traffic. In the name of giving something Paul is taking something from her. He is the man who involves in the illegal activities and uses Rennie also for his own benefit. Rennie has become dangerously involved in island politics, close to boiling point because of the impending elections that threaten to unseat the corrupt government in Power. Paul enjoys the lack of limit. He is the risk loving man and playing war and past legal limits. He pushes Rennie into the risk after used and leaves her up. He is the symbol of male power who takes advantage of weak point of innocent women.

Almost all the male characters, whether visible or indivisible, she meets, actually use her. Not only the three men with whom she had physical relation but also the man she meets in the airplant tries to use her. Dr. Minnow tries to use her but in a much concerned way. He is about the same, not as violent as other men. It is difficult to know if he sincerely cares for Rennie because he does not really warn her about getting involved in the island. He sees Rennie only as a woman. She is in this surrounding a sweet and naïve person stuck in something too rough for her. He is the stereotype of man who wants to protect woman like weak and helpless people. In his eyes both (women and Canadian) are in same position. Rennie is a Canadian woman. 'Rennie therefore twice weak' for him. Thinking her a Canadian woman, he tries to help her by saying the coming difficulties. He warns her that she should not expect any understanding and help from anyone but herself. But she doesn't really listen to it,

and doesn't take seriously the warning given to her against Paul. Anyway, Dr Minnow is also a male figure. He also wants to use her for his own benefit through her writing which is denied by Rennie herself. Feminine identity and the definition of limits of women's bodies are mixed and interacted to each other. Rennie's body integrity as well as her feminine identity are threatened by men.

Rennie is being used by the men to whom she is ready to do everything. She believes everyone and provides her help but what they do, they lead her towards the circle of problems and difficulties. Her lover Jake is mostly violent with her and she gets scared of him. Denial, her life giver also turns to another male tormentor. She imagines all his power and even his soul in his hands because he was operated through his hands. Again Paul and Dr Minnow who try to use her for their own benefit by blackmailing her emotionally.

Rennie is mostly violated and mistreated by male, she is more so the victim of traditional and culture. She is also violated by other women too. She becomes the subject of traditional consciousness. If we go back to her past background, we come to know that she raised up in Griswold, a small village. Atwood presents Rennie's grandmother as a typical bad mother figure. Her grandmother has sent her to the cellar and locked her there for doing something wrong. This echoes her incarnation in the basement cell of a prison for an unknown crime. This seems to show that Rennie, like other women in general is condemned to the culture role of a victim. Rennie imagines Jake's lover as 'a headless body and feels this alienation with her own body after disconnected with Jake who had seen her as a completely sexual term. She is always in need of a man who would be in touch of her heart despite her body. Rennie who tries to cross the traditional boundary that had sat by the patriarchy.

Though Rennie is capable, strong and independent like male, she can't cross the fence created by the male power in the society. She falls into it. She unconsciously internalized it though it is not her intention. Culture and society taught her about it and forced to follow it. She unknowingly becomes the victim of patriarchy. Margaret Atwood, through her character Rennie is showing that a strong and professionally independent woman too are not totally free in the patriarchal norms and values. They internalize it. It is what most of the women have been taught, consciously or unconsciously.

### **Rennie's Lost Identity**

Rennie, the main character of the novel, is a professional lady. She earns money for herself and has her own existence. But she suffers from identity crisis. Sometime she feels herself empty and nude. She always comes in touch with males. She always wants male company to support her that puts her identity in question.

When we see her past, we find her in Griswold, her birthplace, Rennie is a revolutionary lady; she not only questions her femininity but also her whole identity. In her youth, she wanted to leave Griswold to detach herself from her root. She eventually left Griswold, because she wanted to make her own identity, own name that is her own stance. First of all she leaves her home, secondly, she leaves Toronto where she is working and living with Jake. She fulfills her aim to be a journalist. She introduces herself in front of the male figure saying "I'm a writer", "A journalist. I write for magazines. I am doing a travel piece" (37). Writing on the magazines that profession of writing on the magazines is the job that traditionally related to male. "She always likes to get that in first, before people mistake her for a secretary".

