

Exploring Masculinity versus Femininity in *Woman at Point Zero*

by Nawal El Saadawi and *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood



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Declaration

I would like to state that this dissertation entitled “**Exploring Masculinity versus Femininity in *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi and *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood**” is a record of first hand research work carried out by me during the period of my study in the year 2016-2017 and this dissertation has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Associateship, Fellowship, or other similar title and that this dissertation represents my independent work.

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Certificate

This is to certify that Thinley Wangmo has completed her Master of Arts in English dissertation entitled “**Exploring Masculinity versus Femininity in *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi and *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood**” under my guidance and supervision. To the best of my knowledge the present work is the result of her original investigation and study. No part of the dissertation has ever been submitted for any other degree or diploma at any university. This dissertation is fit to be considered for the award of the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

Masculinity versus femininity is regarded as “tough versus gentle” culture. Femininity is considered to be the collection of qualities or nature of the female sex. It is closely connected with softness, gentleness, submissiveness, being emotional, and weak. Masculinity is considered to be the feature of male sex. It is linked to being strong, tough, and hard. The fight and struggle against prejudice and suppression of women due to the categorization of superiority of masculinity and inferiority of femininity is dominant everywhere in the world. Femininity and masculinity are social identities which have created waves of imbalance and destruction in human lives. It breeds violence, injustice, loss of moral values, human ruin and unspeakable evilness. It sets out to trap into which many people fall. The source of Feminism germinates in women’s quest to achieve equality and justice between the sexes and to solve the gendered conflict.

This dissertation endeavors to employ the feminist approach and examine the presence of masculinity versus femininity in *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi and *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood. It attempts to expose the destructive effect of the value which is placed upon the term masculinity and femininity which finds its outlet through human behavior and actions. It aims to examine how men bring the downfall of women through the assertion of their masculine trait which is deeply rooted in them. The study also aims to analyze how women also contribute in bringing their own downfall. It also attempts to reveal how women try to combat male domination in their pursuit of self-identity and liberation. This dissertation fervently aims to espouse the equality between men and women and the harmony of coexistence between the two to have liberation and human right for all.

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Introduction

The categorization of masculinity as superior and femininity as inferior lay the birth of patriarchy and an endless injustice being inflicted on women. One resorting to violence and physical strength to resolve conflict are deemed to be the central characteristics of masculine identity. While, femininity reclines to being modest, submissive and weak. The characteristics of masculinity and femininity are instilled and embedded consciously or unconsciously. It has led to incessant struggle of war between the sexes. As individuals deal with each other they develop a gender identity of what it means to be a “man” or a "woman". Men are considered to be masculine while females are taken to be feminine. Femininity and masculinity describe gender identity. The distinction of sex and gender are often found to be vague but the fact is there lies obvious differences between the two terminologies.

Sex is related to the sex organs of male and female bestowed biologically. Gender is not sex. It is the social elaboration of biological sex. Gender is created by society. Society and culture instill in both men and women the stereotypical ideas of gender identities of masculinity as superior and femininity as inferior which leads to injustice and oppression. The distorted religious belief and imagination lead to marginalization and dehumanizing of women in the society. But this does not mean people are helpless puppets shaped by social manipulation and flawed beliefs. One need to critically analyze and make sound judgments to give the basic right to every individual be it man or woman. They both deserve the right to live with dignity and equality. The difference is constructed to validate the sense of superiority of male sex. It is asserted by many feminist writers that the struggle between masculinity and femininity can only end when individuals stop counting privileges of the opposite sex

through education and when women achieve absolute social and economic equality with men. The struggle of women against oppressive weight of men's obsession with staunch masculine characteristics prevalent in the society lead to the suffocation of the lives of women throwing them in the deep abyss of hopelessness.

Margaret Atwood and Nawal El Saadawi present the prominent themes of masculinity versus femininity, suppression of women, female circumcision, self-alienation and regaining of self-identity. *Woman at Point Zero* and *Surfacing* are novels written by two diverse powerful female writers coming from different cultural background. Nawal El Saadawi and Margaret Atwood depict the complexities, suffering and the plight of women across the globe that bind them together as a woman writer. They condemn the oppression imposed on women in a male dominated society. Women had always been under the clutches of male's domination ever since the evolution of mankind. Men have dominated and ruled over women across the globe asserting their masculine attributes.

Women have been voiceless and have been relegated to a lower position. Saadawi and Atwood exhort on the orthodox and unjust rules exerted on women by men. They present strong expression of rebuke of the sexual and social norms imposed upon women. The writers explain how women are demoralized and placed in an inferior position. Their novels reveal the struggle of women and their emancipation from the clutches of male domination facing countless hurdles. In the novels *Woman at Point Zero* and *Surfacing*, both the leading female protagonist defies and refuses to surrender to the set norms imposed on them declaring their feminist perspective.

The study in this dissertation is allocated into two chapters. The dissertation commences with the introduction to the invaluable novels and the phenomenal writers. Then the chapters proceed to critically and analytically explore the elements of

masculinity versus femininity in *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi and *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood. The texts selected for this study will be analyzed very closely to draw out the destructive effect of masculinity and femininity in the society. The study will proceed to present how the men bring women's downfall and further explore and confront how women also contribute to their own downfall which will be examined with meticulous care. The leading protagonist combating against the male domination demonstrating their feminist perspectives in both the novels will be presented. The study also intends to encapsulate meticulously the essence of the study carried out and present the findings in the concluding portion.

Nawal El Saadawi, the writer of *Woman at Point Zero* is an internationally known figure. She is known to be called as "Simone De Beauvoir" to Arab world. She is a physician, psychiatrist, feminist writer, and an activist for women's right who was born in the year 1931 in the small village of Kafr Tahla in Egypt. At the tender age of six, she experienced a painful traumatic experience of clitoridectomy. She graduated from the University in Cairo Medical School. She got herself specialized in psychiatry and became a doctor in the year 1955. She became the Director of Egypt's Public Health. She held important post as the editor-in-chief of *Health* magazine and an assistant general secretary for Egypt's Medical Association.

After she published her first non-fiction *Women and Sex* (1972) in Arabic in Cairo which dealt with religion, sex, female genital mutilation, political and economic oppression, she lost her jobs making her seek out wholeheartedly into her research on women and neuroses in prisons, traveling often to Qanatir Women's Prison after her dismissal. Saadawi encounters the woman who was given death penalty for killing a man which had led her to the creation of the character of Firdaus in her powerful book *Woman at Point Zero* which was published in the year 1973. In the year 1981, El

Saadawi found herself imprisoned in the same prison for voicing out against *Egyptian* President Anwar Sadat although, she got released after his assassination in 1981. She wrote her book *Memoirs from the Women's Prison* (1984) with an eyebrow pencil conveyed to her cell by an imprisoned young woman in the prostitute's ward on a roll of toilet paper. In her memoir, she gives voices to the real experiences of the marginalized women. She records the mad ravaging outburst of the women prisoners telling their chilling stories in their own voices.

Her book *The Hidden Face of Eve* discloses the description of the female circumcision she underwent at the age of six. The novel portrays a world in which little girls are sexually abused by male relatives and mutilated by their mothers in the name of god which made her the internationally recognized figure on the status of women in the Arab world and introduced the word feminist into Egyptian culture. Her courage of breaking the taboo amidst the conservative society earned her name as the feminist writer.

The versatility of her work can be seen through her weaving of fiction, nonfiction, autobiographies, memoirs, short stories, plays and essays. She has authored numerous works of fiction and non-fiction. Saadawi in her book *A Daughter of Isis*, her first autobiography, there she narrates about her personal experience with female genital mutilation. Her autobiography reveals the portrait of her childhood which had produced the freedom fighter in her. Saadawi's books have been interpreted into myriads of languages worldwide and it is being taught in universities across the world.

Her works have the presence of intense feminist point of view which put her under threat consistently and her name appeared on the death list issued by various Islamic fundamentalist groups. In 2004 she endorsed herself as a candidate for the presidential elections in Egypt with the aim to provide human rights, democracy and

liberty for women. However, she was forced to recede her candidacy as she faced growing government persecution.

Several awards and honors have been earned by Saadawi. The Stig Dagerman Prize was awarded to Saadawi in 2011 by the Stig Dagerman Society and Älvkarleby municipality which is a Swedish prize awarded to a person who supports the importance of free speech and promote empathy. She has also won the North- South Prize in 2004 by the North- South Center of the Council of Europe for contribution in the fields of human rights protection, and creating awareness regarding issues related to global solidarity. Three honorary doctorates have been bestowed to Saadawi.

She truly is the writer who has refused to succumb to the oppressions imposed on woman by gender and class. Saadawi also mentions how the western women are deluded in thinking that they are liberated in comparison to women living in other parts of the world. She audaciously remarks that one should be fully liberated to be in the position to liberate others. She candidly remarks how many American feminists have come to liberate her but the irony was they were noticed to be oppressed by their husbands. *Woman at Point Zero* is considered to be Nawal El Saadawi's best-known novel. The novel was applauded worldwide for its daringness, the moral strength to speak out and withstand danger and for its ideological message.

It has been remarked that Nawal El Saadawi's novels can be read through two lenses, firstly, as chilling and intoxicating stories, and secondly, as novels of social concerns embedded in the story line. Nawal El Saadawi is the author as well as the narrator in her novel *Woman at Point Zero*. The novel commences with the author Saadawi introducing the readers to the events which had led to the imprisonment of the protagonist Firdaus in the novel. The shift in the role of narration occurs after the writer Saadawi encounters her protagonist Firdaus. The protagonist Firdaus, who is a prisoner

then narrates her compelling story to the author. In the process Saadawi presents the world of two people who happens to be Firdaus the outstanding protagonist in *Woman at Point Zero* and herself. Both the characters battle with feelings of triviality, and defenseless resentment over the state of women.

The genre employed is creative non-fiction. It blends fiction with the element of reality, history and private events to present the conflict and contradictions which the characters experience. It gives the reader the first-hand experience of the events and allows the readers to experience the whirlpool of emotions in the face of oppression which women go through in their everyday lives. Saadawi had emphasized the effect of the prison encounter in her writing where she had mentioned her being so affected by this real woman Firdaus that she says that she wrote it as it was. She had mentioned that fiction is only twenty percent, or maybe ten percent.

In *Woman at Point Zero*, Nawal recounts her observation while doing research on the personalities of a group of women prisoners as a psychiatrist in Egypt. She expounds in her preface that when she was running these studies, she had never thought that some days in near future she would encounter similar faith and get held as a prisoner. She meets a doctor who mentions about a prisoner in Qanatir prison who is sentenced with the death penalty for killing a man. The doctor tells her that the woman seems incapable of killing anyone. Nawal starts wondering about Firdaus, the woman who is convicted for killing a man, and thought to be incapable of committing such a crime. She becomes inquisitive and desperate to meet Firdaus. Nawal becomes devastated as Firdaus refuses to meet her.

Finally, Firdaus succumbs to meet Nawal, the day before she is to be put to death. After Nawal finally meets Firdaus, readers are taken into Firdaus section of

narrative where she enfolds her oppressive life; everything from her struggles to her desire to have her life ended narrated in the cell.

Firdaus comes from an acute poor family. Her father repeatedly beats her mother and she undergoes a childhood of cruelty and neglect. Her mother makes her go through clitoridectomy. Soon, her parents die, and she lands up living with her uncle in Cairo. Although her uncle permits her to go to school, he violates her as he caresses her thighs. Though Firdaus is uneasy with the way in which he touches her, she does not show her aversion because it doesn't occur to her to do as a result of her mother's submission to her father's ill treatment. Firdaus learns to think that men possess women's bodies. Her uncle gets married and Firdaus gets admitted to a boarding school as his wife dislikes Firdaus.

