



## **Feministic Approach in the novels of Margaret Atwood**

<sup>1</sup>**Maninder Kaur**, Research Scholar

<sup>2</sup>**Dr. Disha Khanna**, Dean, Faculty of Liberal Arts  
GNA University, Phagwara

### **Abstract-**

The current paper aims to concentrate on feminism in Margaret Atwood's books. It then provides the work's conclusion after illuminating human life's paradoxes with a focus on feminism. This essay makes the claim that feminism and inward exploration are strongly related. There are two choices available to everyone: one is to dwell in a world of make-believe like an ostrich, and the other is to enter the room and confront reality. While the first technique would be very handy and pleasant, the second would force one to change their beliefs and attitudes. Atwood is drawn to the second alternative and searches for the truth because she is sure that nothing else will adequately reflect the current circumstances. The standing of women in the household and the function of women outside of the home are the main topics of the essay.

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

### **INTRODUCTION**

Humans are like the Earth's blessing; they are equipped with an unstoppable intellectual power to defend both their own lives and the environment in which they dwell. Every person should be aware of the importance of their life. To ensure that all living things are comfortable, they must adopt specific corrective measures at regular intervals. The situation gets paradoxical when the contrary occurs and a person is neither able to defend his own life nor the lives of others. Since the beginning of human life on Earth, it has frequently been observed that anarchic forces occasionally manifest and turn into heinous destroyers of innocent lives. A dictatorship or anarchy has both political and economic sway. Those who are successful in amassing wealth frequently suffocate the lives of innocent people.

Women have historically been taken advantage of by the so-called godlike Man in numerous ways. It is erroneous to believe that men are more important than women. We must acknowledge that gender politics are the source of this ideology. Man is viewed as a sign of strength and wealth. The idea that



only males should work and make money is a sexist fixed rule that pervades society. Women are not permitted to leave the confines of their homes. Women are only used as a sexual object and to perform menial tasks like cooking, washing dishes, and other menial household chores. It is quite strange to witness such a stupid, anti-women political agenda. People find it incomprehensible when wives or girls refuse to perform household chores while husbands are forced to complete these menial tasks. Later, when women started to become more aware of gender politics, it was because of an inherent drive to learn more through education. A tradition of excluding women from education also exists. Few women, who did so covertly, started reading books and became aware of the gravity and importance of the situation. Such women attempted to explain their situation after sensing their overwhelmed lives.

### **MARGARET ATWOOD, A FEMINISTIC AUTHOR**

One person who was able to comprehend the pitiful predicament of women is Margaret Atwood. She is now regarded as a Canadian literary icon for being a female feminist novelist. According to legend, following the First World War, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, conscious initiatives to empower women began. Women now have the freedom to work and be paid fairly. The Women's Liberation Movement granted women some freedom during the 1960s and 1970s, which brought about an unforeseen transformation. In order to feel liberated from institutional exploitation, women had to travel an almost 100-year journey of emancipation from enslavement. Such events and circumstances are used by Margaret Atwood in her masterwork to eloquently depict the progression of women's independence. She portrayed the predicament of women who were initially unaware of their exploitation and then rejected it in order to live a life of independence.

A well-known and respected female novelist from Canada named Margaret Eleanor Atwood is also a feminism critic and social activist. Since she was young, she had a strong interest in reading literature and saw it as her passion. She has authored more than 35 volumes, including novels, short tales, poetry, literary critiques, social history, and children's books, as a result of her propensity for producing works of literary merit. More than twenty-two languages have been used to translate her books.

Recent Canadian fiction frequently features Margaret Atwood. In the 1960s, Atwood established her



reputation as a poet, and since then, she has gained a devoted following as a fiction author. She is well-known worldwide, particularly among feminists.

She had a reputation as a serious author with a lot of promise. She demonstrated a great understanding of the inner workings of the female psyche and developed a prestigious reputation among female writers for her imaginative interpretations of feminist ideas. She investigates the connection between people, nature, and the power and behaviour of people. She built a solid reputation by teaching literature to students at many reputable universities.