Rennie acts as a bold, strong and independent woman. It shows that she can live without any male support. But like other women in the society she always wants

male protection. She also suffers from the traditional social myths about femininity. Her both (Feminine and individual) identities fall on crisis. First of all she goes through a crises about her femininity. She undergoes a breast surgery. When she was operated. She believed two things at once;

that there as anything wrong with her and that she was doomed anyone, so why, waste the tie? She had a horror of someone, anyone, putting a knife into her and cutting some of her off, which was what it amounted to no matter what they called it. She disliked the idea of being buried one piece at a time instead of all at once. (23)

After her surgery, she feels her is no more a female. It is hard for her to make love with her boyfriend who also seems to see her differently when he knows about her breast cancer. Rennie has the feeling that he denies her body. In doing so he denies her femininity. He neglects her body because this body seems strange, distant and different. It is the crisis of her feminine identity.

Feminists want to eradicate the patriarchal order that 'a woman needs a man to be herself and to define herself. It can be a warning to what could happened if women let men rule their lives. The female characters featured in this novel, though they don't exactly fit in this group, can't imagine living without men. It shows their dependency upon male. Being dependent means being chained and unable to live without an upper power. This need compelled them to accept the power of men over them. Atwood shows the readers that the trouble comes not only form men. Women are not poor helpless victims but also have failures and make mistake. Women's identity falls in crisis not only due to men but also from the women who are unable to take care themselves and to stand in front of men. They want to keep their freedom

but still they are willing to place themselves in dependence. Women want to be the equal of men and at the same time to be treated specially and helped by them.

Rennie, when she is living with Jake, she has tried her best to fulfill his all sort of desires. She keeps his interest at the top by neglecting her own. She has to write what Jake wanted for his people. She does what he wants. She makes bed for him, takes baths for him and tough. Although she has pain inside, she tries to make him happy. But her idea was no more respected. She is forced to do the things without her interest. Jake does what he wants. He doesn't care about her interest, "He ordered a bottle of wine and urged her to drink more of it than she wanted to. Perhaps he thought she would be less boring if she get drunk, but this was not the care" (19). Jake takes her as sexual object only. He objectifies her body. Being his lover, Rennie, also changes into "Package" according to the interest of Jake. She has been a packager exploiting the media in order to manipulate tastes and inspire fashion trends at almost awesome triviality.

Rennie's relation is disconnected because of her illness. The disconnection is rooted in Rennie's mind. Not only does she imagine Jake's lover as "a headless body" but also feels his alienation with her own body. She decided "she was being silly and possibly neurotic as well. She didn't want to turn into her sort of woman who was afraid of man. It's your own fear of death, she told herself (40). She feels weak within herself and loses the writing talent too. Denial (Another male) saves her through surgery. When Daniel emphasizes the post-operative importance of a hopeful mental attitude, Rennie asks bitterly, "so it's my fault is there's a recurrence? I have cancer of the mind (82). Denial insists, "It is not a symbol, It's a disease [. . .]" (83).

Rennie feels that his hands save her and take her back to life she wants the meaningful touch of his magic hands and wants his protection. But after physical

relation with him, she realizes that he is not at all powerful. Thus, obsessed by her memories of her loss of Jake and of her unfulfilled love for Denial, Rennie at last turns toward an American, the gun-runner named Paul. When he makes love to her, Rennie feels deeply "grateful" that "she can still be touched" (204). She reveals that Paul was originally her lover. Paul, who wants to take advantage, leaves her when she was in difficult situation. Rennie's dream of successful love-life remain incomplete. Her love-life loses its meaning during this identity crisis.

Rennie's whole life seems to be collapsing and she is practically left alone wondering what her life is about. The answer she finds does not help her because it is the realization of the emptiness of her existence. When we look at the aims that she had in her youth, she is failed in many ways. She has been unable to forget Griswold from where she internalized the patriarchal social norms and value. The name of this village, through it can be by hazard, can be interpreted in a way that would explain Rennie's need to leave it. "Word is an area of small hills, nothing special but it sounds very close to "world". This likeness could mean that this place is like a world, what implicates that it defines the people living in it and does not allow them to go out easily . Furthermore "Gris" can remain of "Grisly" and a "grisly world" is something pretty much anyone would like to escape and forget. But "gris" can be seen in a different way, especially from a French speaking person ('gris' means gray), a colour usually related to melancholy, boredom or sadness. A gray place appears like one covered with clouds perhaps the reason why Rennie wants to go away from it. Rennie wants to detach herself from her origin to develops her "self" independently. She wants to create her individual identity by living her birthplace because it is impossible for a woman to cross social boundaries without leaving it. Rennie left but it never leaves her mind. She keeps remembering it and being influenced by it. She

unconsciously follows the socially norms though she never wants it. She seems not to be very pleased, away from home especially missing it security. It becomes the obstacles for her way to creating new identity. Her identity is in crisis.