After completing her secondary school, back at her uncle's house, Firdaus gets miserable treatment. Her uncle a religious figure exhibits his hypocrisy when he marries her off to Sheikh Mahmoud, who was more than sixty years old with facial deformity for dowry. Sheikh Mahmoud flogs Firdaus very often and after one menacing beating, she flees and ends up in a coffee shop, tired, thirsty and hungry where she meets Bayoumi. He invites her to his apartment saying he has two rooms. She stays in his apartment. In the initial period, Bayoumi was kind to Firdaus but the day she mentions that she wants to get a job, he beats her and imprisons her in his apartment. He brings along his friend to abuse her sexually.

Firdaus becomes completely broken and runs away to the city where she meets a wealthy woman named Sharifa who trains her to become a high-class prostitute taking advantage of her innocence and her plight. When Firdaus talks about her uneasiness of her work, Sharifa tells Firdaus not to mix her feeling with work as nothing comes out of pain. One night Firdaus overhears Sharifa and her friend Fawzy fighting over their

ownership of her, so she runs away again. She meets a police man who makes her feel obligated to have sex with him as he threatens her with arrest. It becomes night and she ends up sleeping with a man in utter destitution who gives her a ten pound note. Her contact with the note brings out buried wound deep in her guts as she remembers how money had always been made an object which was forbidden to her. She recollects begging her father for a piaster and her mother being beaten by her father for losing a piaster. The ten pound note also evokes in her a sense of pleasure and empowerment as she gets the sense of power. She remains a prostitute as she views it as freeing herself from being under others control.

A client named Di'aa tells her that she is not an honorable woman which devastates her. She gives up her life as prostitute and begins working as an office assistant. She in her encounter with revolutionary man named Ibrahim finds herself in love with him. She starts having relationship with him only to learn that he is engaged to the boss's daughter. Ibrahim proved to be as exploitative as every other male with whom she had encountered. She becomes extremely hurt and becomes a prostitute again as she thinks it is better to be a prostitute rather than a mislead saint. And many powerful men come to her, and she rejects some of them to prove that she possesses power over her own body, and also because of her hatred towards them.

A pimp coerces her into working under him and he dominates her. She comes to realize that she is not free as she imagined as a prostitute so, she decides to leave the place but the pimp suddenly appears and tries to stop her. He slaps her and reaches for the knife in his pocket but she pulls it before him and stabs him into his chest killing him leading to her death sentence. Firdaus tells Nawal, that she wants to die so that she can go somewhere new. She also informs Nawal that she is being sentenced to death and the rationale behind it is not because men are scared that she might kill again but

because of the truth she might tell. As she concludes her story, she gets taken away to be executed. Nawal leaves the cell feeling ashamed and hollow. She feels the helpless fury and sorrow in the society overpowered by men which cripple women.

Margaret Atwood, a highly acclaimed Canadian poet, novelist, critic, an activist and environmental activist was born in Ottawa, Canada in the year 1939. She also, published many books of poetry and short stories. She published poems and articles in the college literary journal while studying at Victoria College in the University of Toronto. She taught at various universities. Atwood has won many awards and numerous honorary degrees. She has won the Arthur C. Clarke Award and Prince of Asturias Award for Literature. She has been shortlisted for Orange Prize for Fiction. In the year 1987, she was named Humanist of the year by the American Humanist Association. She is also known to be a prominent feminist writer who famously remarked saying that men are afraid that women will laugh at them while women are afraid that men will kill them. Atwood depicts female characters suppressed by patriarchy ideology in her novels.

Atwood's work flourished in more than forty languages. The *Edible Woman* (1969) was Margaret Atwood's first novel and *Surfacing* was her second novel published in the year 1972. In her novel *The Edible Woman*, Atwood explores themes like gender stereotypes, loss of identity and alienation. The book talks about women being compelled to take a more feminine role and the life of domesticity controlled by men. In her famous book *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) she mentions about the oppression of women in a society which is dominated by patriarchal society. She presents deprivation of women's rights and how women struggle to attain freedom and individuality. Her other works include *Lady Oracle* (1976), *Life Before Man* (1979), *Bodily Harm* (1981), *Cat's Eye* (1988), *The Robber Bride* (1993), *Alias Grace* (1996),

The Blind Assassin (2000) and her most recent creation includes *The Heart Goes Last* written in 2015 and *Hag-Seed* in 2016.

In *Surfacing* the nameless narrator who is the leading protagonist is not named. She returns to her village Quebec in search of her missing father with her boyfriend Joe, her friend Anna and David who are a married couple. The narrator pays a visit to her father's friend named Paul to inquire about her father but he seemed to have no clue about him. A guide named Evans, escorts the narrator and her company to the island, where the narrator attempts to gain clues regarding her father's disappearance. She is of the opinion that her father is still alive but has become demented. The nameless narrator's search for her father was futile so she decides to return but her friend David makes a suggestion to stay on the island for a week. The narrator accepts though she fears that her demented father might appear.

David consistently reprimands Anna who confides to the narrator that David is a womanizer and how he constantly demands her to wear makeup. Joe unexpectedly proposes to the narrator but she refuses Joe's proposal telling him about her last husband and her aborted child. The narrator after going meticulously through her father's records sees several sites on the map being marked and she finds out that her father had been researching Indian wall paintings. She goes to visit a site with her friends and they see a decomposing blue heron hung on a tree.

David starts filming the dead heron for a movie he is making. The heron's death disturbs the narrator. On the campsite Anna reveals to the narrator that she has forgotten to wear her makeup and that David will punish her. They encounter the Americans, and the narrator notices an American flag on their boat. The narrator becomes frustrated and confused in her failure to find her father. The narrator notices David humiliating Anna, persuading her to remove her clothes for a film he is making, a film called *Random*

Samples. Anna finally agrees but feels humiliated. The narrator questions David why he is torturing Anna, and he says it is because of her infidelity. The narrator canoes to a site in her father's map and dives into the lake in search of the paintings. She sees a disturbing object which horrify her making her scream and swim for the surface. She was of the thought that what she saw was a dead child who she thinks is her aborted baby. Joe who had followed her onto the lake demands to know what she was doing. She narrates her story about leaving her husband and being forced to abort her baby. Joe tries to rape her, but he leaves her alone once she tells him that she will get pregnant.

Later, David tells the narrator about Joe and Anna having physical relationship and tries to seduce her. The narrator fights David's advances. They find a police boat coming to the island, and David tells the narrator that the police have found her father's body but the narrator refuses to believe David. To get pregnant she seduces Joe and gets the feeling of a new child replacing her aborted baby. Joe thinks that the narrator has forgiven him for cheating on her. The narrator destroys David's film and leaves her friends on the last day on the island. The narrator's friends search for her, and being unable to find her they eventually leave the island.

All alone on the island, the narrator becomes mad and she destroys everything inside the cabin. She becomes an animal eating plants and running around naked. She thinks about raising her baby outside and not teaching it language. She sees the visions of her parents. Finally, in her communion with nature she discovers her inner self and surfaces over all conventions imposed unjustly on her. She decides not to feel insignificant anymore. Paul comes at the island with Joe and the narrator realizes she loves Joe and decides to reunite with him.

The theoretical background of Feminism not only deals with women but it encompasses an entire history behind its development. The Feminism as a movement started within the time period of nineteenth and early twentieth century though it has its roots in the eighteenth century. It was named as the First Wave of Feminism. It addressed issues like suffrage and property rights. Mary Wollstonecraft is considered to be the grandmother of British Feminism. Her first feminist treatise, *A Vindication of the Right of Woman* (1792) was one of the earliest projection of the First Wave of Feminism which is still revered as a seminal text. She wrote how women are not inferior to men and how they should be treated equally. She highlighted how women appear inferior only because they lack education. Male writers like John Stuart Mill wrote *The Subjection of Women* (1869) and Fredrich Engels wrote about inequalities faced by women in the male dominated society. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) mentions the hurdle that female writers encounter as the men have the grip of power exerting their domination and depriving women the right to education.

Simone de Beauvoir started Feminism in *The Second Sex* (1949) and it gained its momentum in the 1960s. De Beauvoir with vigor projects the inhuman gender division which reduces women to the inferior level. She highlights how men have termed female sex to be the inferior sex, second class citizen and the second sex. Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* famously wrote, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (330). Beauvoir asserts how gender is constructed. She lucidly highlights how under the cultural compulsion one "becomes a woman". The Second Wave of Feminism (1960s -1980s) began in The United States and started spreading throughout the world. It delved into issues like domestic violence, sisterhood, solidarity, sexuality, the workplace and reproductive rights.

Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) revealed with vengeance the sufferings of women and psychological distress of housewives in America. In Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1969) she sought out women's right to their own body and the right to express their sexuality.

The Third Wave of Feminism (1990s- present) refers to the chain of feminist activities which marked its beginning in the early 1990s and which continue to the present day seeking true understanding of the concept feminism which strives for true liberation. It addresses issues like violence against women, trafficking, body surgery, self-mutilation and endless plight of women. With education and exposure women have emerged from the shadows of men through the popular movement known as Feminism. The movement strives to address the women's issue and to find solution to gender disparity. The feminist writers have sought out literature to raise awareness of the gender problem and to redeem women to their rightful position which was deprived ever since the dawn of civilization. The imprisonment of women and their unjust status are questioned and the long silence is broken by women writers in the mid-sixties.

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is a quintessential feminist literature. Elizabeth Bennett, one of the most loved female character follows her own path in spite of the rigid societal pressure to lead a married life which was expected for all women. She was known for her witty dialogue expressing her personal views. The characters in feminist literature are revealed with their fiery mind of their own who does not readily confine oneself to the traditional roles crafted by the society. Feminist literature portray their woman characters as a woman with their own choice, decision, personal values and beliefs which determine their identity.

The Feminist theory asserts that gender is culturally constructed. Judith Butler wrote her book *Gender Trouble* (1990) in which she mentioned that the making of a

man and woman is a never ending process that begins before birth. Feminist theory projects women's oppression, its causes and consequences and ways to overcome the oppressive domination exercised by men. It is said to be a theory that is an analytic approach to everyday experience. It is a pledge to strive and to herald positive change to eradicate oppressive means to address the situation of women. Feminist theory endeavors to attain the liberation of women from the adverse position imposed through social, political and economic dependence. Jan Flax mentions in *Thinking Fragments* that Feminist Theory is a call for a trans-valuation of values and rethinking of our ideas about what is just, humanly excellent, worthy of praise, moral, and so forth.

Feminism is a fight for justice against sexist oppression, exploitation, oppression and seeking gender equality. It seeks meaningful lives through individual liberation and rightful privileges. It shows its staunch opposition against gender roles, stereotypes and unjust discrimination inflicted upon women. Although there are diverse shades of Feminism, it is generally broadly developed as Radical Feminism, Liberal Feminism and Rational Feminism.

Elaine Showalter, an American literary critic, feminist, and a specialist in Victorian literature is best known for her work *Toward a Feminist Poetics*. She divided the history of women's writing into three phases. The first phase is The Feminine Phase (1840-1880) in which the women writers imitated the male writers in their artistic standards. The second phase of the feminist movement was The Feminist Phase (1880-1920) where the women writers rejected male dominated standards of the portrayal of femininity in literature and presented the side of wronged womanhood. The third phase of feminist movement The Female Phase rejects both imitation and protest turning to female experience and self-discovery.

Elaine Showalter coined the term “Gynocriticism” which aimed to reveal how male literary tradition had suppressed women’s image in literature. She sought out to project the female experience through female voice by replacing male’s literary writings. She worked to encourage the blossoming of new writers and tried to recover the forgotten text from the previous decades. The close examination of women’s text revealed the suppression of women, imprisonment of women, depiction of madness and the sensation of powerlessness.

Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* depicts madness of woman caught up in the frustration of repressed sexuality and anger for the societal imposition avenged towards women. Showalter also draws attention to sex differentiation which enforces the women writers to use male pseudonyms. Mary Anne Evans used the pen name George Eliot and the Bronte sisters wrote under the male pseudonyms Charlotte (Currer), Emily (Ellis) and Anne (Acton Bell).

