



SOCIAL CRITICISM IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S SELECTED NOVELS: A REINTERPRETATION

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Abstract- Margaret Atwood is the prominent postmodern Canadian writer and she highlights environmental degradation along with exploring dark side of human nature and criticise various social practises in her novels as foundational theme. In this research paper we will discuss about how our social practises affected lives of human beings like commercialisation of human, nature and animals in our society to gain material wealth adversely impact on our society. In her novels she highlights that human commercialised human and women get objectified in patriarchal society. “*The Edible Women, The Handmaids Tale, The Year of Flood and Oryx and Crake*” show evil aspect of our society where Marxism, materialism, eco-criticism and adverse impact of technology is common theme that encourages readers to think consequences of human actions.

Keywords –Materialism, Marxism, social hierarchy, feminism, commercialisation

This study focuses on darker aspect of human, nature and society. Margaret Atwood focused on darker side of human nature and represent social criticism of contemporary society from multiple perspectives. For instance, in her novel “*The Handmaids Tale*” she highlights how women are involved in oppression of women and helps in commodification of other women for personal benefit. Feminism has no place in this society and feminism faces criticism because of under pressure of patriarchal society where women characters help to keep patriarchy society in existence. where women can be purchased and sold for benefit of others. In the novel *The Handmaids Tale, The Edible Woman* and *The Bluebird* represents that how women are exploited for benefit of others and lots of public activities are for woman degradation. Themes of secrecy, depiction and power dynamics are highlighted in these novels. Novel “*Surfacing*” shows impact of psychological trauma and the complexities of human relationships that explores darker aspect of our society like control, oppression, complexities of relationships, mental trauma etc. Commercialisation and objectification human shown in the selected novels of her which represents how our society exploit woman and nature too for benefit of some people and we are also part of this exploitation. Novels *Surfacing, The Handmaids tale, The Edible Woman* and *Oryx and Crake* are dystopian novels which highlights evil or hidden side of human nature, commercialisation of nature, woman and children. Protagonists of these novels are easy source of representation of social criticism from multiple perspectives like easy bargaining of human, nature and children.

Similarly short story “*Free for all*” shows dismal face of our society where human segregated from human because of the sexually transmitted disease and the infected people are left to die by abandoning from society. By exploring the darker aspects of human nature, the story raises questions on morality and ethics of our society, this story is warning against dehumanisation of certain groups of people and the importance of empathy and understanding. This story serves as senses of fear and rigid control over uninfected people and dictating their lives and freedoms. The fear of disease drives desire of protect oneself on the cost of human lives, moral decay is the main theme of these novels which demonstrate how fear and desire of protecting oneself drives people to be dehumanize and moral values are degrading on the cost of human lives.

In the novel “*The Edible Women*” we have seen that protagonist struggling for her identity and women get objectified to fit on societal norms and expectations which became more difficult for them, women are treated as they are object and they should be perfect looking, their body should be fit and perfect on societal parameters, their skin tone should be perfect, and they should be perfect on all parameters defined by society. In this novel the character “*The Woman Down below*” is the landlady who symbolizes traditional living and judge lifestyle of Marian and Ainsley and her actions symbol of societal expectation which drives to put restrictions of women’s lifestyle of living. Ainsley is highlighted manipulative and protective nature of women which proves her desire to fit into societal expectations, she seduces Len to get pregnant by him to prove herself as an ideal woman who can fit into society and expectations which are imposed by society on women, her actions are unconventional but her desire is to get just fit in contemporary society.

In novel “Surfacing” exploitation of nature and women for individual benefit is become common and degradation of nature is important feature for gaining economic wealth. Natural resources of food and feeding both are exploited, child birth rate are decreased and this novel lover himself compels protagonist to abort the child and when she abort she feels herself as murderous which shows her emotional and artistic death. Women and nature are interconnected and Eco feminists says where nature get exploited women also vice versa, the novel gives us picture how nature get exploited in the name of progress and progress became cause of degradation of women and nature, in the chapter 1 of this novel there are symbols of nature degradation “white birches are dying” sea shell, fishes are dying are symbolize environment degradation and undefined scientific progress which is progress but on the cost of nature and ecofeminism along with Eco criticism is important theme of this novel which represent human degradation along with nature exploitation, eco feminism is vital theme of this work which represent self-made women who was struggling for identity crisis and have past memories of her life and ecofeminism explained how women get degraded where nature exploited, death of herons symbolizes interconnectedness of women and nature and herons death is related to commercialisation of women. In an instance character Anna portrayed objectification of women and uses her beauty to attract men and expose her body in the way in which women bodies are commoditised. Societal expectations and beauty standard are becoming cause of women degradation, the portrayed of women critics societal expectations placed on women particularly in terms of their roles as wives, mothers and sex objects. Ecofeminism introduces connection between women and nature which provides introduction of two new world and interconnection between them, represents how our contemporary society oppress, compel and dominate both women and nature for individual benefit. In the patriarchal society we have seen measurement and distinction of man from nature, women and nature both are feminine and have close connection between them but man has disconnection from nature which represent separation from mother nature and this dualistic in nature, surfacing represents the darkness of human nature towards natural world and human itself.