Rennie does not consciously Decide to begin a new life but it is obvious that this is exactly what she wants. She wants a change therefore she chooses the Caribbean island. Her life is starting in St. Antoine, the promise Eden. But the beautiful island happen to fade very quickly and Rennie's aims to sleep in order to forget what she is doing there. When she arrives, she first thinks succeeded in making herself indivisible, free to decide whether she wants nobody being in position to do so. But later she realizes that she is unable to do so. Even if she can't have any connection with local people. She is watched from the beginning and the one, composing her identity is not herself. As with Jake, she appears as a blank paper and somebody else has got the pen. Rennie's situation is similar to the migrating birds traveling over dark seas. In, St. Antoine, she totally depended upon other. She doesn't use her mind for own self-decision. She believes the people who is near and dear to her. She follows their footsteps. Her last lover, Paul told her that the upcoming trouble does not concern her because, she is a tourist, she feels protected. But she ends up in the middle of it. The reason is only one that is, she neither worry nor wants to think about the future. She has fear that she could face death anytime therefore she is afraid of what her future could be or that there could be any future for her. She was hopeful about her bright future when she left her home. Unfortunately, she deeps running through black clouds, even under the burning sun of the Caribbean island. There she loses her real existence.

*Bodily Harm* is also a fragmented text that replicates the fragmentation of identity. To find her true 'self', a woman must be strong enough to search it and go

through the emptiness she might face sometimes. Rennie is strong but not static. Running from place to place and person to person she can't go away from her life. But is actually life behind by it. Because of the cancer, she loses her physical perfection. In the plane while she is returning home the island immigration officer, examining her passport picture and asks "Renata Wilford That you." She replies that it is but he insists, "It doesn't look you" (37). Because of her cancer induced weight loss, the "bad picture" of Rennie's face doesn't resemble the real Rennie, but underneath this explanation lies another" (37). Her health is replaced by an illness, without her doing any thing for it to happen and it opens the door for numerous problems to come, also making her love-life collapse. The basic elements of her life disappear and she remains alone and lost in crowd.

The need she experiences to have a man taking any case of her, reveals her hidden weakness. She doesn't allow her to establish her personality and on the contrary puts her in Jeopardy. She loses her identity, it is in crisis. Her 'self' itself is in question. This crisis ruins her 'self'.

### **Rennie's Self-Realization**

At the end of the novel, Rennie is able to know the actual reality with her self realization. The reality that Atwood points at is the male violence against women which seems to have been brought out 'to counterbalance women's recent self assertion'. Rennie also learns her own gullibility when she is in the prison. She is arrested from her hotel room for her unknown crime. "No sooner does Rennie believe herself safe in her hotel bedroom than two policemen barge into arrest her for "suspicion" (262). Their presence means that they have come to do something to her. Her arrest begins a seismic split in the surface of Rennie's life. She is treated badly in

subaltern cell than she realizes her own weakness and thinks seriously about her own life.

Rennie meets her goal to create her own individual identity both as a woman and human in the final part of the novel. Now she feels perfect physically as well as mentally. First, her feminine identity is reconstructed after her operation. She was operated through Dr. Denial's hand. She thinks "Denial's hands are not only the skilled hands of a surgeon but also the loving hands of a compassionate man, manual when Rennie awakes after surgery, he is holding her hand and "dragging her back into" the life that he had saved. By the hand " (32). Later in love with him. She believes that "his soul was in his hands" (98). Denial gives her life and it could be described as Rennie's rebirth. She is awakened to the fact that an invader has entered her body and will have to embark on the "journey to recover her lost sense of self. Unknowingly she is struggling on a journey to reconnect.

Just as Denial gives Rennie back her life, Paul's tender touch gives "her back her body" (248) is a love scene more mystical than sexual, " a moment of . . . incarnation" in which she re-enters the surgically mutilated body from which she had felt separated (204) Paul reaches out his hands and Rennie can't remember ever having been touched before. She is open now, she has been opened, she is being drawn back down, she enters her body again and there is a moment of pain and incarnation.

This may be only the body's desperation, a flare up a last clutch at the world before the long slide into final illness and death; but meanwhile she's solid after all, she is still here on earth, she's grateful, he's touching her, she can still be touched (193). At the moment when she finds she can be touched again it is the greatest pleasure for her.