The Feminist theory is an overriding element in both the novels *Woman at Point Zero* and *Surfacing*. The novels identify the causes of women’s domination. The novels depict oppression of women through the leading protagonist and their struggle in out shadowing the masculine domination. Nawal El Saadawi and Margaret Atwood present reality from women’s lens. They present women’s lives fractured and dictated by events outside of women’s control. They present their leading characters being aware of their women’s deplorable plight and trying to rise above their experiences into way of knowing about themselves as women and the world.

In applying the theory of feminist in analyzing the novel *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood, one can identify the First Phase of Feminism in the leading protagonist who is not named. The leading character not being named shows women being considered insignificant and subservient under patriarchal oppression. The element of isolation and

alienation is emphasized by avoiding the naming of the protagonist. The First Phase of Feminism is also evident in the novel *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi. In the beginning Firdaus, the protagonist was presented as a mild character. The narration of the washing of her father's leg by her mother and Firdaus being taught how to wash man's leg reveals the utmost display of superiority of male over women. Men exhibit sense of supremacy expecting obedience from women. Women were considered to be very insignificant drowning in servitude.

The Second Phase of Feminism is Feminist. The presence of feminist trait in the novel *Woman at Point Zero* is seen through the powerful character portrayal of Firdaus who goes through a chain of exploitative events and finally strikes against the powerful acts of male domination. One startling example of Firdaus's feminist characteristics was when she was taken to Cairo after her parents' death. She sees mirror for the first time and she mentions how looking at the mirror made her feel being born for the second time suggesting at this point in her story, she was totally shaped by society. And she disliked what she saw in the mirror. Nawal El Saadawi mentions Firdaus saying:

I stood in front of the mirror staring at my face. Who am I? Firdaus that is how they call me. The big round nose I got from my father, and the thin-lipped mouth from my mother. A sinking feeling went through my body. I neither liked the look of my nose, nor the shape of my mouth. I thought my father had died, yet here he was alive in the big, ugly, rounded nose. My mother, too, was dead, but continued to live in the form of this thin-lipped mouth. And here I was unchanged, the same Firdaus, but now clad in a dress, and with shoes on her feet. I was filled with a deep hatred for the mirror. From that moment I never looked into it again (*Woman at Point Zero* 26).

The shift towards a more assertive and rebellious Firdaus is presented seeking her liberation. Firdaus indicates that her fear of all men and of the vicious nature of her society, has vanished in the end part. She felt triumphant and took pride in herself for finally succeeding in scaring men by killing the pimp. The Second Phase of Feminism is shown in the novel *Surfacing* when the unnamed protagonist resorts to the world of wilderness and madness in her battle against male domination. She refuses to be victimized. She destroys David's film which contains naked pictures of Anna.

The Third Phase of Feminism is showcased in the novel *Woman at Point Zero* where Firdaus regains her inner voice by breaking her silence leading to her emancipation and self-discovery. She no longer has fears and she declares that she is free from the enslavement of hope and fear. The Third Phase of Feminism also stands out prominently in the novel *Surfacing* with the protagonist's self-discovery and understanding her place in the society. She discovers that total withdrawal from society will result in her death so she decides to join society without giving into the pressures that dominated her.

Literature Review:

Feminism is the advocacy of women's right and female emancipation from injustice and inequality. Feminist Theory is referred to a set of theories concerned with the status of women in society and the quest to bring positive change in the lives of women. Feminism, a theme in Atwood's novel, is explored through the perspective of the female narrator, highlighting the ways how women are victimized in their lives. A. Shanmugam through examining "Perspective of Feminism in *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood" presents the main objective of the unnamed narrator. The narrator mainly strives to find the values that are essential to her as a woman, as a Canadian, and as an

individual, to become her natural self. Women and nature being the victim of an aggressive patriarchal is being explored.

Assia Mohdeb and Imane Hadj Henni in their review "Women's Empowerment in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*: When Female Consciousness Reaches its Climax in Nature" draw the interconnectedness between women and nature's experience under men's oppression. They reveal the theme of women's empowerment through nature. They mention the protagonist awareness of her position as a socialized figure and her burning desire to connect with her natural self. The division between men and women, nature and culture is emphasized.

Ambika Bhalla in her paper "Ecofeminism in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*" presents an eco-feminist perspective. She mentions how the nameless protagonist sees the gap between her natural self and her artificial construct when she is in the presence of nature. She becomes aware of victimization of women, the positioning of men at the higher position and women and nature at the lower position. The social mentality that leads to the domination and suppression of woman is connected to the social mentality which leads to the abuse of natural environment. She expounds on the domination of women over the years to be directly connected to the environmental rape of the planet. She mentions how the female body is seen as a resource to be colonized and commercialized like nature.

G.Sankar and R.Soundararajan in "Female Quest for Self-Identity and Women Subjections in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* " mainly highlights how the women are unable to find their female identity in a patriarchal society. They assert that for women to develop stable personal identity one needs to face hurdles which are complex and problematic issues constructed by society. The nameless protagonist is oppressed and

considered to be the other. The protagonist struggles to find her place in her family as well as in the society elucidating the quest of grappling with notions of self-identity.

Luciana Labatti Teixeira Serpa in "An Inner Trip: Women and Nature in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*" analyses the relationship between woman and nature which leads to self-discovery. Landscape is used as a source to attain self-knowledge as the unnamed protagonist goes back in time and place to discover her inner self. In her endeavor to find her inner self she embraces nature, the landscape and the animals. In the process she delves deep into her past which is buried deep inside her repressed memories.

Gloria Ada Fwangyil in "Cradle to Grave: An Analysis of Female Oppression in Nawal El Saadawi" observes how women are oppressed and subjugated right from infancy, childhood and adulthood. Gloria examines how Firdaus was discriminated by male oppression which is strongly supported by religious authority. She asserts the need of social and political transformation to give right and equality to women in the society.

Hannah Woode Amissah-Arthur in examining "Of Sex and Power: Using Phallic Masculinities in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* and Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*" points out how the men sexually abuse women using their phallic masculinity. In Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, Mara's husband Akobi displays his sexual prowess and sexually abuses her at his whim.

In Helen Chukwuma's paper on "Women's Quest for Rights: African Feminist Theory in Fiction" she mentions how African literature has been enhanced by the expression of women writers voicing their concerns of human rights. She reproduced some of the assertions of Chinweizu from his book titled *Anatomy of Female Power* which highlights how women writers liberate their female characters by making them burst the system to be free. Helen points out how Nawal elevated the bar of women's

solutions higher which is crystallized in her protagonist victory by killing her male oppressor in *Woman at Point Zero*.

Omar Mohammed Aldulaimi in examining “Manifestations of Hysteria in Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero*” highlights the repressed trauma which leads to hysteric symptoms. Firdaus life being marred by violence and cruelty undergoing clitoridectomy at a very early age was known to inflict physical trauma and induce hysteric symptoms. Omar highlights how Nawal presents through her own personal experiences and research that circumcision is the source of sexual and psychological shock in the life of the girl and the cultural practice of female genital mutilation as well as the repression of women’s desire lead to hysteria.

Oyeh O. Otu in "Prostitution: The Economics of Sex and Power Dynamics in El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero*" points out although prostitution is taken to be a revolt against men in seeking freedom, it is still a huge industry controlled by men. Prostitution is said to be modern day slavery. Otu asserts how Firdaus is deluded with frustration in seeing herself as enjoying some freedom in comparison to other women in thinking prostitution as being free, and independent. Otu presents how men control the sex industry making women sexual objects for economic gain.

Jaspal Singh in his study “The Idea of False Sisterhood: The Post-Feminist Echoes in Rupa Bajwa’s *The Sari Shop*” explores the failure of sisterhood and womanhood. The idea of false sisterhood is portrayed in Rupa Bajwa’s novel *The Sari Shop*. Rupa Bajwa’s novel *The Sari Shop* reveals patriarchy is not only the tool of oppression which suppresses women. She presents the failure of false sisterhood where women of upper-class disregards the subaltern woman as “resident aliens”. She projects how women become oppressors for the women of their own sex. Her novel also highlights how elite women are only domesticated maids in the male dominated world.

Nazneen Khan in “Articulating Women’s Experience in Kuenzang Choden’s novel *The Circle of Karma*” mentions that the novel projects the patriarchal society that existed in 20th century Bhutan where male held the complete reign of power over women and children. Kuenzang Choden presents the ordeal of voiceless women. Through her protagonist Tshomo, Kuenzang Choden presents woman character striving to break through roles imposed on her.

If viewed from the surface of the story line Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, it appears to be a tragedy but when delved deep into, it emerges to be a colonial text which also centers on the balance between masculine and feminine forces. Okonkwo’s life was consumed by his obsession to be masculine and his fear of being seen as effeminate. But in the end, Okonkwo becomes tragically reduced to a feminine status by British colonizers who strips off his masculinity leading to him committing suicide as he could not bear to see his clan breaking up and falling apart. He was a victim of his own reverence for masculinity and manhood. The novel emphasizes the idea of balance between masculine and feminine attributes.

Objectives of the research:

The novels *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi and *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood have been the source of research for many research scholars. *Woman at Point Zero* has been researched using various approaches like women’s quest for rights, using phallic masculinity, cradle to the grave, and prostitution. On the other hand *Surfacing* has been explored through Ecofeminism, women's empowerment, and as women and nature. A lot has been discussed however, what has been lacking in

criticism or the lack of research gap are how men bring the downfall of women and how women also contribute to their own down spiral.

The major objectives of the research are as follows:

1. This study aims to reveal how there is no victory in glorifying masculinity while demeaning femininity as it results in endless cycle of victims and moral deprivation in the novel *Woman at Point Zero* and *Surfacing*.
2. It attempts to examine how the elements of masculinity versus femininity leads to deprivation of human right and endless sufferings of women.
3. This research attempts to critically examine how it is not only men who bring the downfall of women but how women also contribute in bringing their own downfall by delving deep into the inner most hidden neglected truth which remains unexplored and neglected.
4. This paper further intends to present how women assert their feminist awakening in combating male domination in both the novels in their pursuit of self-discovery and liberation.

Research Methodology:

“Exploring Masculinity versus Femininity in *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi and *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood” will be analyzed critically following the paradigm of qualitative research. The theory applied will be feminist theory to analyze the novels. This research strives to gain insight of the topic by focusing on sources like Jstor, academia, articles, journals, essays, library research related to the study. I will visit central library of the University to meticulously look for references to have better perspective. The typing and formatting will be done as per the M.L.A 7th Edition.

Scope of the Research:

The scope of the research is to find out why women are still under male domination even in this twenty-first century. This dissertation seeks to elucidate and educate people about the distortion and manipulation of the term masculinity and femininity which breed evil impulse in human behavior creating injustice, suffering, and detrimental effect to mankind. It strives to present society's flaw where they indoctrinate gendered identity in the young child which leads to the burgeoning of negative masculine trait in young boys and stifling self-alienation in young girls. It aims to embolden women to strive against unjust evil forces of society which is pervasive across the universe which confiscate their right through joint collaboration to claim their shared dreams of utopian liberation.

The study further seeks to demand enlightenment of men from their oppressive and self-assured mentality giving in to self-reformation and self-illumination. The study also aims to clarify that it is not only men who bring down spiral of women with their fanatic obsession with masculine attributes but women also equally contribute to their own downfall. The dissertation also intends to entreat equal opportunity to education for women and in all sphere of life.

This study finally implores stakeholders to not only keep asserting the essence of feminism but to help bring real dynamic change in human behavior and action helping every individual transcend their boundaries to the path of refinement , empowerment and justice.