In “The Year of Flood”, we see concept of waterless flood which symbolise end of the world and climate change in this world, man’s disconnection from nature and natural world provides us detail of how man’s activities represent downfall of nature and natural disasters took place in this world due to undefined human action on the name of develop porgressable society. The waterless flood represents swipe away human from the natural world as punishment of their involvement in extinctions of other species as per god gardener’s belief waterless flood is a hyper object which use by god to swipe away human from the world and punishment to human for inhuman activities, and this compare to god’s dark angel that fly by night to control human activities, in the adverse time dark side of our contemporary society explored in this novel too like selfishness, cruelty, and willingness to do anything to survive and no matter what cost on it is may be it is on cost of human lives or natural resources.

“The Painball Arena” is a brutal space where human are forced to fight until death for their entertainment, it criticises our society for inhumanity and “The Corpse corps” is the corrupt society which represents violence, and brutal aspect of people and they can do anything for their survival and individual benefit, “The God’s Gardners” is the group of people who are eco activist and spiritual seekers which serves as commentary on human nature such as intolerance, xenophobia, and a willingness to supress and these examples are representation of criticism of our contemporary society including violence, exploitation, and the exist with in humanity. Oppression, violence, cruelty are important aspect of these novels which represent gloom side of human nature and how man became manipulative and selfish for his survival.

In “The Handmaids Tale” patriarchal view, forced labour, surveillance and control are important themes serve warning against environment degradation and exploitation of human rights. Forced reproductive labour, bearing children for ruling class are commentary on exploitation of women and use of their bodies for commercial benefit highlights dark brutal aspect of our contemporary society and this is not limited only Canadian society but it spread worldwide. Surveillance and control are called eyes of God and this aspect represents warning against the dangers of patriarchal fundamentalism, oppression and extinction of humanity. The year of flood is the novel which highlights environment concerns and declining of women and human due to environment degradation. In the opening lines of novel protagonist Toby introduces herself and her concern for declining environment represent man’s dismal behaviour towards nature and natural things, dying animals and deforestation is seen in the starting paragraph of this novel and protagonist worried about degrading nature and deforestation. Unchecked capitalism and exploitation of power highlighting corporate cynicism and the contrast between luxurious corporate compounds and lawless territories governed by corporate interests represents disparities in society. Survival struggle is seen in this novel which underscores how our society harsh and cruel towards human and nature for individual benefit. Toby used to collect produce and cheeks on her garden but faced difficulty due to animals that ruined her food source and she has decided to kill one if she wants to protect her food but later, she felt guilty on her action and this incident showing harsh realities of this world.

In the “Oryx and Crake”, we see in the opening lines snowman is alone and starving, he sees several naked people on beach and for survival he eats mangoes but later in the novel he sees several human dead for human organ transplantation and human kidneys are removed for production of more kidneys, Blyssplus pills is new invention and crake promoted these pills in ad campaign, these pills are for control human sexual desire, libido desire and even it was used for control human reproduction system and this function hide from people and it is claimed that these pills are for prevention of sexual disease but controlling human reproduction system is hidden and Crake’s strict approach to the world leading his experience in lack of empathy and understanding of human nature, he exploited nature for his personal benefit and creation of genetically modified creatures for human benefit highlights his selfish nature over environment degradation, Crakes ability to create and release pandemic showcase his emotional and sociopathic tendencies. Control and manipulation are an important aspect of this novel which leads social criticism and personal benefit over environment, animals also exploited in this novel and seeing as commodity of earning money and commercialisation of animals and other natural resources is became leading theme of this novel, genetic engineering became harmful for animals and modified humans as well animals took place of natural human and natural resources challenging degradation of human and nature.

Margaret Atwood is the environmentalist and due to her concern for environment she has highlighted the themes of harsh contemporary society and criticises various social practises dark human nature and in her novels, she represents how woman and nature exploited in this world for individual. Dark human nature of Margaret Atwood’s novels leads to evil characters in her works

who are shrewd, cunning and aggressive. Margaret Atwood novels leading evil or inhuman characteristics of characters and she tried to keep these characters not too positive or too negative for instance Lady Oracle, Cats eye, and the Robbers bride are leading examples of represents women characters who are evil and became cause of downfall of protagonist and society. Patriarchal power and biblical representation of eve is cause of downfall of Adam and Margaret Atwood is became famous author of dystopian novels which serves how some characters help to maintain patriarchal power of society. Consumerism and corporate greed is an important aspect of her novels which underscores our societal practises which highlights dehumanisation and unchecked advancement highlights exploitation of nature and natural resources by human and in her novel “Oryx and Crake” she raises questions on progress without ethics and critique on capitalism , she critiques on patriarchal practises where man hold power and money and women leads to hold slavery, where both man and women had to survive in an dystopian world. She encourages readers to reflect unchecked scientific progress, corporate power and environmental degradation.

Her novels critiques limited resources for women and societal expectation from women, gender stereotyping and women exploitation in this contemporary society became tool to maintaining patriarchal power and power dynamics is a play in terms of authority on women bodies and identities. Her novels are thought provoking and helpful to understand societal structures where gender discrimination, commercialisation, capitalism and oppression are foundational theme. Social criticism and critique on feminism are important part of her novel “The Handmaids Tale” this dystopian tale portrays colonizing forces, reactionary and multifaceted regime where man and women had to fit predetermined roles along with their whole personality including way of talking, dressing and way of living. Criticism of feminism, societal structures, hyper patriarchal society is focused points of this novel which highlights these social issues including castes system too in Gilead making our society difficult for many people to live and Margaret Atwood provokes her readers thought towards society and its norms which deforming our societal structures and encouraging readers to think and change our society and leads to checked scientific progress able people who help to maintain balance between man and nature.

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