The fact that she can still be touched, not just physically, but mentally is important. She is again capable of human emotion, human attachment. In this sense, she is able to bridge the gap between mind and body. This incident with Paul certainly helps Rennie begin to recover her lost connections, but there is one final event which seals her recovery and reconstructs her. She says that what Paul has given her is enough. "She can live with that, It's something, and "Something is better than nothing after all" (222). Her feminine identity comes into existence with the reconstruction of her body.

The man who realizes her body exist pushes her into the sea of Pain and suffering for his own benefit. With her involvement with Paul, she revolutionary involves in local politics and finally reaches to person. During her imprisonment Rennie witnesses much violence that she has never seen before. She observes man getting brutally beaten outside of her jail cell. Rennie comes to know that the male figures whom she thinks supporter to gain her feminine identity are really the obstacle on the journey of her whole identity creation. Because of her relation with them, she lost her identity. She recognizes that she has used and suffered at the hand of a patriarchy.

It is unfortunate that Rennie has to be subjected to so much pain and suffering before she can become whole again. There is only one woman (Lora) with her in the prison to see her difficulty. Rennie knows Lora, may be Paul's lover through Paul. By the help of Lora, Paul becomes success to involve Rennie to his business. He uses one woman to make unable another. He says "its always better to use a woman, they are less likely to be suspected." Lora knows everything about Paul. She becomes partner in his every activity. Lora becomes more familiar with Rennie although Rennie doesn't like her so much. Rennie does not know the intention of her nearness.

She can't imagine, why Lora has been so insistent about coming with her. They have nothing in common.

The two women have shared not only the experience of imprisonment, but also their life stories and although Lora's life has been much tougher, the two women's suffering has unmarked both of them in the same. Symbolic way: Rennie is always uncomfortable aware not only of her own "nibbled flesh, the little teeth marks on her breast. (284)

Because of the fault of Lora, now Rennie is in the jail and lives a difficult life. But she is only the observer of Rennie's difficult life. Rennie thinks that:

She does not really like Lora very much; she never has liked her very much; in fact she dislike her. They have nothing in common except that they are in here. There's nobody her to look at but Lora, nobody, to listen to but Lora. Rennie is going to like her a whole not less by the line they get to. (271)

The vivid memory illuminates for Rennie the absolute necessity for human contact. "Rennie kneels on the wet floor and touches the hard, which feels cold" (287). She moves Lora limp body to a corner of the cell and brushes her hair away from her face, a face which is briefly recognizable. She realizes that there is no such thing as a "faceless stranger". She is holding Lora's hand, between both of her own, perfectly still, nothing is moving, and yet she knows, she is pulling on the hand, as hard as she can, there's an invisible hole in the air, Lora is on the other side of it and she has to pull through, she's grafting her teeth will be effort, she can hear herself, a moaning, it must be her own voice, this is a gift, this is the hardest things she's ever done (288).

Lora's body in "her lap", an image that suggest a pieta, Rennie assumes not only a maternal, but also a quasi-divine role. When she speaks Lora's name, which

"has come unhooked and is hovering in the air" (298). The name descends and enters the body, and Lora seems to more and say "oh God" (299), a response that stresses the vitalizing power of love and language: they create human identity. It is unclear, if that she succeeds in reviving Lora from death or not but Rennie is struggling to save Lora, she is actually saving her.

The scene depicts Rennie rebirth into a world that she will be able to connect with Rennie sees a reflection of herself in Lora. Now she feels that both of them (women) have been victimized at the hands of patriarchal society. By saving Lora, Rennie acknowledges that she is not only victim but also overcomes her own victimization by helping others. As Hansen states, "Rennie's Transforming experiences a personal triumph essential to and secured by narrative closure is qualified by the fact that they the heroines' "cure" depends on another woman's pain, suffering and possible death" (6).