Chapter One

Masculinity versus Femininity in *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal

The elements of struggle between masculinity and femininity are dominant in *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi. The novel presents a patriarchal society. The title of the novel *Woman at Point Zero* speaks about the abysmal cry of the female who is made to appear trivial and insignificant. Nawal El Saadawi shows how men exert their power and control over women asserting their masculinity. The title *Woman at Point Zero* speaks volume about the state of woman. The negative connotation of such phrase reveals the situation in which women find herself. The word “Point Zero” can be interpreted in a myriads of ways. The term zero is the starting point of the series of cardinal numbers. It represents the digit “0” which means “nothing at all” according to the English dictionary. The term zero as a person or thing would mean no significance or a state of nonexistence. The protagonist Firdaus is a voiceless soul caught in a whirlpool of violence and abuse. Her life is darkened from her infancy to the life of adulthood as she is the victim of male’s atrocity. Her dejected life whirls her around and abandons her at the face value of point zero pronouncing her state of insignificance in the midst of a male dominated world.

Men placing themselves at the pedestal and asserting their sense of supremacy expecting obedience from women is portrayed vividly in the novel. The narration of the washing of the father's leg by her lifeless mother and the narrator being taught by her father to wash his leg reveals the utmost display of superiority of male over women. Firdaus mentioned how she saw herself taking over what her mother used to do. The trend of slavish role is indoctrinated and made to be continued. Women’s sole purpose is considered to aid men lead better life is portrayed profusely in the novel. Unhealthy social environment which streamline gender identity imposed on women by society is

strongly reflected. Saadawi presents the hierarchy of supremacy maintained by men and enforced on women to embrace it willfully as the most natural thing in the world. Saadawi presents Firdaus's father emulating the typical characteristic of a masculine man to the extent that she fails to recognize him as her father. Firdaus mentions how her father would head for the mosque to attend the weekly prayers. She mentions how she could hear the men invoking Allah's name seeking his divine blessing repeating the holy words. She observes them constantly watching what went on around them with suspicious eyes ready to attack, full of aggression. Firdaus goes on to mention that she was not able to differentiate which one of them was her father. Saadawi highlights how religious men do not feel wronged in oppressing women as they consider it to be normal and right through the distortion of religion.

Firdaus's mother is intimidated by her father, and her feelings are suppressed indicating the submissive side of femininity. Silence was considered to be women's virtue and submissiveness to be their embellishment. Her father frequently beats her mother using his masculine tool to silence her and to make her voiceless. The powerful importance of patriarchal element enjoyed by men can be found in the father who never went to bed without supper even when there would be no food and all would go to bed with empty stomach. Men privileging themselves can be seen through Firdaus's father who was so inhuman. He eats alone leaving Firdaus watching him as he devoured the food. She mentions that she was so hungry that she could not cry. Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* comments:

Why did men drink wine and woman water? Why was one sex so prosperous and the other so poor? ... But one needed answers, not questions; and an answer was only to be had by consulting the learned and the unprejudiced (22).

The destructive effect of embracing masculinity can be seen in the inhuman characteristic of the father who had lost sight of being caring and compassionate in his veneration for his absolute manhood. He was completely devoid of human compassion. Education was considered to be the field for men and no place for girls. The gendered constructed belief is shown which makes education only men's arena; considered to be strongly prohibited to women's domain. It was a tool used by men to suppress women and to keep them under their control. Saadawi stresses on the importance of education and knowledge to elevate women's place in the society. She sheds light on how women's education and economic soundness are means of freedom from the masculine yoke. The preference of male child over female child is highlighted. Firdaus says when the female child died, her father would be very indifferent where he would eat and go to sleep but when the male child dies, he would vent out his anger by beating her mother. The social discrimination towards female sex is highlighted and female as being viewed as insignificant and unimportant is revealed. The social discrimination towards women which commences right from infancy is elucidated.

In *Woman at Point Zero*, Firdaus's young playmate named Mohammadain acquaints her with the knowledge of sexuality at a premature age by lifting up her clothes around her waist showing signs of burgeoning masculinity embedded in a young boy through the societal influence. His act is considered to be an imitation of what he sees through his lens and the view of women as the sexual object. Saadawi draws to attention the signs of masculinity conditioned in a young boy by the society. Firdaus mentions how her father knew how to get dowry in exchange of his virgin daughter. Saadawi presents how Firdaus is left at the mercy of her uncle who exercise his patriarchal power by marrying her to old Sheik Mahmoud for dowry without getting her consent to clear his debt. Marriage was considered to be a kind of business in

exchange of a virgin girl for dowry. The repercussions of such marriage which leads to the consideration of women as personal property purchased through a trade devaluing her and giving men the authorization to do what they please according to their whim is emphasized. Firdaus' uncle considers women as a product that can be traded off any time with a deal.

The life of servitude as a wife is made evident with Firdaus' duties which encompasses of endless household chores and attaining to Sheikh Mahmoud's sexual needs. Sheikh Mahmoud had deformity and was described in a revolting manner with pus oozing from his chin and his speech blemished with meanness who sees Firdaus as an object and a slave. Her life consisted of long monotonous hours of washing, cooking and cleaning the large house draining the life out of her leaving her with fatigue. The moment she sits to rest then Sheikh Mahmoud would appear by her side groping like a starving man. Saadawi asserts marriage to be a kind of captivity, a tool where men expect absolute respect and obedience paralyzing women to being voiceless sex slaves in the form of wife deprived of emotion and desire. Firdaus's husband Sheikh Mahmoud attacks her using sarcastic mocking masculine tone when she comes back to him after running away. He verbally assaults her asking why she has come back to him. Saadawi in *Woman at Point Zero* presents Sheikh Mahmoud's cruel caustic remarks:

Why did you come back from your uncle's house? Couldn't he bear to feed you for a few days? Now you will realize I am the only person who can put up with you, and who is prepared to feed you (59).

He berates her questioning whether her uncle is unable to feed her even for a few days. He skins her with humiliating tone and words accusing her for maintaining her distance from him. He makes her feel extremely pathetic and low robbing her away of her sense of worth. Firdaus and her mother are ill-treated by men as they were

economically depended on men which makes them easy target for exploitation and abuse. Firdaus was at the mercy of her stingy father, uncle, and her husband because they had money and she did not. All of them were careful not to give her any money of her own, so she remains imprisoned in their control unable to escape their grasp. The implication of the world of master and slave, implication of woman as a slave is maintained through deprivation of women from economic equality.

The abusive trait of masculinity is asserted when Bayoumi physically assaults Firdaus when she mentions of looking for a job. Saadawi in *Woman at Point Zero* presents how Firdaus desire of having a job is taken to be a tremendous violation and ousting of Bayoumi's manhood who becomes extremely violent who starts assaulting her saying:

How dare you raise your voice when you are speaking to me, you streetwalker, you low woman? His hand was big strong and strong and it was the heaviest slap I had ever received. My head swayed from first to one side, then to the other (66).

The men holding on to economic power is made evident in the novel. Bayoumi becomes violent accusing her of raising her voice. He locks her in the flat and in the middle of the night rips the cover, slaps her and sexually assaults her. He even sends his friend to abuse her treating her like a piece of dirt. He was completely devoid of human decency and treated her with utter disrespect.

Virginia Woolf known for her book *A Room of One's Own* and her influential essay *Professions for Women* mentioned that the problems women face can be removed only when woman attain social and economic equality with men. She was passionate about having a balance between man's self-realization and female's annihilation of self. She aspired to attain a femininity of the unconscious and rejected the separate feminist

consciousness so that there would be no conflict. Saadawi exposes how veneration for socially created masculinity leads to women annihilating themselves and losing their sense of worth. She poignantly reveals Firdaus's self-annihilation as she was always found placing the men in the foremost importance in the earlier part of the novel. She was living in the dark shadow of the men in her life and was giving preference to men ignoring her wants as she was conditioned to be unimportant. The pitiful life of Firdaus who is taught to show reverence for men abandoning her wants are depicted when she comments:

When I cooked fish, I used to give it all to him, and just take the head or the tail for myself. Or if it was rabbit I cooked, I gave him the whole rabbit and nibbled at the head. I always left the table without satisfying my hunger (64).

Men are found making all the main choices. The freedom of making choice was completely unknown to women. When Bayoumi ask Firdaus's preference for oranges or tangerines, it completely shocks her as choice had never been allowed to her. She becomes dumbstruck and fails to give her response. It was something which no one had ever bothered to ask her. In fact it had never occurred in her thought whether she preferred oranges to tangerines, or tangerines to oranges depicts the shallowness and hollowness of the rigidity of male domination.

The men bringing the downfall of woman can be seen through their viewing of woman as an object to be abused for sexual pleasure which is evident through the exploitation of Firdaus by her uncle, her husband and other men whom she encountered. The woman are expected to remain in the state of servitude. Firdaus love for books makes her understand the domination of men throughout history. Through her reading she discovers that all rulers were men who shared the commonality of distorted

personality with incessant hunger for money, sex, and boundless power. She finds they were corrupted men with loud voice having a potential of deceiving people with sweet flavored words in disguise of perilous poisoned arrows resulting to history repeating itself with foolish obstinacy. Saadawi also shows how the societies exploit religious teaching to suppress women and to restrict women. Firdaus's uncle finds it unimaginable to send her to the university. Saadawi presents the orthodox distorted religious mind set of Firdaus's uncle who states:

To the university? To a place where she will be sitting side by side with men? A respected Sheikh and man of religious like myself sending his niece off to mix in the company of men?(47)

Saadawi questions the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic teaching and presents how women's plight is a result emerging as a result of social, political, religious and class stratification. Firdaus's uncle mentions how it is totally unthinkable to send her to university as she will be sitting side by side with men. He considers himself to be a respected Sheikh man who is incapable of allowing his niece to mix in the company of men. Firdaus mentions that her profession which is prostitution has been invented by men who were in control of the world. The exploitation of woman by man through phallic masculinity is highlighted in the novel through Sharifa protesting:

No, Fawzy, no! His voice sounded like an angry hiss. No. No what, you slut? The bed creaked under them...Sharifa's voice like a series of gasps followed by the same protesting tone (80-81).

Marzouk the dangerous pimp declares like a successful businessman saying, "I am in business. My capital is women's bodies and I don't mix work and love together" (126). Firdaus asserts how men force women to become prostitute and then punish them for stumbling low through their violent aggression. She reveals the double standard and

hypocrisy of men who expect women to be virtuous but continues to exploit them reducing them to the lowest state. Saadawi condemns the men inventing the profession of prostitution, making money as pimp out of women; objectifying women as commodities to be purchased at their whim, and at the same time their hypocrisy of condemning the profession and expecting high moral from women who engage in the same act as themselves.

Firdaus's encounter with Di'aa, a journalist who remarks that she is 'not respectable' (95) shows the hypocrisy of men who expects high standards from women but who have none to offer. In her encounter with an Arab prince she declares "I am not a prostitute. But right from my early days my father, my uncle, my husband, all of them, taught me to grow up as a prostitute" (135). Saadawi also presents how men cannot accept rejection from women showing their utmost superiority complex who cannot stand being refused which is taken to be an insult to their manhood. Firdaus's rejection of a very important personality from a foreign state makes him more ardent in pursuing her which highlights men's sense of self-regard for themselves over women. Firdaus even get sent to jail for rejecting one of those important men which portrays political factor which suppresses women keeping men being dominant over women. Saadawi also exposes the men's exploitation of women prostitute as a part of diplomatic tools and men's control over politics to suppress women.

Saadawi traces the chivalrous roles played by men where Firdaus mentions she abhorred the men who tried to give her advice or those who told her that they wanted to rescue her from the life she was leading. She exhorts how they felt noble and elevated reminding her of the fact of being low. The entrapment tools devised by men over women that is the belief that women ought to be protected by men are disclosed. Men's extreme abuse and exploitation of women is presented very prominently in the

dangerous pimp Marzouk who exercises his power over Firdaus insisting on sharing in her earning and in fact confiscating the larger part for himself. He declares himself to be the master over Firdaus. She was unable to dodge his menacing control over her as her pimp as he had better connection with police than her. Saadawi also presents how law punishes women but turn a blind eye to men.

