

# **Feministic Approach with Reference of Margaret Atwood's Novel**

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**Abstract-** The present paper tries to focus on Feminism in the novels of Margaret Atwood. The paper deals with the introduction includes the background of the Canadian Novel and the themes of Margaret Atwood's novels. It illustrates paradoxes of human life with special attention on feministic approach then it gives the conclusion of the work. This paper asserts that the Feminism is closely related to journey into the interior. There are two options for all, first is to live in an ostrich like world of make belief and second is walking into the room to face the reality. While the first would be well comfortable, convenient approach, the second would compel one to revise one's believes and attitudes. Atwood is interested in the second option and looks for the truth, being convinced that nothing else will do justice to the present situation. The paper focuses on status of the women in the family and the role of women outside the world.

**Keywords -** Margaret Atwood, Feminism, Gender Politics, Women's Movement

## I. INTRODUCTION

Human beings are like the boon on the Earth and they are armed with an invincible power of intellectuality to protect their own life as well as the planet where they live. Each human being should understand the value of his/her life. They are supposed to take certain corrective actions with some intervals to generate adequate comfort level for all living creatures. The situation becomes paradoxical when the opposite of it turns up where a human being is neither able to protect his own life nor others. Since the beginning of the life on Earth, it has been normally seen that anarchic forces emerge sometimes and they become brutal destroyers of

innocent lives. Anarchy or dictatorship comes with political and economic power. Those who manage to hoard money often suffocate the lives of innocent people.

Women have ever been exploited in multiple ways by the so-called godlike Man. It is a misconception to give more importance to men over women. We must say this ideology has come out of the gender politics. Man is considered as a symbol of power and prosperity. It is a stale set rule in the world that only men are supposed to work and earn money. Women are disallowed to go outside the four walls of their houses. Women only represent an object for sexual pleasure and for doing monotonous petty works like washing clothes, cleaning utensils and cooking food. It is very strange to see such a foolish gender biased politics against women. It is unimaginable for people to see wives or girls denying the household duties and men or husbands are made to do these petty works. Later, when women slightly began to realize the gender politics, the awaking came to them due to their internal urge to gain knowledge through education. There has also been a tradition of denying education to women. Under this condition very few women secretly began to read books and they realized the severity and intensity of this matter. Such women, who started to sense their overburdened life, tried to give words to their condition.

## II. MARGARET ATWOOD, A FEMINISTIC AUTHOR

Margaret Atwood is one who managed to realize the pathetic plight of women. She has now

become a legend being a female feministic author in Canada. It is said that the conscious efforts of women empowerment started after the First World War during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Women were given rights to work and earn adequate salary. During 1960s and 1970s, the Women's Liberation Movement brought an unexpected change by providing freedom to women up to an extent. It was a journey of women's emancipation from exploitation which took almost a hundred years to make women feel liberated from institutional exploitation. Margaret Atwood also wrote her masterpiece with such incidents and happenings which clearly show the path of women's emancipation. She depicted the early position of women living in ignorance of their exploitation and later their rejection of it in order to live the life of freedom.

Margaret Eleanor Atwood is a renowned and honored Canadian female novelist who is known as a feminist critic and social activist. She had keen interest in reading literature since her childhood and she considered literature her passion. Because of her inclination towards writing praiseworthy literary pieces she has written more than thirty-five books including novels, short stories, poems, literary critiques, social history and books for children. Her books have been translated into more than twenty-two languages around the world.

Margaret Atwood is a ubiquitous presence in recent Canadian literature. Atwood made her reputation as a poet during the 1960s and has since developed an avid following as a writer of fiction. She is an international celebrity especially among feminists [1].

She gained reputation as a serious writer with tremendous potential. She exhibited a remarkable insight into the workings of woman's mind and earned a distinguished reputation among women writers for her visionary interpretations of feminist thoughts. She explores the relationship between humanity, nature and

the human behavior and power. She earned a good name while imparting knowledge of literature to students of various reputed universities.

Margaret Atwood is often closely associated with feminism. She always tries to empower women through her appealing novels. The terms 'feminism' or 'feminist' first appeared in France and then in Netherlands in 1872 thereafter in Great Britain in 1890 and finally, in the United States in 1910. The Oxford English Dictionary marks 1894 as the time for the first appearance of 'feminist' and 1895 for 'feminism'.

Elaine Showalter narrates the development of Feminist theory passing through a number of phases. In the first phase, which is called 'feminist critique', the readers examine the ideologies behind written literary pieces in the world. The second is called 'Gynocritics', where the woman is the producer of textual meaning and it becomes the path of the individual or collective female literary career and literary history. The last phase of the development of feminist theory is considered as gender theory where the ideological effects on people due to male dominant literature and the effects of the gender system are examined [2].