Rennie internalizes the fact that only the women can understand the pain and suffering of women. Men don't know the feeling of women. They don't know how to treat women. Rennie now totally supports the great idea that Jocasta (Rennie's friends) had expressed long ago. Jocasta said:

I think it would be a great idea if all the men were turned into women and all the women were turned into men, even just for a day. Then they'd all know exactly how the other ones would like to be treated.  
(156)

In the cell Rennie realizes how she was treated and victimized by male figures. She always wants to know the mysterious man who left rope on her bed. The presence of unknown man in her life hurts her throughout the novel. With the lack of identity, the

man with the ropes takes different forms; from the sadistic island police to various men with whom Rennie is romantically involved:

Rennie is dreaming about the man with the rope, again. He is the only man who is with her now, he's followed her, he was here all along, he was waiting for her. Sometimes she thinks it's Jake, claiming in the window with a stocking over his face, for fun, as he once did; sometimes she thinks it's Denial, that's why he has a knife. But it's not either of them. It is not Paul, it not anyone she's ever seen before. "The face keeps changing. (287)

She tries to identify him as Jake, as Daniel, as Paul until, terrifyingly. She begins to realize that this facelessness is the possibility of any male in society; he is an agent of male oppression. He represents the potential patriarchal structure. It is the need for male dominance and female subordination. Even when she thinks about Jake, her lover, is too typically a male. Sometimes he becomes violent with her. He liked:

To pin her hands down, he liked to hold her so she couldn't move. He liked that he liked thinking of sex as something he could win at. Sometime he really hurt her, once he puts his arm across her throat and she really did stop breathing. (207)

When she takes Paul, who reconciles Rennie's body and self, he is also a male figure. He taste for danger, fits him neatly into the role of renegade hero. He lives the edge, he deals drugs, he rescues maidens in distress. The picture, she creates in her mind for the man with rope doesn't match. Than she equates him as the faceless stranger with the rope.

The meaning of "Renata," "born again" and perhaps even of Wilford, . . . will ford or will cross over, "suggests the symbolic significance of the question about

identity; this is the begging of an inner journey. Rennie is released from prison through the intervention of a representative of the Canadian government. At the end, Rennie is able to become a more fully integrated person. The importance lies in the fact that Rennie was ultimately able to connect, to feel again. The final redemptive acts of Rennie are more important than her ultimate fate. Throughout her life, Rennie suffers in many different ways. The break-in and diagnosis of cancer victimized her. Her love-life turns into a sort of betrayal therefore she thinks, "Being in love was like running barefoot along a street covered with broken bottles" (102). She overcomes all the problems and reconstructs herself.

As a journalist she has taken on a new outlook. She has recovered her lost voice and recognizes the ultimate power of language. She imagines writing the cancer article in order to distance the unacceptable reality from herself, now struggling with an even more unacceptable reality. She imagines the article that she is going to write about St., Antoine after her release from Prison. To continue to be a journalist means that she is not going to abdicate this power. Instead, she is going to use it to her advantage; she is regaining her lost identity; she thinks, "She will never be rescued. She has already been rescued. She is not exempt. Instead she is lucky [. . .]" (301).

Rennie is going to change her old ways and writes about what is important. She says at the end; "In any case she is subversive. She was not one once but now she is. A reporter. She will pick her time; then she will report. For the first time in her life, she can't think of a title" (290). She looks out the window of the plane while returning to Canada, "It's so bright" (290) in the outside. It symbolizes the coming brightness in her life. Now she is enjoying total freedom. Can she make her freedom exist in the future by imagining it is the present? This question remains unanswered.

Rennie lives the hardest life in the prison. There, she learns real humanity. The subaltern cell becomes the place of Enlightenment for Rennie where she questions her identity and realizes her fault. In the beginning, she was totally depend upon males to do anything. Now she realizes, that she was living a life guided by others. She did whatever they want. Her consent becomes her failure. At the point of this realization, she decides to live for herself. Here she is born again. It is the rebirth of Rennie.

Rennie gains her lost 'self by her self-realization that was destroyed in the time of identity crisis. Though there is no actions that proves Rennie is regaining or reconstructing her self but her realization itself is the reconstruction. At the end of the novel, there is not only the reconstruction of body but also the reconstruction of self is reflected. She finds her new identity that shows her success in her quest of gender identity. She meets her goal of establishing gender identity with her self-realization.

### **Redefining Gender in Atwood's *Bodily Harm***

*Bodily Harm* follows the main character, Rennie, (Renata Welford), a travel and pop culture writer who tries to escape the traumatic experiences of her own past by going on assignment to the fictional Caribbean islands of St. Antoine and St. Agathe. It is the story of a victimized woman and her struggle to find her own individual identity. Though the entire plot of this novel revolves around victimized woman. It also has some elements of redefining gender. Rennie is victimized, for she is somehow breaking the tradition. Coming out of the four walls and trying to live her own life is like a stone in the throat of the society. She does that. She chooses the life which is preferred for men only. In the regard Alexander writes in his review:

The main character seems to be over the whole women's movement thing; she teats it like last year's hemline. And she doesn't mind when

her boyfriend wants to very realistically pretend to rape her and gets off on that. She just does what he wants, it, without question, without any expression of her self and her desire.