Margaret Atwood and feminism are frequently linked. She makes a point of empowering women with her enticing books. The names "feminism" and "feminist" originally emerged in France, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and the United States in 1872, 1890, and 1910, respectively. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the terms "feminist" and "feminism" first appeared in print in 1894 and 1895, respectively.

Elaine Showalter describes how feminist theory evolved through many stages. The first stage, known as "feminist critique," requires the readers to look at the world's written literary works from an ideological perspective. The second is known as "Gynocritics," in which women generate the textual meaning, which then determines the course of each person or group of women's literary careers and literary history. The final stage of the development of feminist theory is known as gender theory, which looks at how the gender system and the ideological impacts of male-predominant literature affect people.

### **FEMINISTIC APPROACH IN ATWOOD'S NOVEL**

The process of feminism did not begin with the "women's movement" of the 1960s. The early writings of numerous female authors, such as Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Women" (1792), which critiques male authors like Milton, Pope, and Rousseau, demonstrated the existence of women's inequality in society. Toril Moi explains key concepts or phases of the emancipation of women. For instance, "feminist" referred to a political perspective held by women, "female" to biology, and "feminine" to a group of traits associated with women as defined by culture. Between the terms "female" and "feminine," feminism finds its power.



Women's experiences with gender power dynamics and their problematic relationships to patriarchal traditions of authority share similarities with Canadian views on American cultural imperialism and its ambivalence regarding its European descendants.

Beginning in the early nineteenth century, specific women and a few men spoke out against male supremacy, which consigned women to the outskirts of society and gave them poor status. As a result, public awareness was growing, but there were still few indications that the political or social order was changing.

Feminist science fiction, a branch of science fiction that focuses on women's position in society, first appeared at the turn of the 20th century. The first wave of feminism was represented by female writers in the literary movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the 1920s, authors like Clare Winger Harris and Gertrude Barrows Bennett created science fiction works from female perspectives that occasionally dealt with issues of gender and sexuality to depict the terrible treatment of women by men. They showed how men treated women as things to provide them with coercive sex pleasure. Science fiction incorporated sensationalism with social, political, and technological criticism by the 1960s. The success of feminism in Canada had been a gradual struggle for establishing equal rights between women and men.

### **FEMINISM IN ATWOOD'S NOVEL**

The hidden subjugated world of women, where social injustice drives them toward evil, is the subject of Atwood's books. Margaret Atwood also explores the innate desire of women to reject all socially prescribed identities in order to live freely. Margaret also gives numerous instances in the book where a victim chooses the route of survival and later liberates herself or herself from any sort of conventional grips where women are viewed as objects for sex or to perform boring housework like sweeping floors or washing clothes.

Through the books of Margaret Atwood, the paper explores the woman's struggle for survival and how it defines her status as a woman in this world. The female characters of her novels project the notion of survival across her works. Failure and fertility, mild anti-Americanism, multiculturalism, nature vs. humanity, the search for one's own identity, Southern Ontario Gothic, underdog heroes, urban vs. rural, and women's empowerment are some of the key themes in her books.

She has made an effort to include all of her experiences as a woman, a female, and a writer because



she is regarded as a feminist writer of the 1960s. Nationalism has a big impact on Atwood. Her sense of feminism, nationalism, and both the Canadian and female identities are all connected to her feminism. Her critical essays attest to her fight for life and gender awareness.

She uses gorgeous caverns as the inspiration for her characters' personalities in her books, transporting the reader to the past memory that serves as the lens through which the present is experienced. Atwood discusses women's personal, real-life experiences in her works.

She creates a self-portrait of herself as a woman who is a hero and artist who follows her own inner guidance. She paints a picture of a hero whose personality doesn't lack nuance or compassion. The protagonists and the novels have a unique connection that captures their emotions and fantasies. Atwood has created fictional heroes who live up to their expectations for personality and fate. The protagonist in these books takes on a distinctive persona that denotes a female. To reclaim lost facets of themselves, they all set out on trips. A victim can only genuinely survive, in Atwood's opinion, if they admit their own guilt. In her books, every woman achieves success and is required to be a true survivor.