### III. FEMINISM IN CANADA

Defining feminism exactly can be a challenging task but a broad understanding of it encircles the speaking, writing and thus advocating on behalf of women and by identifying injustice to females in the social status. Thus a new aspect has been explored these days in the 21st century which shows the feminism and its politics in detail with great intensity [3]. Margaret Atwood's novels examine these issues with the portrayal of her subjugated female characters in her novels. Feminist approach can be identified in fiction since Jane Austen had addressed the restricted lives of women who faced such predicament in the early part of the century followed by

Charlotte Bronte, Anne Bronte, Elizabeth Gaskell, who espoused the cause of women's pathetic state. George Eliot also depicted women's misery and oppression in her renowned autobiographical novel *Ruth Hall* (1854). Moreover, an American journalist Fanny Fern revealed in public by writing her own struggle to support her children as a newspaper journalist after her husband's premature death. Louisa May Alcott, a staunch feminist, penned a strong feminist novel *A Long Fatal Love Chase* (1866) which deals with a young woman's attempts to run away from her bigamist husband and become independent. Surprisingly some male authors also recognized the injustice being done to women [4]. The novels of George Meredith and George Gissing and the plays of Henrik Ibsen also outlined the pathetic plight of women of the contemporary time.

Women's experience of the power politics of gender and their problematic relation to patriarchal traditions of authority has affinities with the Canadian attitudes to the cultural imperialism of the United States as well as its ambivalence towards its European inheritors [5].

At the beginning of the Nineteenth century, individual women and some men were speaking against male dominance where women were relegated to the margins of society and were provided low status. Thus, awareness was rising among the people but still there was little sign of change in the political or social order.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, feminist science fiction emerged as a sub-genre of science fiction that intends to deal with women's roles in society. Women writers in the literary movement of the 19th century and early 20th century, was the first wave of feminism. During the 1920s writers such as Clare Winger Harris and Gertrude Barrows Bennett published science fiction stories written from female perspectives and occasionally dealt with gender and sexuality-based topics to show males abusing females with their brutality. They portrayed how

men dealt with women as objects to give them forceful sexual pleasure. By the 1960s science fiction brought sensationalism with political and technological criticism of society.

Feminist science fiction chiefly questions wrong social ideologies such as how society constructs gender roles, or the unequal political and personal power of men and women. Some of the most notable feminist science fiction works illustrate these themes through presenting various situations to satirize society where gender differences or gender power imbalances exist which are called dystopian world and in the contrast of it utopian to explore worlds in which gender inequalities are abolished.

Feminism in Canada in the 1960s and 1970s was part of an international movement now referred to as the second phase of the wave of feminism. The first feminist movement reached its peak in the second decade of the 20th century when many countries including Canada, supported the cause of women.

In its early years, NAC (National Action Committee) represented the tradition of liberal feminism which sought emancipation for women through changes in national laws. Canada was more on radical side during feminism's second wave, typically involving the younger generation of women and associating even some of the male students of New Left actively for the cause of peace and civil rights for improving the low and derogatory position of women but later they refused to take to fight on the behalf of women. Women, therefore, formed their own revolutionary groups. Since 1960s, these female groups began Women's Liberation Movement. They advocated many empowering revolutionary changes in the personal & social life of women. The afflictions of women emphatically included the right to abortion by Abortion Caravan in 1970 apart from other demands for liberalization of society for women. Feminist activism in Canada had achieved radical transformation in women's lives in the male specified social milieu.

The success of feminism in Canada had been a gradual struggle for establishing equal rights between women and men.

#### IV. FEMINISM IN ATWOOD'S NOVEL

Atwood's novels deal with the hidden subjugated world of women where injustice in society pushes them towards darkness. Margaret Atwood also depicts the internal urge of women to break all conventional identities in order to live with freedom. Margaret also shows many examples where a victim in the novel adopts the path of survival and later enables her identity or self free from any sort of conventional clutches where woman is seen as an object for sexual pleasure or for doing monotonous house hold works of washing clothes or sweeping floors.

The paper traces the woman's survival that defines her place as a woman in this world through the novels of Margaret Atwood. Her novels deal with the theme of survival as projected by the female protagonists of her novels. The major themes of her novels are failure and fertility, mild anti-Americanism, multiculturalism, nature vs. human, search of self-identity, Southern Ontario Gothic, underdog-heroes, urban vs. rural and women empowerment.

As she is claimed as a feminist writer of nineteen sixties, she has tried to encompass all experiences as a woman, as a female and as a writer. Atwood is under strong influence of nationalism. Her feminism is also related to her sense of feminism, nationalism and both the Canadian and female identity. Her critical writings prove her quest for survival and gender consciousness.