Rennie is a victim on all different levels simply because she is a woman who doesn't follow the rigid rules of society. This novel is about female body from the point of view of the woman whose body is already damaged by cancer and mastectomy. The diagnosis of breast cancer and subsequent mastectomy are obvious forms of victimization. She feels her life has changed after the diagnosis. Ronnie knows that her lover 'Jake' is "afraid of her, she had the kiss of death on her, you could see the marks" (201). Jake has left her for a whole and unscarred woman. We can see her returning to her apartment in the beginning of the novel. She finds two policemen there, who show her "a length of rope coiled neatly" on her bed and tell her that a man had broken in, perhaps intending to "strange her" (13). She is disturbed by the treatment of the policemen. Their worthless questions and instructions bother her. She says "Next he would start lecturing me about locks, about living alone, about safety" (15).

They ask such questions because, as Rennie has thought, "he wanted it to be my fault, just a little, some indiscriminate same provocation" (15). Their questions reveal their suspicion that she might have encouraged voyeur, "Suddenly unbuttoned blouse and pulled left arm out of shoulder" (15). When a policeman says "what in hell are you doing?" then she replies "I want you to believe me." (15). To make them clear about their suspicion, she bares her scarred breast to prove that she is no longer worth looking at.

Rennie is somehow resisting against patriarchy, she no more remains within four walls. First of all she leaves her home. Secondly she leaves Toronto where she is

working. She is alone in St. Antoine, it is very challenging for a woman to go alone to St. Antoine, A Caribbean Island. She has gone there to write travel piece but falls in political uprising. Rennie is being used by Paul, the unknown gay met during some holidays and Dr. Minnow, a politician. Dr. Minnow is an ambiguous character. He thinks Rennie is twice too weak because he gives the same place for both women and Canadians. "We get mostly Canbadisans," He says "The sweet Canadians" (29).

Rennie somehow reacts against his perception towards her. She can't tell whether or not this is meant as irony. She only says, "We're not all that sweet" (29). Dr Minnow tells her to write a piece on the local situation defending his opinion. "He gives a small laugh" and says, "Look with your eyes open and you will see the truth of the matter. Since you are a reporter, it is your duty to report "(133). Then Rennie reacts badly to the word duty. "Duty was big in Griswold". She says "I'm not that kind of reporter" (133)

According to feminist perspective, Rennie and another female character "Lora" fall into identity crisis which come from the fact that they are trying to change the place they have been given in society i.e. taking care of the house and children being a kitchen creature. Of course, in the case of Rennie, the patriarchal culture of Griswold where she born, advocated for women to be in submissive role. In the eyes of her Griswoldian counterparts, her job as female writer is unacceptable. She is marked as unconventional, because she has no children and has a job of her own. The fact remains that she wants to escape a life where she feels threatened to build another one. The personal choice seems to be very important point here. Women are trying to obtain because they need to decide for themselves and not let men rule their life. It is the redefining of gender role shows the resistance against pre-defined gender roles.

Rennie admits that at one point she wanted to be a doctor like her worshipped grandfather, but she quickly leaves the idea. The reason is that in Griswold "Men were doctors, women were nurse, men were heros, and what were women? Women rolled the bandages and that was all anyone ever said about that" (56).

The novel *Bodily Harm* is very effective on this level, in that it explores Rennie's own personal journey as a survivor of breast cancer. We can take Rennie as a brave woman. When her cancer is diagnosed, she immediately imagines writing an article about it. Rennie is in St. Antoine, the place where "white women have a bad reputation." Paul informs that:

The women here think they (white women) have spoil the local men. They don't like the way white women dress, either. You'd never see a local women wearing shorts and pants, they think it's dengensate. If they started behaving like that their men would beat the shit out of them. If you tried any of the women's lib stuff down here they'd only laugh. They say that's for the white women. Everyone knows white women are naturally lazy and they don't want to do a women's proper work, and that's why they hire black women to do their work for them.

