

MARGARET ATWOOD'S SURFACING: FEMINISM AND SEXUAL POLITICS

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ABSTRACT:

Feminism and Gender inequality are not natural but embedded. They primarily explained Women who were confined to the patriarchal culture-defined roles. Girl-child social conditioning, gender discrimination, and self abnegation facilitate stereotyped roles. Feminism and Sexual Politics in general employed to describe political, social and economic movements. It seeks to give more rights and adequate protection to women. It does not have a single key definition in the context of the American radical feminist author Gloria Steinem, intellectual background is stressed. "The goal of feminism is to liberate the individuality of the person and understand that in every one of us there is a unique human being who is a mixture of heredity and environment."

Index Terms: girl-child, predicament, patriarchy, chauvinism, sexuality, Feminism, consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

There was always a difference between men and women in any society and hence also Canadian Society. Canadian literature was all about the oppression of Canadian women and the exploitation to which they were subjected earlier.

There were some social, economic and political issues, which exile women's rights and create the corruption of their identity, which have been aptly described in their works. The works mainly portrayed issues like Patriarchy, Misogyny, Gender discrimination, Sexual exploitation and the right to education.

Margaret Atwood is a most potent writer of post-feminist fiction. Atwood never places the female narrators and heroines in the role of the one who will be suppressed and oppressed. Atwood's advent primarily discusses some of the basic causes regarding the cause of the women of the world, the stance of the women living alone because of the patriarchal society of men.

Sexual politics and asymmetry of power between the two sexes is one of the issues at the very root of the novel *Surfacing*. She wishes to know how a social organization based on mere rigid sex categories impacts women. In the novel, Atwood uncovered the existential and psychological foundations constructed by the society that resulted in prime cause of the oppression of women and psychic suffering. Atwood vividly describes the patriarchal as well as domestic and sexual roles allocated by patriarchal Society to women. Dowry, gender role, self-denial and male dominance in wedded lives are explained sensibly by the novelist. The narrator in *Surfacing* is the unnamed narrator and therefore it is not hard for a reader to identify

with it. Emerging title character not given a name; she is alone. She is ostracized by society and does not wish to associate. She is dominated from the start in her own home. Her father was a botanist and did not wish her remain close to society, thus he settles northern Quebec Island to live. He constructs a home and settles his family.

He provides her with a dismal childhood without the comfort of relationships, socialization, and moral guidance. As Atwood in *Surfacing*; "her family lived between two anonymities, the city and the bush" (S63).

For her father:

The restrictions are so pitiful that it has impacted her childhood psyche itself. She was not allowed to socialize with her neighbours; she lived like a caged bird. Thus, Atwood generates the need for Communication

between human and sharing ideas and experience moulds an individual's character. In the novel in front of us here, the principal character's dad deprives her of the outer world. This is observed when the main character explains, "Although we did exploit the visitations with the dour, belligerent Paul and the children of Madame, the games were short and static" (S 58).

Atwood creates the need for a line of communication between children and parents. She is trapped in the narrow world that her father had built for her. Life is cruel because it won't provide her with any ground on which she can flourish and succeed. She is socialized into gender roles when she is little.

Because of the need to have to become a woman growing up in a man's world, Atwood's Protagonist herself suffered from gender discrimination when she was growing up as a Child in her time. She is especially well able to remember how; "the boys chased and caught the girls after schools and tied them with their own skipping ropes. I was the one who always deliberately don't untie. I spent hours on end tied up in fences and gates and convenient trees, waiting for some benevolent adult to come along and let me go; eventually, I became a professional escape artist at untying knots."

This once again clearly indicates how the women were oppressed under the provided rules of the society. They were compelled to think from a very early stage that they are being oppressed and they would be dealt with as a no-being in the society, who has no opinion and voice. In short, Margaret Atwood here tries to lend voice to the voiceless.

Hence, in the male chauvinist world, the girls never had the slightest opportunity to know their real self. Socialization that the male chauvinist world provided to the girls socialized them into thinking, "men should be superior."

They consider themselves inferior to men.

Atwood tries to shift the reader's attention towards the fact that 'the world is masculine on the whole; those who fashioned it governed it, and still govern it today are men.' (Beauvoir, p298) Such a world diminishes femininity to less and subservient. Atwood's unnamed protagonist. Not only is she the sole character to be introduced without a name and without a name. The truth is that "None of the women had names than"

The disadvantaged childhood life compels her to learn according to the conventions of the society. At the start of the novel, Atwood presents the female protagonist as timid and obedient lady who quietly tolerates all embarrassing events. There were certain things on which she had blindfolds on her eyes. She never responded to them except for bearing them. She endured the few childhood provided to her by her dad when she was a kid, she misses going to school like other kids but never resists this injustice, and she is exploited for nearly all her teenage years by a middle-aged man and undergoes a forced abortion. She still doesn't acknowledge the atrocities committed upon her. A woman who is sexually abused is generally despised by society.

Maybe it is because of universally accepted stigmas against women that she is forced to go

through all of this. As she does not wish to hurt her family and bring shame to the family name, she continues to play the passive role even in wifedom. Atwood reveals marriage which does not allow women to be their own individuals, but they are promised that their role is searching for completeness as wives and mothers and it is pointless to seek anything but this, it only deprives their life.

The narrator too after being involved in a relationship must endure brutality by her husband and goes into self-denial of her own needs. His suffering angers her. She concludes: "He said he loved me, the magic word, it was supposed to make everything light up, I'll never trust that word again" (S 51).