The highest sense of the evilness embedded in masculinity spirit is found in dangerous pimp Marzouk who forcefully imposes his protection over Firdaus declaring there isn't a woman on earth who can protect herself and that every prostitute needs a pimp to protect her. He declares "For me the word impossible does not exist" (127). The presence of flawed societal belief is deeply instilled in him making him a detestable character blinded from logical thoughts seeking his own doom.

De Beauvoir asserts that men basically dominate and suppress women by alienating them, as the other defined totally in opposition to men. According to men, he is esteemed to be very important, and superior. He is designed to rule the world and pursue his will. On the other hand woman is supposed to follow and be shrinking violet. He is the savior, imminent master, and illuminator, while on the other hand she is vulnerable, dumb awaiting for him to rescue her. De Beauvoir voices out how in describing woman as 'Other', man is trying to degrade the woman making her powerless and helpless.

Self-empowerment and self-liberation are to be achieved only when one confront with the ugly truth no matter how gross and humiliating it may be. Women also play their part in their downfallen tragedy. Women causing the downfall of women are reflected through Firdaus's mother conducting clitoridectomy on her which leads to her crying all night. Firdaus reminisced how a woman carrying a small razor blade was brought in by her mother who cut off a piece of flesh from between her thighs. Saadawi

condemns the act meted out by women who have actually gone through the same painful primitive torture which is promoted by traditional customs. Firdaus in her innocence refers to the female clitoris as “a piece of flesh” (16) which get cut off reveals the extreme exploitation and how she has no authority of her own body and life. Her sense of sensuality is being taken away from her and she is being numbed. She recounts how she had the pleasure sensation with Mohammadain, her playmate before the clitoridectomy. In the later phase of her life she tries to reach that sensation but it was in vain.

The ignorance of Firdaus about her own body and her childish reference of the female clitoris as “a piece of flesh” (16) crystallizes how a child is being robbed off the right to choose and how she is a voiceless soul. It also highlight the brutal aggression carried out against women’s bodies and the sufferings of women. The brutal ritual is associated with society’s fixation with virginity. Firdaus’ uncle insinuates in her that dancing was a sin and kissing a man, too was a sin which reveals how women are forbidden to experience sexual pleasure. Saadawi is sensitizing the society to its flaws and shortcoming to create awareness. Firdaus condemns her mother and her circumcision which was very torturous hysteric experience making her the victim of deep anguish over physical loss of part of her body.

In *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in Arab World* Saadawi mentions her ordeal of circumcision. She mentions weeping and crying out for her mother and her shocking discovery that her mother was standing by her side in the midst of strangers, conversing with them as if they had not slaughtered her daughter just a few minutes ago. Saadawi speaks against circumcision as a victim and also as a physician how it is destructive which women obediently practice in their entire lives. The marked injustice of patriarchal society conditioning women to have lower expectation devoid of dreams

and adventure is exposed through Firdaus's gendered experience which is instilled in her by her mother who show her routine work which consisted of fetching water in a heavy earthenware jar and making rows of dung cakes. She states:

My mother no longer sent me to the fields. Before the sun had started to appear in the sky, she would nudge me in the shoulder with her fist so that I would awaken, pick up the earthen jar and go off to fill it with water. Once back, I would sweep under the animals and then make rows of dung cakes which I had left in the sun (17).

Saadawi emphasizes the destructive impact of the assertion of gender constructed identity which has made women spiritless and lifeless and on the other hand made men devoid of moral values and basic human understanding. Her mother and her aunt's submissive and docile nature towards her father and her uncle embed in her the wrong message which makes her susceptible to abuse without questioning. Their timidity towards men make Firdaus to think that men can do anything that they please. When her uncle touches her, although she is uneasy, she does not show her disgust because it doesn't occur to her to do. Saadawi also delves into the most destructive attributes of woman who to some extent pay blind loyalty to the privileges of men and in their ignorance support the men's superiority remaining in perpetual servitude. Firdaus mentions:

No light seemed ever to touch the eyes of this women, ever when the day was radiant and the sun at its very brightest. One day I took her head between my hands and turned it so that the sun fell directly on her face, but her eyes remained dull, impervious to its lights, like two extinguished lamps (23).

Firdaus poignant description of her mother elucidates the most destructive impact of woman's self-annihilation. Saadawi highlights how women have been ruined under the oppressive dominating cruelty of men. She asserts how men place themselves over women and reiterate their importance generation after generation robbing women of their sense of self-worth and the essence of their existence imprisoning women in hollowness and emptiness. Her aunts dislike of her leads to her being at the mercy of her savage husband furling her towards chain of misfortune and finally on to the streets.

Her uncle's wife expresses strong hatred for Firdaus instead of uplifting her as a woman. She was not in the least supportive and never sympathized with Firdaus. She was not at all sensitive to the suffering of Firdaus and she fails miserably to the woman of her own sex. She contributes to the down spiral of Firdaus's tragic life. She was consistently instigating her husband to get rid of Firdaus complaining about the difficulties faced and remarking that Firdaus eats too much. She expresses strong disapproval and desperate desire to get rid of Firdaus. Her hatred culminates to Firdaus marrying Sheik Mahmoud who was more than sixty years old when she had not yet turned nineteen.

Saadawi also presents how the elite class woman ill-treat woman from lower class. Firdaus recounts how her uncle brought home a small servant girl who slept on the floor in her room. She recounts how one cold night she invited the servant girl to sleep with her on the bed. Her uncle's wife sees them and she beats the servant girl as well as Firdaus. This shows how it is not only men who project women to be of inferior suppressing them but also how women of the same sex look down at woman because of their low status. Low class women are ill-treated by high class women just as all women are ill-treated by men.

Actually Firdaus was a bright student who dreamt of becoming a doctor, an engineer and a lawyer but unfortunately she becomes none because right after her secondary certificate her uncle's wife persuades her uncle in arranging her marriage to Sheik Mahmoud for an enormous dowry. Sheik Mahmoud proves to be an abusive husband who beats her whether he had a reason for it or not. The society's indifference to woman's suffering is made evident when Firdaus runs away from her husband after violent beating on the street with swollen eyes, a bruised face but no one pays attention to her. It was as if she was invisible to them. Saadawi's feminist empathy is obvious through her language and she portrays her fervent passion for advocating social justice for women's right. Firdaus upon reaching her uncle's house find herself at loss of words when her aunt says;

It was precisely men well versed in their religion who beat their wives. The precepts of religion permitted such punishment. A virtuous woman was not supposed to complain about her husband. Her duty was perfectly obedience (59).

Her uncle who is a religious man tells Firdaus that all husbands beat their wives. Her aunt normalizes the beating as something natural and instead backfires Firdaus preaching her about obedience and being a virtuous woman who remains tolerant by not complaining. Firdaus was being indoctrinated to be submissive and voiceless giving privilege to men. The gendered identity is being deeply and thoroughly entrenched in society's culture. It is embedded in people's action and belief that beating wife is completely natural. Saadawi highlights how Firdaus is stifled by the unjust tradition and expectation having to abide by the rules imposed on her by her family, society, and religion.

The wealthy-looking woman named Sharifa Salah el Dine instead of helping Firdaus takes advantage of her vulnerability when she finds Firdaus on the bank of the Nile. Although Sharifa Salah el Dine seems to reveal how life had hardened her and admits that she is terribly hard, she makes no attempt to uplift Firdaus deplorable condition. After finding Firdaus at her most miserable state instead of helping her, Sharifa uses Firdaus to work for her by training her to be a high class prostitute exploiting her like all the other men she had met. She in the pretense of being motherly and sisterly crucifies Firdaus into never leaving the room day and night, only to be laying on the bed visited every hour by a man making money out of her.

Firdaus in her struggle to escape the clutches of Sharifa Salah el Dine and Fawzy who was planning to take her under his control encounters a police man. Although the police man is supposed to provide safety, he only proves to be the contrary. He uses his position to threaten her with arrest and walks her through the dark alley and sexually abuses her. All men being similar in their thought in viewing women as sexual object is projected. Firdaus's encounter with Di'aa, a journalist sends her deep into self-reflection. He remarks 'You are not respectable' (95) and those words penetrates into her bone of her head like a hammer. She goes through psychological trauma with the words of her not being a respectful person haunting her.

She becomes determined to become a respectful woman so she finds herself a job in a company. While working in the company Firdaus encounter Ibrahim, a fellow worker who was the head of a revolutionary committee within the company with whom she falls in love only to realize that he had been deceiving her proving men to be as exploitative as any other. She becomes very hurt, betrayed and expresses her deep anguish declaring how hurt she was as she expected at least something from love.

Firdaus resorts to becoming prostitute from the hatred born against men. She states the time had finally arrived for her to “shed the last grain of virtue” (117) where she can no longer entertain herself with illusion. She believes that it is better to be “a successful prostitute rather than a misled saint (117) and all women are the prey of men’s crafty ambition. She declares that prostitution is invented by men and they compel women to trade their bodies at price, and the lowest is that of an enslaved wife. She sees all women as prostitute and remarks she being intelligent seeks to be a free prostitute.

Firdaus choice of embracing prostitution was a revolt against men as she asserts she had chosen this life of her own free will and freedom. She chooses prostitution as her rebellious act against authority exerted on women. It also reveals Firdaus rejection of patriarchal imposition and taking power into her control. It also shows her revolt against men expecting high moral standards from women. It is also her way of turning men into sexual object, and refusing traditional standard.

Although Saadawi uses prostitution as Firdaus’s weapon to rebel against men, she is very lucid in portraying prostitution as a violence inflicted by men against women. Prostitution is viewed to be a severe exploitation which propel rape, beating, and abuse. Pimp exercising their authority over their sex worker is made obvious with the ruthless pimp Marzouk. The harsh painful reality of prostitute drowning themselves in deep psychological shame is showcased. Saadawi projects female powerlessness, lack of education and opportunities to be the root causes of female prostitution which is a form of slavery in the modern world. She also shows the darkest tragedy of prostitution which robs woman off their sense of dignity. She highlights woman being economically dependent on man and being thrown at the mercy of man who pushes woman to dire situation. She emphasizes and seeks education emphatically for

women's empowerment and liberation from domination. She values education as a freeing tool for women in freeing themselves from their own ignorance.

The assertion of feminist trait in *Woman at Point Zero* is made palpable in the preface of the novel. Nawal mentions Firdaus with her utmost reverence and describes her as someone who is unique and above other women. She was presented to be absolutely dauntless. She was a woman who dared to challenge to overcome enslavement that deprive human being of their access to love and to real liberty. Through the title *Woman at Point Zero* Saadawi presents the presence of feminist element. In the novel she draws how although zero denotes nothing at all; this point zero also denotes the beginning or a starting point of an origin. Saadawi in her masterful touches reveals how Firdaus fights against the waves of her struggle against nonentity to finding her inner source-her inner identity.

Saadawi highlights turbulent journey of Firdaus of being inconsequential being to a person who is capable of claiming her identity and finding her liberation. Although her sense of liberation comes to the cost of her murdering the pimp culminating to her death sentence, her genuine sensation of liberation is truly found in telling the truth, even at the cost of her life. The protagonist's name Firdaus means "Paradise" which is the highest level. Her name "Firdaus" signifies her ways of liberating herself through the revelation of her truth which helps her to attain her level of paradise. Firdaus shows her strong criticism of female oppression in her encounter with Saadawi as she declares how all her entire life she was in pursuit for something that would give her the feeling of pride and make her feel superior to everyone else, including every powerful personalities. Firdaus suffers from the sexual violation from every men she encountered coming from different social positions, occupations, and personalities. Firdaus's absolute intolerance for female oppression, sexual violation and her utmost rejection of

male supremacy is made transparent with her powerful statement which is haunting and brutal. She assertively mentions: “However, every single man I did get to know filled me with but one desire: to lift my hand and bring it smashing down on his face” (13-14).