(149)

Paul looks at her with something between a challenge and a smirk, which Rennie finds irritating. He also says, "They also think you are not only a journalist. They don't believe you're really just writing for a magazine" (149). The women living in At. Antoine heartily internalized the patriarchal notions. For them Rennie's profession is unconventional and unacceptable. They don't know much about magazines. They are the blind follower of traditional patriarchal rules and regulation. But Rennie, who is free and independent. She has not any restriction on her expression. She crosses the

circle of man made rules. She doesn't have fear of any male in the society. She is a journalist. She confidently says "But I am " (149).

Patriarchal society is male oriented that allows only men doing every activity whatever they like. Men have unbound power, they have right to choose woman who can satisfy them. They use women in whatever way they like. But women are not free for doing activities according to their choice. They are not allowed to choose man of their interest. But it is different in case of Rennie. She crosses the fence that society has created for women. She does not take 'sex' as a broader way. For her it is the women need. She used to think:

Sex was not an issue, it wasn't crucial, it was a pleasant form of exercise, better than jogging, a pleasant form of communication, like gossip. People who got too intense about sex were a little out. It was like wearing plastic spikes with rhinestones and meaning it, it was like taking mink coats seriously. (102)

Rennie has physical relation with almost all the male characters in the novel. For her 'sex' is nothing. She takes sex as nothing than "a pleasant form of exercise" what mattered was the relations" (102). She has a lover Jake with whom she has physical relation. The ending of her relationship with Jake is the direct result of her mastectomy. She slowly detached from him because Rennie's feelings about him remain unclear. She is not satisfied and falls in love with Denial, the doctor who performs the surgery on her. Rennie imagines all his power and even his soul in his hands because she was operated through his hands. "They are the first objects she sees when she wakes up after the surgery" (32). She eventually sleeps with him but this does not allow her to enter her body again. She thinks he has the power to cut her and save her life in doing it. She realizes that he does not correspond to the man of her

fantasy. Sleeping with Denial is not helpful for Rennie because he is not a male, all powerful character. He is an idealized figure of a savior. When her desire remains unfulfilled with him, she leaves him too. Then she finally finds Paul, an American arrived in a post-colonial island, St. Antoine. He holds the power and sexually desires her, what finally makes her able to accept her mutilated body, to recognized it as her own and again be one with it. Touching her, Paul makes her body exist and gives it back to her. She needs a man to do that, to be a whole woman again. So she uses her individual right to select suitable guy for her which is against the norms of society.

Hence, we can see some events that help to redefine the traditional gender role. Protagonist, Rennie tries to go against traditional gender role given by the society. She faces various problems in the journey while opposing traditional norms and values. She has to suffer very much. To preserve her identity she runs place to place and person to person that shows her resistance against patriarchy.

#### IV. Conclusion

The story of *Bodily Harm* revolves around its heroine, Rennie Wilford who is victimized physically as well as mentally. Because of breast cancer she is victimized physically; she is victimized mentally because of the break-ups. Rennie wants to create her new independent 'self' escaping from her birth place. She leaves Canada and travels to the island of St. Antoine with the intention of indulging herself surviving a bout with breast cancer and traumatic break-ups. She disconnects herself from her origin-Canada where her problems are not life threatening. They only prevent her from fully enjoying life, and moves to Caribbean island where she is surrounded by various problems. Rennie is confronted by a world where her rules for survival no longer apply. Her imaginative Eden (St. Antoine) turns to be a depressed country on the brink of revolution and civil uprising. Rennie, a young women who is undergoing deep self-examination after having mastectomy, soon finds herself in some civil unrest.

Rennie is a lifestyle reporter who writes mostly about fashion trends or travel; whose life has begun to shatter around the edges. There we can see the conversation between two women, two political prisoners about the events of their lives which brought them to prison. At first, Rennie is living a normal life. She spends her free-time with her controlling but sensual boyfriend, Jake. Her life changes dramatically when she finds out she has breast cancer. She feels as if she is about to die, as if worms are eating away her 'insides'. Her boyfriend pretends to feel fine about it, but Rennie senses his disgust and their relationship ends. She realizes that she is in love with her surgeon. After all, he has been a part of her that even she herself has never seen her insides. The married surgeon is guilt ridden and Rennie decides to go on vacation. After being infatuated with Paul, a shadowy player in the local scene, She

involves in the politics without her interest. Rennie soon finds herself thrown into a nightmare. Then after she learns to believe in herself. But she couldn't have anticipated her efforts not only survive but comprehend and report the swirl of events around her lead her to new levels of personal and artistic awareness.