In her novels, she has channeled out beautiful caves behind her character and their personalities, and thus takes the reader to the past memory through which the present is focused and lived. In her novels, Atwood deals with women's intimate and authentic experiences and

she draws a self –portrait of woman as the artist and hero who is faithful to her own inner commands. She creates an image of a hero whose character does not lack depth or sensitivity. A special relationship between the protagonists and the novels records their feelings and fantasies. Atwood has invented heroes who fulfill their vision of character and destiny. In these novels; the protagonist becomes a unique individual signifying a female. They all embark on journeys in an attempt to rediscover lost parts of themselves. According to Atwood, acknowledging one's own culpability is the only way a victim can truly survive. All women in her novels succeed in their endeavors and must be true survivors.

The paper deals with women's experience in male dominated culture. The themes of novels present women caught in oppressive stereotypes from which some women struggle to create a female space for themselves. This may be done through autonomy of thought, self-definition and self-reconstruction of one's own history, through creative composition, oral or written and bonding among women through a refusal to take up the victim's position or the role of subjugation.

Thus, the paper focus on the gender politics which is being fixed by birth that splits her apart with the enforced gender. Throughout her existence, she is never treated as a complete individual and she cannot locate herself as a human being. Atwood gives speech to her life and power to her insignificant presence in the society. The silent woman becomes aware of her individuality and forces her in the world of man from where she is removed as a useless commodity.

#### V. FEMINISTIC APPROACH IN ATWOOD'S NOVEL

The 'women's movement' of the 1960s was not the moment when the mechanism of feminism started. Women's inequality in society showed

its signs much earlier in the works of many women authors like in Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Women" (1792) which discusses male authors like Milton, Pope and Rousseau. Toril Moi describes major terms or stages related to women's emancipation, for example 'Feminist' was related to political position of women, 'Female' to biology and 'Feminine' to a set of culturally defined characteristic of women. The force of feminism lies between 'female' and 'feminine' [6].

## VI. THE CONCEPT OF FEMINIST

This is the final outcome of women's agitation against patriarchy during 1970s or 1980s. Feminism is a super concept for 'feminist', 'feminine' and 'female' phases in the revolution of learning of equality between genders. Feminism produced feministic criticism during 1980s, which consults other theories like Marxism and Structuralism and many others. It became more radical by attacking on male versions of the word and finally aspired to establish literary cannon of female writing which would exhibit hidden and forcefully suppressed female feelings and experiences. Showalter also describes three phases of feminism in the history of women's writing. According to her, a feminine phase (1840-80) , in which women write imitated dominant male artistic norms and aesthetic Standards; then a feminist Phase (1880-1920) in which radical and often separatist positions are maintained and finally a female phase ( 1920 onward )which looked particularly at female writing and female experiences [7] .

Anglo-American critics are primarily concerned with the study of written literature by women and as women. French feminist critics concentrate more on the theory of gender in writing. Margaret Atwood is undoubtedly influenced by them and presents an unequal political world where women are even denied a simple life. Howell mentioned about Margaret Atwood that her writing is grounded on the

strong sense of her own cultural identity, nationality and gender [8].

To see Atwood's feministic approach, it is necessary to see thematic aspects of her novels and minute details of her character sketches. Her novels are women specific and show the struggling females who are almost non-existing entities from the patriarchal point of view. Her novels open up with startling details and carry suspense, and thrill throughout the narration. According to Atwood the victimization of the female has been an accepted tradition in any society of this man made world. Margaret Atwood satirizes the society for its stereotypical narrow minded mentality for women.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Margaret Atwood has a talent for the conscientious feministic perspective. The tone of her works seems to indicate her sense of political and social responsibility. Her poem '*Spelling*' is a testament to the power of words and it depicts the victimization of powerless mute women. Atwood starts it by describing her daughter on the floor, learning how to spell for the first time and then leads the reader through a history of persecuted helpless women. Atwood depicts the woman caught in a war and her thighs are tied together by the enemies, so she could not give birth. Such disturbing portrayals of women have earned Atwood the reputation of a daring feminist.

One hardly needs to refer to the use of a woman's image as a sex symbol that is being utilized for selling almost everything under the sun. Atwood is aware of the challenges that women face and she is not living in a fool's paradise with a belief that women have decisively reached the goal of equality with men or they have asserted their identity at a level where they can claim it to be the affirmation of their distinct self. Many authors have been similarly urging and appearing against the violence on women through their writings.

Therefore, it is very important to consider those cotemporary authors along with the intense study of Margaret Atwood's feministic approach in her universally acclaimed novels. Hence, the paper shows how women live in such a situation and create a female space or identity for themselves.

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