Firdaus fleeing from a violent husband and marriage indicates her attempt in finding freedom away from enslavement of male domination and finding her own identity. It indicates that she is no longer willing to be abused by her husband. The more she was oppressed and subjugated, the more she was driven in seeking freedom. Saadawi’s strong feminist sympathetic tone is very obvious when she mentions Firdaus being compelled into sleeping with a man in her utter dejected situation and comes in contact with a ten pound note. The note brings out overwhelming emotion of how money was always made an alien object which was out of her boundaries. She reminisced begging her father for a piaster and her mother being beaten by her father for losing a piaster. The ten pound note induces in her a sense of unknown pleasure and power. A revelation seems to be invoked in her in terms of being financially independent. The ten pound note ingrains in her the joy of being free from having obligation in terms of economic liberation. Firdaus jubilantly remarks how it was like a veil being uplifted from her eyes and seeing things for the first time. A strong fierce realization endows in her as she reflects how money has always been made forbidden to her by Sharifa, her husband Sheikh Mahmoud, her uncle and her aunt. She gets the sensation of empowerment and freedom having money of her own. She questions herself:

Was it possible that a mere piece of paper could make such a change?
Why had I not realized this before? Was I really unaware of this
throughout the years? (89).

Through Firdaus unawareness and her ignorance of the powerful role exerted with money, Saadawi depicts how women are kept in utter ignorance and darkness by men. She reveals it as men's strategy of dominating women and making them feel obligated to them by crippling women economically and keeping them handicapped. Saadawi emphasizes the importance of knowledge and education for women. She asserts the economic empowerment which frees women from men's oppressive clutches. Firdaus takes to prostitution as she finds it less oppressing in comparison to wife whom she think is an enslaved prostitute. Her life as a prostitute is largely driven by her desire to seek independence where she owns her own body. She also considers prostitution less confining than the life of a female employee who becomes a prostitute as she is terrified of losing her job.

Firdaus's realization that she is no longer free as a prostitute comes with Marzouk, the dangerous pimp who forcefully assert his control over her. Firdaus's understanding that men control the sex industry is highlighted with her having to bribe the police in times of trouble and her encounter with the pimp Marzouk who tries to control her and take the larger share of her money. She finds out that Marzouk has strong connection with police and realizes how he can easily play to his advantage making her see the idea of prostitution as being free as nothing but self-delusion. She declares she doesn't want to be anybody's slave but the master of her own. Her awakening to the fact that men control the sex industry leads to her making the decision to quit prostitution and to seek employment with her secondary certificate. Marzouk, the dangerous pimp as usual with his infamous trait forbids her saying she has no right in choosing the type of work to do. He tries to subjugate her by beating her which leads to him being stabbed by her.

Firdaus stabs the dangerous pimp Marzouk to indicate that her fear of all men and of the vicious nature of her society, has vanished. Her murder of him is a rejection of subjugation and exploitation showcased through self-defense. She felt triumphant and does not repent her action of killing him but instead she draws pride in herself as she had finally succeeded in scaring men. Saadawi also throws into light how men push women to extreme level leaving them with no choice but to strike back in a violent way. Firdaus also brings to notice how men bring out the worst in women and awakens the aggressive strength which has remained buried and dead awaiting to find its outlet. Saadawi with her great insight draws attention to how men's aggression towards women breathe life to women's vehement anger and vengeance which lies in their subconscious level. Murdering Marzouk liberates Firdaus and restores her voice by breaking her silence leading to her emancipation.

The female protagonist Firdaus rebels and refuses to submit to the set norms imposed on her. Firdaus tearing up bank notes given by the Arab prince and slapping him displays her utter rejection of male oppression. Firdaus being fearless in the prison is also suggested to be her overcoming oppression wherever she is. Firdaus feels triumphant and mentions that she has liberated herself as she no longer fear life and death which enslave her. She assertively with true feminist voice mentions she wants nothing and fears nothing making her free.

Firdaus's time spent in imprisonment gives way to deep introspection and further leads to experience of self-discovery and the essence of self-knowledge and self-realization attained through introspection. Firdaus delves into her past events and experiences leading to better understanding of her present circumstances as Saadawi's imprisonment in 1981 which was meant to silence her by president Anwar Sadat not only enabled her to write about her experience as a writer in the prison but also engaged

her as a witness to reveal the experiences of the prisoners who were compelled murderers and prostitutes. Saadawi's story of imprisonment is deemed to be an awakening contribution as it gives way for one to experience profound introspective journey during a period of imposed imprisonment.

Saadawi in *Woman at Point Zero* delves into the themes of the subjugation of women in all spheres of life by elucidating the oppression of women through religion, culture, politics and sexual exploitation. Saadawi presents how female oppression and male domination pose as a problem that is the living reality in the present day society despite the rapid civilization. She presents the detrimental effect of female oppression which needs to be nipped off and eradicated completely from the face of the earth. She reveals the tragedy of men holding onto their masculine trait inflicting suffering.

The man becoming the victim of holding extreme attachment to their masculine trait can be seen in the tragic death of the hero Okonkwo in the novel *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe. Saadawi emphasizes the importance of dismantling the continuation of patriarchal oppression and harmful cultural belief, tradition and religions of the societies through the empowerment of women. She highly desires the empowerment of women through education. She exhorts women's empowerment through women's solidarity to transcend to the blissful world of equality and true freedom. Saadawi proves to be highly inspirational as a woman writer and a true eye opener with her powerful book *Woman at Point Zero*.

Chapter Two

Masculinity versus Femininity in *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood

The elements of struggle between masculinity and femininity are also present in *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood. The presence of masculinity in *Surfacing* is presented through the characters like Joe and David. The assertions of male dominance are revealed through their conducts. Self-realization and acknowledgement of truth leads to self-empowerment. The women contributing to their own destruction is seen through Anna and the nameless narrator who later paves her way to self-liberation. The very fact of the protagonist being unnamed in the novel *Surfacing* highlights the pervading message of male displaying their masculine domination. The leading character not being named draws the reader's attention of women being considered insignificant and subdued through the form of oppression.

It reveals how women's lives and thoughts are considered to be invalid and dictated by men. The notion of women being inconsequential and valueless which is indoctrinated through gender identity is made palpable. The idea of having no identity is also emphasized with Paul's wife being referred as Madame and not named. The nameless narrator mentions how all women were addressed as Madame and none of them had names showing extremity of women being considered so trivial. The nameless narrator recollects how 'her brother got under the table and slide his hands up and down the waitress's leg while she was bringing the food' (3) highlights how men view women to be of sexual objects even in the eye of young boy under the conditioning of the society.

The narrator also recollects her school days when they were asked what they would prefer to be when they grow up. She mentions the response were mainly a lady and a mother. Atwood depicts how girl child is conditioned to limit herself to giving birth and childcare making her the easy victim of men domination. The protagonist when she goes to find her father on the island, Paul questions her asking whether her husband was with her. It is made obvious that a man should be handling the problem. Atwood draws attention to how men assert control on women in the guise of protecting them. The society is being conditioned into making women weak who need to be protected by the masculine men. The gender identity is made prominent when the narrator feels it is never her job to cut the fish but her brother or her father's job. The roles of women created by society is highlighted. Simone de Beauvoir questions:

How, in the feminine condition, can a human being accomplish herself? What paths are open to her? Which ones lead to dead ends? How can she find independence within dependence? What circumstances limit women's freedom and can she overcome them? (*The Second Sex* 37).

Simone highlights the limitations which sabotages woman. She depicts how men imprison women within the four walls and keep her far flung from the world of opportunities to enslave her in their aggressive grip. The nameless narrator reveals how divorce is frowned upon by the society which is a tool used to chain women in the marriage. She remarks how divorce is not a part of the vocabulary in here. Divorce is considered to be like an amputation. The women being considered to be the mere object of sex and procreation is also emphasized. Margaret Atwood in *Surfacing* mentions the unnamed narrator stating:

But I couldn't have brought the child here, I never identified it as mine; I didn't name it before it was born even, the way you are supposed to. It

was my husband's, he imposed it on me, and all the time it was growing in me I felt like an incubator... he wanted a replica of himself; after it was born I was no more use (38-39).

Joe is emphasized with stereotypical masculine attributes like not displaying his emotion. Joe fails to understand the narrator at an emotional level. He gets relieved when the narrator does not exhibit her emotion in her inability to find her father. She mentions that Joe prefers that she shows no emotion and reaction, no matter what has happened showing the heights of masculinity devoid of true human emotion. David makes decision in the group as he suggests that they stay an extra week at the cabin although the place belongs to the narrator without consulting her. His conversation in many ways shows him as being masculine and dominant. David is pushy in his relationship with Anna. He belittles and humiliates her. The nature of men being oppressor is being presented through his character trait. Anna in her midst of her initiation of conversation gets silenced by David and he controls what she is allowed to say. The exploitation of the weak by the powerful masculine hand through violence is indicated. The inequality of the sexes are prominently shown through David and Anna's relationship.

Anna is projected to be weak and submissive while David comes out to be domineering and overpowering. David does not seem to be considerate of Anna's feeling and regards her as an object to please him. Through Anna and David's relationship, Atwood reveals how women are defined to be a sexual objects. She emphasizes how women are defined only in terms of physicality and as a mere sexual gratification for men. She draws attention to how women are not considered to be an equal companion in marriage. Women are treated to be some kind of a subordinate being. He demands Anna to wear makeup every morning. Anna mentions that David

doesn't like to see her without it. She gets terrified when she forgets to put on makeup. Atwood discloses through David's extreme insistence on Anna wearing makeup the unrealistic and cruel expectation which women are made to live up to by men. David's insistence of Anna wearing makeup and enforcing her to fulfil his demand leads to her alienation from her wants and choice.

Woman's right to choose how she wants to appear like and what she wants to be is withheld by men in asserting their perspectives and imposing themselves on women. Through Anna's plight, Atwood sheds light on her feminist perspective. She voices out how a woman's identity is reduced to that of a beautiful doll. She presents how women should reject the unreasonable beauty myth favored by society and embrace inner positivity and strength. She discourages how women should transcend beyond seeing themselves as an objectified sexual beauty. She disseminates how the high expectation of female beauty is a destructive way of social control enforced on women in the world ruled by men. The narrator mentions Anna's fear through their conversation:

God, she said, 'what am I going to do? I forgot my makeup, he will kill me.' I studied her: in the twilight her face was grey. 'Maybe he won't notice,' I said. 'He will notice, don't you worry. Not now maybe, it hasn't all rubbed off, but in the morning. He wants me to look like a young chick all the time, if I don't he gets mad (156).

The emphasis is laid in the decoration of oneself. Decoration of oneself is said to be offering oneself as merchandise on display. In Anna's case it is imposed forcefully by her husband. David pushes her to take off her clothes for the camera saying "Come on, take it off, it won't hurt you, we need a naked lady' in his light humour voice" (171). He proves himself to be very manipulative displaying his masculinity and almost

bulldozing her to do as he pleases exhorting, “Now just take it off like a good girl or I’ll have to take it off for you” (173). He was very humiliating towards Anna literally pushing her to tears and forcefully making her pose for his random samples using his menacing tone. David ridicules Anna using masculine sexist language: ‘bottom,’ ‘ass’, ‘a pair of boobs’ reducing Anna to mere bodily organs. David completely disregards Anna and ridicules her over trivial things remarking:

She is too dumb, she can’t figure out what I am saying to her, Jesus, she moves her lips when she watches T.V even. She doesn’t know anything, every time she opens her mouth she makes an ass of herself (176).