### **THE CONCEPT OF FEMINIST**

The result of women's protests against patriarchy in the 1970s or 1980s is this. Feminism is a catch-all term for the "feminist," "feminine," and "female" phases of the revolution in learning about gender equality. During the 1980s, feministic critique emerged and consulted numerous other ideologies, including Marxism and structuralism. By challenging masculine uses of the word, it developed into a more extreme movement that ultimately aimed to create a literary canon of female literature that would reveal hidden and forcibly suppressed female feelings and experiences. Additionally, Showalter outlines three stages of feminism in the development of women's literature. She argues that writing by women went through three distinct phases: a feminine phase (1840–80) in which they imitated dominant male artistic norms and aesthetic standards; a feminist phase (1880–2010) in which radical and frequently separatist positions are upheld; and finally, a female phase (1920–onward) that focused specifically on female writing and female experiences.

The analysis of written literature created by and for women is of particular interest to Anglo-American critics. French feminist critics focus more on writing theories of gender. They surely had an impact on Margaret Atwood, who depicts a political society where women are even denied the



chance to live a simple existence. Howell said that Margaret Atwood's writing is strongly rooted in her sense of her own cultural identity, national identity, and gender.

Thematic elements of Atwood's books and minute details of her character sketches must be viewed in order to understand her feministic perspective. Her books are geared for women and highlight the struggles of these nearly nonexistent from a patriarchal perspective females. Her books begin with shocking details, and the narration is filled with suspense and thrills. According to Atwood, it has long been a custom in every community in this artificially created world to victimise women. In her satire, Margaret Atwood mocks society's narrow-minded attitudes about women.

## CONCLUSION

Margaret Atwood has a gift for writing from a conscious feminist perspective. Her writing style appears to reflect a sense of civic and social responsibility. Her poem "Spelling," which portrays the abuse of helpless mute women, is a tribute to the strength of language. Atwood begins by describing her daughter learning to spell for the first time while sitting on the floor. She then takes the reader through a timeline of oppressed, defenceless women. In her illustration of a woman caught up in a conflict, Atwood shows how the foes have bound her thighs together, preventing her from giving birth. Atwood has gained a reputation as a brave feminist for her frightening representations of women.

It scarcely needs to be said that nearly everything under the sun is sold using images of women as sex symbols. Atwood is aware of the difficulties that women encounter, and she doesn't believe that they have successfully attained equality with males or that their identity has been enough proclaimed to qualify as an assertion of their unique selves. Similar calls and statements against violence against women have been made by other authors in their writings. Therefore, it is crucial to take into account these contemporary writers in addition to a thorough analysis of Margaret Atwood's feminism in her widely regarded works. The research demonstrates how women deal with this scenario and forge a female identity for themselves.

## REFERENCES

[1] Moss John, A Reader's Guide to the Canadian Novel, Ontario: McClelland and Steward, 1987,



p.1.

[2] Showalter Elaine, "Toward a Feminist Poetics," *Women's Writing and Writing about Women*, London: Croom Helm, 1979.

[3] Fiona Tolan, *Margaret Atwood: feminism and fiction*, Costerus (Atlantic Highlands); Rodopi, Volume 170, 2007.

[4] Louisa May Alcott, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, Random House Edition, 1995.

[5] Eleanor Rao, *Strategies For Identity: The fiction of Margaret Atwood*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), p.24.

[6] Toril Moi, *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism* (London: Macmillan; and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell), 1989, pp. 115-32.

[7] Showalter Elaine, "Toward a Feminist Poetics," *Women's Writing and Writing about Women*, London: Croom Helm, 1979.

[8] Carol Ann Howell, *Margaret Atwood*; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p.213.