Atwood presents the image of woman as an object to masculine desire and violence is contrasted starkly to psychic and physical consequences that the actions have on the women. Women characters unknowingly lose their identity. Both of them (heroines) are victimized at the hand of patriarchy. Lora has also the similar story like Rennie. She is also a young girl disconnected from her root to build her identity. The social and sexual oppression that she experiences are different from Rennie's. In a male-ordered society, her voice remains unheard. Finally, she is silenced and victimized woman.

Rennie, the central character of the novel, unlike most of other women, resists patriarchy and social norms. She is aware of her identity before leaving Griswold. She escapes from Griswold because there she couldn't exist herself. She doesn't want the life of restriction and protection. Her desire is to live free and enjoyable life. In Toronto, she becomes independent being, a reporter. She has her own life: free and self motivated. There somehow she gets her name and identity. But later on, she loses her identity due to some weaknesses which she inherits from the culture and society she lives. She starts to move according to other interest. She believes everyone and accepts their council. She becomes the follower of others' Footsteps. Here, in this situation, she forgets her individual identity and her "self" is destructed. She loses all control over her life. She doesn't have her own "self". She becomes a puppet dancing in the hand of male counterparts.

Self is the greatest ornament of an individual that indicate one's essential being by identifying him/her from others' particular nature. To have one's own identity and to exist by himself and herself, one should be able to preserve the self. But Rennie, who is in search of individual identity is unable to save her 'self'. Because of her frequent contact with male, she avoids to think about herself. She becomes nude in the hand of male in patriarchal society. Social, cultural, sexual, authoritative and many other men made factors hinder her 'self' that leads to identity crisis. Mostly, in patriarchal society, women feel identity crisis due to the destruction of the self.

Rennie, finds her identity in crisis while she involves herself with different men. Although she is a writer, she doesn't know what she is writing and how she is writing as a reporter. She is working for another interest at that time her will power is being lost. Though she is independent, she always wants male support to live life. Physically and mentally victimized Rennie doesn't think about herself until she is locked up in an underground cell with another woman, Lora. Inside the prison, a kind of consciousness knocks her heart. She visualizes all the events and examines them. She realizes her fault. She, at that time remembers her life which she was living for others. She questions her individual identity and seeks her 'self'. Rennie finds herself infatuated with male like Jake, Dr Denial, Dr Minnow and Paul. Each of them kept an incomplete sort of relation and left her alone in the difficulty. When she is separated from male at the time she starts to think about her life. At the time of her operation, she thought herself different from other women. She didn't take herself as a whole woman. But now she learns with effort that she can still live a full life. She is not different than everyone else. It argues that the need of all women with breast cancer is a change in attitude rather than clear environment or creative medical options.

Rennie, throughout the novel, doesn't think or even knows what her desire and interest are. Jake is seen packaging her. Dr. Denial, in the name of giving her new life holds her hand and instigate her to fulfill his sexual desire. Paul rescues her from physical and mental disgust. But in doing so he also uses her in his arm-traffic. He is a risk loving man and Rennie, unfortunately becomes his victim. It would be clear that people who are using her and then putting her into trouble are males. They are the root causes of her suffering.

Rennie plans for future to continue the job as a reporter. She redefines her role as a writer. She believes that she will regain her voice and write a real journalistic piece on the political upheaval. She will become proactive. She is seeing into the future. Seeing herself getting out of the prison that means the heroine is still in the prison and that her only hope of getting out of the prison. Her release from prison is set in future tense that guarantees nothing. The clear implication of the story is that Rennie, whether she is physically liberated from the prison or not, can never escape the knowledge of human evil which that prison has come to symbolize. At the same time the recognition of human kinship which finds positive expression in Rennie's effort to revive. Lora is one whose redemptive value is entirely independent of its practical consequences.

It is very important to note, Rennie has recovered her lost voice and recognizes the ultimate power of language. As a journalist, she has taken on a new outlook. She is going to change her old ways and writing about what is important. Rennie is not going to abdicate this power, instead, she is going to use it to her advantages. How she internalizes the cultural, patriarchal norms and values which are prevalent in the society. How male ideology traps her and badly victimizes her. Because of that she lost her individual identity, But her lost self is regained at the end

of the novel. Her individual identity is reconstructed with her consciousness and self-realization.

After her self-realization, she feels lucky to be alive and feels more alive than many around her. Her self-realization leads her towards the creation of new individual identity. In this sense, Rennie, at the end of the novel gets not only her feminine identity but also her individual identity.

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