In his eyes she is absolutely flawed and imperfect, different as a woman making her an object to be ridiculed and subject of his sarcasm. Atwood presents how men keep women ignorant to exert their power upon them and yet how men use women’s ignorance to belittle them lavishly at their whim. Atwood projects how women’s acceptance of abuse and taking it to be something natural keeps the oppression towards women alive worldwide.

Marriage is being depicted as a scary imprisonment in the novel where one awaits disaster to happen. Anna considers marriage to be as precarious as skiing, not being able to foresee in advance while the narrator describes it as throwing oneself off a cliff waiting for tragedy to strike. The protagonist and Anna imply marriage to be some turbulent death like sentence in which they drive into. When Joe proposes marriage to the narrator and when she refuses, he becomes hostile. The narrator thinks marriage to Joe is some kind of victory. The narrator states how for Joe marriage is a sexual act, putting a rope around her neck, and entrapping her to doorknobs.

Atwood condemns the acceptance of oppression by women just like the skin being attached to bone. Her objective is to urge women to break the imposed prison

walls built by men. She expounds the enhancement of women by breaking free from their timidity and docility. The silence of Firdaus's mother instills in her the patriarchal importance of submissiveness and timidity. A girl is conditioned to be passive, weak and submissive to be feminine. She describes her mother remaining in the shadow of her father. Her mother had taken on and adjusted her life to that of her husband's as shown in her diary. In her diary she only entertains the record of the weather and the work done on that day only with no reflection and emotion. It was devoid of human emotion showing the truth of women being souls who burn themselves without illuminating themselves.

The narrator recollects her mother being painfully uncommunicative allowing her father to explain everything. But she sees through how her mother had the answer but remain wordless. It is insisted assertively by men how women's place is at home as her emancipation was taken to be real threat by men. Her restriction to domestic labor which is a repetition producing nothing new causes the domination of male. Patriarchal oppression is represented where women are seen as being inferior and men as being superior. Anne's nakedness projects the deep humiliating experience which she goes as she continues to submit herself to being treated with indignity by David. The narrator states:

I could hear Anna splashing and then stumbling below on the sand point; she was really crying now, her indrawn breaths rasping. The bushes rustled, she swore; then she appeared over the top of the hill, she must have climbed up by holding on to the leaning trees. Her pink face was dissolving, her skin was covered with sand and pine needles like a burned leech (174).

The narrator tells Joe about her failed marriage and her abortion. The pain and guilt of abortion is emphasized. Atwood throws into light how women go through psychological trauma while going through abortion and the psychological scares of the unnamed protagonist is highlighted. The oppressive nature of masculine world is presented through Atwood's revelation that men not only exploit and control women but even exercise control over childbirth. The deep anguish and the narrator's emotional trauma is depicted. She recollects her horrifying experience of abortion undergone. She expresses her deep mental trauma and anguish of being held up in a metal frame while the baby is taken "out with a fork like a pickle out of a pickle jar" (101). Atwood presents the quintessential revelation of how women's lives are often directed by events and forces outside of their control. Her ex-lover's lack of emotion and sensitiveness is depicted as she states that he wasn't there with her during the time of her abortion. She mentions that he came afterward to collect her. His callousness is seen when he insensitively remarks that it is over. He wasn't disturbed or guilty with the fact of making her go through the ordeal of abortion.

The men taking control of women, failing to relate to women, suppressing them and destroying them is crystallized in the novel. Her relationship with her former lover, her abortion and the sense of powerlessness epitomizes the deep anguish endured by the narrator. The narrator mentions feeling emptied and amputated; and says that she is having the ugly sensation of the seed of death being implanted deep within her.

The narrator's submissive nature and lack of strength in giving into abortion depicts the voiceless woman whose decision are already made by men according to their convenience. The cruel exploitation and the state of being abused is reflected. The nameless narrator recollects how her former lover discouraged her from becoming a great artist. Atwood highlights how men keep women financially and economically

handicap, dependent on them to maintain their control and power over them. She also makes it explicit how it is only a man's privilege to become an artist. It is also indicated how men are not happy to see any woman reach higher successful realm even if the woman is his beloved. She also lays emphasis on how society's flawed belief demand that women remain intellectually handicap in comparison to men which leads to women being excluded from various avenue of opportunities. She in her true sensitive feminist ways expresses how tragically women's true genius goes unexplored and undiscovered lying deep within themselves in utter darkness. Marry Wollstonecraft in her best known work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* mentions:

Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience; but, as blind obedience is ever sought for by power, tyrants and sensualists...when they endeavor to keep women in the dark (24).

Woman's acceptance of men's domination which keeps them in the endless oppression is shown through Anna's meekness and through the immersion of herself deeply in the roles that men have crafted for her. Standing up for herself has never been endowed in her. She allows David to trample all over her. She was a puppet like character who had no hold on her life and completely oscillating according to David's whim. She has no sense of individuality. Anna incessantly complains to the narrator about David humiliating her but when he proposition the narrator, she forms an alliance with him. Woman failing to stand up for each other is emphasized. Anna also exhibit no regard for the narrator as she was copulating with Joe to get back at David. The nameless narrator mentions "men think they can do it with guns, woman with their bodies" (212).

Atwood throws light into how women fail each other which poses as a hurdle in their battle seeking self-identity and freedom from male domination. She recommends how women should seek alliance in each other rather than turning against each other to battle against men. She demands collaboration and unity within the women group in their common aspired goal of freedom and equality.

Atwood depicts imagery of animal victim and woman victims sharing the same plight in the hands of men. David finds immense joy in holding his fish up by the tail and grinning, wanting to immortalize it with his camera. The brutal death of heron is a valid evidence of the way women are treated under the abusive male dominated society. The narrator presents the cruelty of men in describing the brutal death of the heron which is found smashed with a stone, hanging upside down with its wing spreading open. Atwood presents the violent acts of men which is taken by them very lightly for their sheer amusement and pleasure. The narrator mentions how David takes great delight in fishing and chilling killing of harmless creatures.

Atwood's feminist sensitivity is depicted through the emphatic binary drawn between the wounded protagonist and the ruined landscape. Nature and women being helplessness and powerlessness under the aggressive suppression and harassment of masculine world is projected. The nature's destruction is a metaphor of violation of women by men. *Surfacing* also in an assertive manner shows the protagonist's desire to find her identity and to free herself from the shadows of male domination. The nameless protagonist is also presented as a Canadian who is oppressed by the cultural imperialism of Americans who consider the Canadians as the other. The title *surfacing* depicts the narrator emerging from the dark stifling shadows of men and shedding off the stereotypical image of woman crafted by the society which suffocates her. Diving into

the lake under the surface of the water she undergoes an awakening moment and self-discovery.

The narrator transcends from victimized soul to a voyage of enlightening discovery breaking away from the grip of patriarchal society. The nameless narrator surfacing from the shadows of masculine world is revealed when she no longer tolerates to be the sexual object for men and embraces her sexuality. She initiates sexual act with Joe, where she feels empowered and she mentions:

He trembles and then I can feel my lost child surfacing within me, forgiving me, rising from the lake where it has been prisoned for so long, its eyes and teeth phosphorescent; the two halves clasp, interlocking like fingers, it buds, it sends out fronds (209).

The narrator signals herself becoming ready for motherhood and becoming alive raising like phoenix and emerging from the ashes which had blurred her vision in the past. She awakens herself from the death like stupor which men imposed on her. The nameless narrator's rebel against the oppressive patriarchy is revealed through her destroying the camera which had captured naked pictures of Anna. The camera is depicted to be phallic symbol dominating the female body. The act of the nameless protagonist destroying it symbolizes her utter rejection of it. The narrator destroying the film coils and unwinding the film, standing full in the sun depicts her voicing out against all forms of men's exploitation against women. It is her way of fighting not only her oppression but Anna's and of all women. As she destroys the film she mentions "hundreds of tiny naked Annas no longer bottled and shelved" (215). Anna watches not knowing whether to inform or not anticipating condemnation from David as her being considered to be an abettor.

The narrator shows her rejection of society which deprives female identities and freedom. She is all for absolute freedom. The narrator declares that she is through pretending. The protagonist dives into the lake, and she confronts her traumatic past and frees herself from all her memories in which she had suppressed herself. She gains strength from nature and gets in touch with her adolescence, her pregnancy and her abortion surfacing through a process of self-discovery by confronting reality. She destroys and eliminates things from her past and becomes an animal. Atwood's objective of turning the narrator into an animal is to depict the colossal exploitation experienced by the narrator and to emphasize the universality of extreme suffering experienced by women across the world. The narrator's frustration and pent up emotion is found in her becoming an animal to reveal how she sees animal not as animal but as refined graceful creatures that are much better than human co-existing with nature and the world. The narrator sees herself as victim and surfaces to become a survivor capable of finding her personal voice. Her immersion with nature awakens her and raises her consciousness of being victimized. Narrator's greater understanding of her place in society is presented and she refuses to be victim and declares withdrawing from society is no longer an option as it leaves one with no alternative except death.

Although the nameless narrator was in search of her missing father, her innermost search lies in the quest of delving deep inside herself and finding her lost self in the course of the novel. The empowering healing energy received in communion with nature leading to self-consciousness and finally getting rid of conventions imposed by society is indicated. The superiority of men and societal concept of women and nature as inferior object to be exploited is asserted. The construction of a stable human society and identity through the coexistence of men and women, culture and nature is emphasized.

The element of the unnamed protagonist's communion with nature which leads to her recognition of victimization and her fight for self-identity is presented. She realizes that she has been violated just like the mother earth. Atwood gives the quintessential picture of how men exploit nature and women for their benefit. The nameless protagonist identify her own destruction with the destruction of nature and its landscape which has so much to offer to the world. She realizes the deep connection between nature and herself and both being the victim of men's exploitation. The protagonist empowers herself through the healing process by embracing nature and rejecting all forms of limitation imposed on woman. The presence of nature raises her consciousness and her feminine consciousness reaches its climax, making her revolt against exploitation. In *Surfacing*, Atwood reveals the protagonist arduous journey from being a victim of patriarchal society, a victim of men to a strong confident person who attains her true self-identity.

Atwood also throws into light how it is only through one's deep realization and acceptance of mistakes that one can attain salvation. She emphasizes how the narrator realizes that her complete withdrawal from society will result in her death which gives her the wisdom to join the society without giving to the domination that suppressed her. Atwood shows the narrator breaking out of the stereotype image of a woman who had been reduced to be a pitiful object at the mercy of men .The narrator emerges to an individual who is powerfully capable of seeking right and equality.

Atwood projects woman's experience from a female point of view. The unnamed narrator surfaces to be physically, mentally and spiritually rejuvenated shedding all limitations which had held her back numbing her senses of the joy of seeing the beauty of being a woman and the privilege of having life. She emerges to be an empowered woman at the end who is truly enriched with experience and undefeated by

tribulation casted upon her. She surfaces to her self-discovery and self-embrace shattering the rigid walls enclosed around her by the society.

Atwood declares that the conflict between men and women will last as long as women and men do not recognize each other as peer. Atwood was very fierce and passionate in advancing the profoundness of unity within women in their endeavor to accomplish justice, equality and an impeccable freedom. Atwood does not recommend demeaning of men and asserting women's domination. She does not demand the privileges of women over men or men over women. She seeks balance and harmony between women and men to lead life of pure joy and fulfilment.

Conclusion

The battle between masculinity and femininity had long begun and is still an incessant battle waged between the two sexes. The battle originates from the assertion of masculinity being superior and femininity being claimed as inferior. From examining the novels *Woman at Point Zero* and *Surfacing*, one can easily draw conclusion that there is no victory over the assertion of male being superior and female being considered as inferior as the outcome is deprivation of human right, infliction of injustice and extreme deplorable behavior in the society based on their flawed beliefs. It only leads to inhuman savage division and cycle of pain for women and abject moral deprivation in men. The men in their obsession to being masculine and in their blind reverence for supreme manhood becomes devoid of basic human values and emotion. They emerge to be an aggressive oppressor who is completely oppressive which is lucidly presented in the male characters of the novels. They appeared to be severely self-righteous who are absolutely blind to the injustice inflicted by them on the other sex. They were extremely callous and ruthless.