Men always like women to remain oppressed and suppressed. The idea of a woman a free and independent existence is quite intolerable to them. Even it is professional or personal. A woman is often regarded as; "A deficient male and second-class citizen, weak in muscular powers, tentative in feeling and lacking opportunities for creativeness except within the special spheres." (Salzman, 1949 p203)

Atwood acting out the roles of Bronte and Woolf resists the gender role stereotypes and prescriptions that typically repress women's agency. Here in the novel, Atwood is certainly concerned with the women in the patriarchal society in the future world. The central issue of the novels is how the two sexes one of whom is traditionally assumed to be superior to the other

one as the passive. At almost all of her heroines, Atwood spells with the magic word, love. Initially, she was used by her lover who ones had assured him that he loved her. Later, however, he turned out to be in the wrong. Afterwards, the narrator makes sure that she no longer will be fooled by the word again. For she well knew that love from men is an only bodily pleasure. Male dominance is illustrated through the protagonist's friend Anna, who physically and psychologically overpowers her husband David. She tells of her plight and reveals her internal conflict as far as her standing is concerned, "I forgot my makeup, and he'll kill me". "He wants me to look like a young chick all the time. If I don't he gets mad" (S 131). David symbolizes male supremacy. Anna cannot be what she is but rather has to primp on her husband's orders, to whom she is treated badly. Based on the perception of the protagonist, he does not know how to love. He believes that his wife Anna is his servant. He wishes to be loved and blames Anna. He believes that he had been coerced into marriage by Anna. David like any man is possessive and gloomy. David always teases Anna to reveal her body not only to him but also to Joe and his camera. David was coerced into taking a photo of her body. Even though Anna denies it obvious that in a patriarchal society women have no voice.

Failure and torture of Marriage the core problems of Margaret Atwood. Either it is David's and Anna's marriage or the heroine. The heroine is constantly referring to her failed marriage. She is constantly recounting about herself as a fool who due to lack of knowledge gets into the marriage vow. Actually, she never got married. Her lover who was middle-aged denied the opportunity to marry him after he had gotten her pregnant. The heroine was even traumatized by discovery of the fact of the truth that he was from a family with children and a wife. She states; "they had names, he said I should be mature."(S170).

Atwood was successful in portraying the double self of the protagonist. The protagonist had duality between her feminine self and her feminist self. Her feminine self is indulged in her fantasy of love, harmony, and peace in the marriage, and her feminist self demands that Anna leave the oppressive and degrading matrimony relationship.

She even encourages Anna to resist the torture David had subjected her to. The protagonist's self as a feminist wishes Anna to decline passively even if it means a divorce. But the feminine self of the protagonist also considers that; "A divorce is like an amputation, you survive but there are less of you."(S47)

She also wanted to be saved from her dead child, something she still regrets. She is famous for not being ashamed of having sinned. Northrop Frye speculates in his book *The Bush Garden*, "The heroine stands alone in her small band and finds something very old, both inside and outside herself, overwhelming her self. The term survival means to get through a series of crises, each of which was entwined with them." and not like the rest, each on its own terms to be encountered, and to fail to meet the crisis is to exist some death principle entering in" (1995). The heroine envisions her dream and comes out of her chrysalis of silence. She makes her decision, "The things to be rejected cast them into the fire, it will not melt; it is of no use for you" (S 192). She returns to nature and the nature of things, "Space rustles around me; owls sound by the lake or within me, distance contracts" (S 192). She shows us how "That is the way they are, they will not let you have peace, they don't want you to have anything they don't have themselves" (S 200).

Surfacing has Atwood attempting to resist the power politics of the dominant order, the patriarchal cliché of misogyny. Atwood attempts to cite the fact that women are a possibility of not being victims and can be anything else except man's world and can dream of being able to breathe in freely in a man-made world. To materialize this fantasy dream, one would have to swoon in history. As has been emphasized by Atwood; "Everything from history must be eliminated." (S 205). For because history always taught the woman less than the man. The woman heroine, at last, in the third book of the novel, realizes she must combat victimization. She needs; "give up the old belief that I'm powerless and because of it nothing. A lie which has always more disastrous than the truth would have been." (S 222). The invisible narrator of the novel existing in this manner symbolizes the struggle of women against the grasp of the Male patriarchal world. Through the central character, Atwood not only depicted the common conception about women and the societal norm of the traditional world but also rethinks the new interaction between man and woman. Atwood presents a new woman who appears on the scene who understands that; "They would never believe it's a natural woman, state nature." (S 220) Patriarchal society has always defined women as natural and ever in a state of helplessness and vulnerability. Surfacing is a survival strategy to awaken women to consciousness. It brings about the consciousness that despite being controlled by the world of men, they too can become conscious of their own worth and try to be what they are. They can resist and learn to see the world in their own capabilities. Atwood deserves the presumption that women are not an ownership object. They are human like the males are. The novel testifies that slaughtering women is slaughtering humankind; "if I die it dies, if I starve it starves with me. it must be born, allowed." (S 222).

Conclusion

In *Surfacing*, Margaret Atwood creates a real climax of the novel out of the process of emancipation and awareness by the protagonist. Patriarchal society burdens are cast off by nameless heroine—she allows herself to drift towards a more nature-based, earthy way of life. The novel explains why she abandoned patriarchal ideals of servitude and opted to accept nature and herself instead.

The narrator's decision to stay behind, rather than being taken into civilization along with her friends, is symbolic of her refusal to engage with imposed gender roles and societal norms. She undergoes a psychological rebirth, removing the layers of oppression and embracing a raw, unedited self. This selfactualization is directly connected to Atwood's concepts of feminism, identity, and self-reliance.

Finally, *Surfacing* concludes in a general yet profound sense of closure, never informing readers about the fate of the narrator. It is more than a book about liberation from repression but of reclaiming voice and presence with oneself.

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