

POST-COLONIAL IDENTITY IN MARGRET ATWOOD'S SURFACING – A STUDY

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Abstract

Canadian literature in English is one of the most virile works of literature. More like the observable sound, it has offered two major critical attitudes those are based on the merit analysis and a proper critical perspective. While reading new kinds of literature, it is not a matter of granting concessions but of exploring and defining tradition is a significant tenant. But, Canadian literature has a deep tradition and a canon. The standard is also on a different level. These structures may help to develop within a narrower frame of time and it acquires young writer's valuable thoughts and ideas in the given situational perspective. After the emergence out of the Canadian tradition of the English – French – American trinity, there is a number of writers have started to write about their conditions, sufferings, and most importantly their identity. This paper also deals with the real identity of Canadian magnanimity that they have not had under the British colonialism. Margret Atwood's "Surfacing" is a novel, which is clearly depicted the identity of Canada after its post-colonial epoch.

Keyword: Colonialism, feminism, identity, alienation, quest

1.INTRODUCTION

Margaret Atwood is a living author and she was born in 1939 at Ottawa in Canada. She is a poet, novelist, literary critic, essayist, inventor, teacher, and environmental and human rights activist. She has become one of the leading women novelists and one of the best Canadian writers. She is receiving so many awards like Booker Prize, Giller Prize, Arthur C. Clarke Award, etc. for her literary career. Her *The Blind Assassin (2000)* has been nominated for the Booker Prize five times. She is authored on seventeen anthologies, sixteen novels, ten

non-fiction, eight children's book, and one graphic novel so far. Besides writing, she has also invented the LongPen and develops with its associated technologies. Her invention facilitates the remote robotic writing of documents.

2.COMMON THEMES IN ATWOOD'S NOVELS

Atwood has been bringing up the label of feminism in writing. She gives that much of importance for women in her works. She willfully works within the background of the feminist movements. Therefore, numbers of critics consider her as a feminist writer. Her most celebrated novels are *The Edible Woman (1969)*, *Surfacing (1972)*, *Life Before Man (1979)*, *The Handmaid's Tale(1985)*, *Cat's Eye(1988)*, *The Blind Assassin (2000)*, and *Oryx and Crake(2003)*. Atwood uses many themes in her works like the portrayal of male and female relationships, power, psychological quest, feminist themes, and autonomy of the individual. Along with the themes, she writes about the art and its creation, the dangers of ideology, and sexual politics, she deconstructs myths, fairy-tales and the classic for the new audience. Her work is often gothic and it gives her a wide reputation.

3.COLONIALISM IN SURFACING

Surfacing is considered a psychological thriller, detective, feminist, post-colonial, and postmodern novel. Based on traditional sense, it is not considered as a post-colonial novel because most of the post-colonial novels are written by its authors from various countries and the novels have stretched bloody independence from the empires such as Great Britain, France, Spain, and America. These novels habitually mark the properties of chaos or bloody nationalism or quest of an independent national identity along with a response to the political marking of colonialism. From the time when the time Canadian independence from Britain has arisen,

Surfacing does not a descent into the traditional post-colonial classification. It does, however, explore an emerging of original Canadian identity. Pirnajmuddin, in his article, tells about the novel "deals with the exploitation and destruction of the wilderness of Canada by those who claim to be rational and enlightened people" (MASCER, 7).

4. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NOVEL

Surfacing has been brought out the condition of the totality of women's alienation through the narrator's continuous feeling of separation and its consequences by Atwood. The narrator feels unrestrained by her father's disappearance and her mother's detachment. She has discovered that men are alienating women by controlling them by the ways of religion, marriage, birth control, sex, language, and birth. She represents men's view as a warrior and its victims are women. The narrator also describes her separation as logical and underlining the way that children acquire gender roles early in life. The result of the narrator's separation creates madness and complete removal from society. So, how the narrator remains separated like other women are also separating from society in some ways. Hence, the struggles of the protagonist and the narrator's self-exploration are the significance of the novel.

5. POST-COLONIAL IDENTITY IN SURFACING

Surfacing is Atwood's second novel. It is divided into three parts. The first part has eight chapters (from one to eight), the second part has eleven chapters from (nine to nineteen), and the third part has eight chapters (from twenty to twenty-seven). *Surfacing* deals with protagonist's two weeks actions. Atwood does not bring up the protagonist's name but she drives to psychological breakdown due to her unwillingness of observing the social outlooks which are forced on women. This non-existence of name hints at serious problems of individuality and of communication. The unnamed protagonist and narrator of the novel have some strong trends towards separation, anti-Americanism, and introspective. The unnamed protagonist suggests the lack of real identity and it denotes that she does not belong in her own culture. Atwood portrays the alienation from end to end searching of the narrator's missing father in a distant

island in Quebec along with her boyfriend, Joe and her other friends, David and Anna. She expresses sufferings, socially isolated, and distrustful of love through the deep psychological and emotional revolution of the narrator. So, the narrator ultimately moves like a mad and lives like an animal. But she appears as a more rational being on the island. Atwood composes thoroughly the narrator's unfiltered thoughts and observations in *Surfacing*.