The disaster of male claiming the superiority of their masculinity is reflected in Sheikh Mahmoud who proved to be extremely abusive husband who could not see Firdaus as anything but purely a slavish personality and an object of sexual conduct. Firdaus's father never exhibited any fatherly love and affection. Firdaus's uncle was devoid of moral values as he took his part in violating her although she showed strong affection towards him being her kin. Her uncle was completely insensitive and he got her married to Sheikh Mahmoud who was old enough to be her father for dowry. All the male characters appeared to be as manipulative, merciless and as brutal as another emerging themselves to be truly savage. Bayoumi not only sexually exploited Firdaus by imprisoning her in his room but did not hesitate to bring along his friends to exploit

her sexually. Ibrahim, although said to be a revolutionary man exploited Firdaus under the guise of love which completely devastates her. She finds her life to be a complete failure in every aspect which includes love leading to her seeking death at the end. Marzouk, the pimp in his utter imposition of domination over Firdaus, culminates in his death with Firdaus plunging the knife into his chest. Firdaus's mother appeared to be lifeless, spiritless and as dead as the pitch black night under severe domination. Her life seems to be a tragedy in itself. Firdaus was the victim of every man whom she encountered as every man proved to be sexually exploitative and volatile. She was deprived of choices and higher education.

In *Surfacing*, the male characters David and Joe in their reverence for masculinity failed to understand and appreciate the women in their lives as they saw them to be of inferior kind. They did not view the women characters to be of equal companion but object of ridicule and sexual conducts. David was acutely forceful in his demand with Anna wearing makeup and he was utterly abusive imposing himself on her leading to her distancing from her inner self. The men subdued women to be voiceless in the grip of their cruel hand and as a beautiful empty doll. The men's exertion of extreme control over woman and being emotionless can be vividly witnessed in the narrator being made to go through the ordeal of child abortion which causes her deep traumatic anguish. David was extremely abusive and threatening with words towards Anna in his pathetic extremity of idolizing his masculinity.

The women characters in both the novels are projected to be the victims of men. They were considered to be of no significance drowning themselves into the dark shadows of the men who imposed servitude and obedience on them. They lived under servile world of self-alienation robbed of their dreams and thoughts. Their acceptance of servitude, domination and dependence on men made them easy victims of

exploitation. The instilling and embedding in women the virtue of timidity and innocence kept them chained within the walls with low expectations leading to their ultimate endless plight. While Saadawi presented how girls are circumcised through female genital mutilation in her society, Atwood presents how women are victimized with obsession of beauty myth in her society.

Saadawi and Atwood examined the different levels of exploitations exercised by men which brings the tragic downfall of women. They revealed the tools used by men which are namely social, religious and political prejudices rooted in the respective societies which suppress women bringing their ultimate downfall. They asserted how the idea of men being dominant over women are due to the result of societal manipulation based on their flawed beliefs and expectations from women. The women are kept in ignorance through endless limitations and restricting them from venturing into the field of opportunities and possibilities. The economic dependence on men kept women extremely loyal with obligation towards men. The women were taken to be of sexual conquest. The hypocrisy of society is revealed through the values and virtues attached to a modest woman while man can escape being immoral and insensitive. The exploitation of women is also meted out by the religious men who cling on to their distorted religious beliefs which lead to the dehumanizing of women by men. The sexual exploitation which remains rampant which robs women of their dignity throwing them into the depth of shame and psychological trauma is presented.

Saadawi and Atwood with their great insight and wisdom expose that it is not only men who are guilty of bringing the downfall of women by placing themselves on the pedestal but how women also have their contributing factors in their cascading downfall through the acceptance of servitude, blind obedience and self-annihilation. Firdaus's mother indoctrinates in her the gender identity and her spiritless images get

transmitted to Firdaus who is made to associate that women function to serve men. Her mother conducts circumcision on her depriving her the expression of her sexuality. Her uncle's wife preaches her the importance of obedience and servitude towards her husband. The women with means and privileges out casting the subaltern women is brought into light. Firdaus's uncle wife was cruel to Firdaus and the maid servant. Sharifa, although she claims that life had hardened her, she makes no attempt to elevate Firdaus from her misery. Instead she exploits Firdaus's vulnerability by training her to be a prostitute under the pretense of motherly and sisterly affection making money out of Firdaus.

In *Surfacing*, the most destructive self-annihilating aspect is imposed on self, particularly the female self on themselves which confines them to the state of perpetual servitude is emphasized which is highly disapproved. The failure of women characters towards each other is taken to be another destructive layer contributing to the wrecking of woman apart. Anna sleeping with Joe reveals the issue of men committing infidelity in their relationship as women also easily part take in extramarital affair is highlighted. The confining life of the narrator's mother and her being uncommunicative sends negative vibe of self-alienation. Anna's easy submission to David's imposition and the narrator's submission to her child abortion also leads to the down spiral of women as men are made to believe that women are weak target for further exploitation.

The strong urgent need of women understanding the plight of one another and taking all measures in elevating each other is hugely aspired and desired as a mean of combating against male's fierce domination. Atwood and Saadawi in a very assertive manner expound the need of reclaiming the self and identity of the female characters. The strong advocacy of women spreading positive vibes, strength and the importance of building solid alliance between the same sexes is exhorted with great zeal to end the

plight of women across the universe. The spirit of collaboration in their struggle in freeing themselves from the clutches of male domination has been presented vehemently with passion.

Saadawi as well as Atwood meticulously presented the assertion of feminist awakening in the women characters in their endeavor to achieve self-liberation from all oppression. The women characters of *Woman at Point Zero* and *Surfacing* crystalize the strength, resilience and will power of the women in the face of inhuman treatment vented against them. In both the novels women characters despite the inflection of male domination and victimization of women they adamantly refused to remain victims of the oppressors. They struggled and brought up their long seasoned rebellious attribute which remained so passive breeding pus and pain longing for its outlet. Saadawi presents Firdaus's absolute dislike of her image which she saw in the mirror for the first time in her life. She abhorred the image seen in the mirror. She saw herself to be the image of the product which has been conceived under the manipulative societal construction.

Firdaus takes to prostitution in protest against the traditional expectation out of women. She takes to prostitution as she observes it as freeing herself economically from the male dominance. She rejects and chooses the men with whom she indulges in sexual encounter to show her upper hand. Once she finds out that prostitution is profession controlled by men, she decides to abandon it. She stabs the pimp who makes an attempt to stop her from leaving her profession to battle against male exploitation. She walks down the street with the air of confidence and triumph for killing the pimp. After her encounter with the Arab prince, she scares him by confessing that she had killed somebody. She snatched the note given by the Arab prince and destroyed it into pieces desiring to destroy all the men who had held her captive at their mercy. She shows no

repentance for killing the pimp, Marzouk. And she goes on further to declare that she has no fear for death. She at the end liberates herself by revealing the hypocrisy of men and declaring the painful truth which frees her. Saadawi makes it passionately revealing by voicing out how women are pushed off to their limits and how they resort to take extreme measures in their desperate pursuit of their identity. Saadawi presents murder as the only option to resist against male domination while Atwood in *Surfacing* presents madness as the only option for her nameless protagonist to surface to her true identity.

Atwood explores the female consciousness and women's search for their lost identity and their authentic self. The nameless narrator in *Surfacing* refuses to marry Joe and she confronts the male domination through the destruction of David's camera which had captured the naked pictures of Anna. She through her self-realization comes to understand the destructive nature of stifling herself. She exhibits that she is no longer the victim of sexual act and embraces her sexuality by initiating sexual act with Joe. In her close association with nature and in her diving into the lake she surfaces as a stronger woman who is capable of finding her identity. Saadawi and Atwood in their writing awaken the feminist consciousness of women and illuminate the realization of barriers and imposition which have limited the development of women in all spheres of life. They depict characters who gain a perspective of their true self who are not even afraid of death in their quest of self-discovery and self-empowerment.

The major findings of the study are that men and women are both victims under the societal construction of gendered identity. The scenario of the rigidity of male glorification and demeaning femininity leads to the burgeoning of an endless plight of women and inhuman behavior from men. Women as well as men are victims of gendered identity which is constructed by the society. The fabrication of the terms masculinity and femininity breed evil impulses in human behavior creating huge waves

of injustice, suffering, and detrimental effect to mankind. The indoctrination of gendered identity in the young child leads to the negative masculine trait in young boys who projects violence and stifling self-alienation in young girls. Men are victims and prisoners of their own ego, hatred, and deception as they fear to let go of their sense of superiority over women although they are very much aware of their wrong doings in the inner realm of their guilty turbulent mind.

It is not only men who brings the downfall of women through their assertion of supremacy over women but women equally take part in bringing their own downfall. Women's empowerment and freedom from men's exploitation can be truly achieved through education and economic power. The utmost reverence of education for women which will not only free them from the male dominated world but liberate them from their own ignorance which keeps them chained to life of abject exploitation is highlighted assertively. Women should be given access to education, and the right to dream their desired goals. Self-reflection is very important as it is the process of looking inward as well as looking outward towards others which leads to our desired transformation. Women are oppressed through the crude societal beliefs and distortion. Women being vulnerable to all forms of exploitation are due to their unequal social status in term of religion, culture, politics and economic power.

The strong unity of women is passionately desired to combat men's unjust domination and humiliation furling at women. Although women are thought to be inferior and men as superior which leads to the breeding of ceaseless violence, those ideas are changeable under the illuminating grace of education and freedom of ignorance. Men need to unleash their obsession of superiority over women and women need to dismantle the walls of servitude and self-isolation in seeking better enlightened world with fresh hopes and limitless dreams.

Saadawi and Atwood serve as a voice to the voiceless and their writings embody depth of female expression and they present the deep anguish of women across the globe and their quest in finding themselves in everyday lives. They express the wonders of coexistence between men and women and the importance of giving equality to all in all sphere of life to have harmony in the world. They highlight the element of disharmony prevalent in the society between men and women and emphasize how it can only subside when one stop asserting importance over the other and believing in the divine equality in all sphere of human lives. The beauty of harmony and companionship between men and women in crafting a healthy conducive environment where marginalization, suppression, domination and bias gender mainstreaming give its ways to the essence of greater virtues like equality and liberty should always be encouraged.

Although the realm of universal patriarchy has lost the kind of credibility it once enjoyed its infamous presence is still pervasive which need to be addressed and given its due evaluation. Though positive changes are emerging, however, the truth is even in the modern society women are still suppressed and deprived in many ways. It is every individual's right to demand for freedom and to be responsible in ensuring the freedom of others around us. One needs to celebrate and acknowledge women who have sacrificed and braved themselves for higher causes and to appeal to women in all walks of life to strive against the benumbing evil rules of society which deprives ones basic human right. One must always aspire for the life of equality between the two sexes, economic independence, political freedom, and social equality in their journey of life which should be sought, fought and revered by all those who believes in grace of liberating humanity. Women should stand in unity in their quest for freedom from all forms of oppression.

Saadawi and Atwood being a true feminist writers expound on the negative effect of patriarchy and how all women are in the same boat under the dangerous ruthless patriarchy. The universal oppression of women are depicted in their assertion. Saadawi published her phenomenal book *Woman at Point Zero* in Beirut in 1973 and Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* was published in 1972 but the horrifying truth in those novels still resonates in the present times making their novels truly phenomenal, overpowering, truly liberating and illuminating. Feminism is not only freeing for women but equally freeing of men from the captivity of patriarchy. One must understand that feminism is for all.

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