The first part of the novel deals with the incidents of the narrator's search of her missing father, a botanist, when they spent their summer. The narrator leaves the city and travels to the Canadian wilderness to find her father. He may possibly dead. David is a cinematographer; Anna is his passive girlfriend like a doll; and Joe, the narrator's hairy lover; and an unsatisfied potter. While they travel towards north direction, the narrator suggests that the three of them are in the erroneous place or she may be in the wrong place. Due to her separation, she also considers her homeland as a foreign country and then she supplements that she does not know the way to reach her father. It looks clear that she has become separated from her parents and she does not attend her mother's funeral in the past. One more reason for her alienation from them is the unpleasant Americans. She records the changes of Americans who have paved roads, a new motel, a concrete bridge, and other constructions threaten the transparency of her recollections. She regrets bringing new technology, huge pollution, and cruel violence. These are slowly the causes them to turn towards northward. It reflects the domination of America. The narrator narrates the story of her husband and a child, drowned brother, and her aborted baby. The baby may consider with one of the twins. It does not have adequate maturity. Atwood creates the character of two babies which refers to two countries: Canada and America. The author depicts her American experience as:

There was a covered bridge here once, but it was too far north to be quaint. They tore it down three years before I left, to improve the dam, and replaced it with the concrete bridge which is here now, enormous, monumental, dwarfing the village. It's the dam that controls the lake: sixty years ago they raised the lake level so that whenever they wanted to flush the logs down the narrow outflow river to the mill they would have enough water power. But they don't do much

logging here anymore. A few men work on railway maintenance, one freight train a day; ... (12)

The second part of the novel depicts the narrator's return to the divided self. The narrator comes to know that David and Anna have a mutual vicious relationship. This relationship is attempted by David to capture on film, in that way Anna is as an object rather than a person. The narrator has believed that David is also in lack of love with her and vice versa. Like the Americans, David is an exploiter. Ironically, the real Canadians who wish to improve her father's island possessions, and he wants to flood the area. In fact, part of David's problem is not an original attack on the Americans and he himself becomes Americanized. The narrator notices her father's drawings and a number of scrapbooks those belonged to her mother, brother, and her. She reads her scrapbook. "I searched through it carefully, looking for something I could recognize as myself, where no drawings at all, where I had come from or gone wrong; but there were no drawings at all, just illustrations cut from magazines and pasted in (Atwood, 72).

These two i.e. her father's drawing book and their scrapbook lead her to the cliff where she faiths to find the Native American paintings and clues about her father's fate. The vision radically alters her, setting her apart from her companions who have turned against the gods and yet will torture her for deviation. She marks but her choice is understood ironically as inhuman. Part two concludes with the narrator's decision to engage her with another language that the language does not associate with the principal culture because she reminds herself that her nation is a border country. It is an area to meet French and English-speaking people.

The last part of the novel starts with the narrator who is being drenched by Joe. She has already been defined as more animal than David or Anna. The father projected in her childish picture of the moon-mother and horned man. While their amalgamation influence strengthens the conventional gender roles that she has already rejected, the narrator's description of their connection is barren of feeling. He is only a worth of modernizing the two shares separated by her involvement in the abortion. The narrator protects herself when the others leave, turns the capturing reflect the wall, rejects her marriage ring and clothes, leaves the cabin, and enters her parents' world. Language interrupts as she breaks down and then she perceives parents and returns to nature. She realizes the ghosts have been banished and

she is free. At the end of the novel, she states that the most important thing is to reject to be a victim but she must confirm whether she goes to Joe or not. "This above all, to refuse to be a victim. Unless I can do that, I can do nothing. I have recent, give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone. A lie which was always more disastrous than the truth would have been" (Atwood, 150). If she goes, her depiction of him as half-formed suggests that she will be the creator and shaper but not he.

6.CONCLUSION

Throughout the novel, Atwood demands a woman's conservative social and sexual role. *Surfacing* traces on the health risks related with hormonal contraception, abortion, the idea of contraception as a male creation, the power received in gravidity, the social inferences of makeup, the hypothetically false ideal of the wedding, the idea of a natural woman, and the inner mechanism that men employ to control over women. Atwood makes the unnamed narrator feel isolation by social forces that cast her in a particular gender role that in complete withdrawal. As such, Atwood grants a frank criticism of the sexual and social norms enforced upon women. Finally, the protagonist of the novel fights with the forces that conquer her. At the end of the novel, she overcomes confidence and a sagacity of freedom.

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