

**THEME OF FEMINIST CATASTROPE AND ECO - FEMINISM IN ATWOOD'S  
"SURFACING"**

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**Abstract**

This paper focuses on gender crisis and feminist exploration concepts such as violence and sexual abuse against the backdrops of a women's psychological and physical disaster. It also analyzed Eco- feminist perspective, the psychological imbalance of women with men and women with nature. It's a great attempt towards a women,s Self- identification like physical, social,economical, spiritual and moreover environmental. A study of nature through women's notion, analysis the supreme importance of women and how Atwood generous in her expression and women being a central object (centralization) among Society and Ecology. Women play a vital part in the environmental movement. Here, Atwood highlights and focuses on women's interest in caring for nature.

Key words: Feminism, Eco-Feminism, Ecology, Environmental movement.

**Introduction**

Feminism – a theme in many of Atwood's novels, explore the perspectives of female narrative and the way women are marginalized in their profession and private life. Surfacing is Atwood's second novel and a general approach to this text cannot do justice, since this novel transcends all 'isms' including feminism.

Atwood's contribution to the cause of women is immense and this text surfacing gives a lucid picture of hear noteworthy contribution. The novel presets a female perspective. The nameless narrator appears at the beginning of the novel as a voice rather than a person. She has no name, no feeling and no desire to communicate with others.

Atwood deliberately avoids the name of the narrator in order to emphasize the universality of the narrator's feeling of alienation from society. The cause and effects of the narrator's psychological transformation remains a mystery. The narrator feels emotionally numb, isolated by the numerous roles which she is supposed to play in her life.

Surfacing deals with a young woman who goes in search of her missing father on a remote island to the northern Quebec, a country side which is far from the city. She is accompanied by three friends: David, his wife Anna and the heroine's lover Joe. She loves a man who exploits her innocence and makes her pregnant. He refuses to marry her, she undergoes an abortion just to make him happy. She is distanced from her parents for about nine years after undergoing the forced abortion.

After aborting, while he comes to collect her, he says: "It's over, he said feel better?" (Surfacing 145). This act of abortion has been traumatic for her; she feels mutilated and half-dead and she considers herself a sinner. She says: "I was emptied, amputated; I stank of salt and antiseptic, they had planted death in me like a seed" (Surfacing 145). This ruthless way in which she allowed her child to be aborted in her young days transforms her completely.

The sense of killing her own child turns her into a psyche. She could not face even her parents by this disastrous incident and hence decides to move away from them. She just sends them a post card concealing her identity. Communication comes to an end and they are departed from each other once for all.

The heroine(narrator) initially suffers a state of inner apathy incapable of absorbing or generating human feeling. She is haunted by guilt. She even regrets that she could have easily resisted the forced abortion since the man refused to marry her. And another decisive factor that contributes to her mental imbalance is her marriage with a middle-aged man. Before marriage everything seems to be pleasant to her. But after her marriage she feels that her husband has betrayed his principles. Reluctantly out of compulsion she bears a child to him. She begins to despise him for treating her as a commodity of pleasure and a child-bearing machine. Living with him becomes unbearable. Words like love and marriage lose their sanctity. She begins to search for love devoid of demands and expectations.

The narrator obtains and say that “A divorce is like an amputation. You survive but there’s less of you. Due to these bitter experience of her life she feels empowered. From that moment after the divorce, her idea about love and marriage changes. Out of frustration she states, that : “He said he loved me, the magic word , it was supposed to make everything light up, I’ll never trust that word again”(Surfacing 55). Though her husband keeps saying that he loves her, she never gets reconciled to him. The symbolic description of the relationship between them is made rich by Atwood. Atwood is one of the most famous and influential contemporary Canadian writers, is closely associated with the cultural flowering in Canada during the last quarter of the twentieth century. She is one of the Canadian novelists who propound the women-nature relationship with a combination of feminist and ecological perspectives. Her awareness of the women-nature connection, or her Eco-feminism, is clearly reflected in Surfacing. Here , Atwood achieves her Eco-feminist awareness that Margaret Atwood establishes through the presentation of the female narrator in the novel. The narrator achieves her ecofeminist concept through two level of her journey: physical and psychological. The purpose of the physical journey is to search for her mysteriously missing father. Yet in the searching process, she begins a Psychological journey. She becomes keenly aware of men’s dominance over women and nature, the women-nature connection and patriarchal hierarchical dualism which privileges men over women and nature. “ The Cedar logs are shorter and easier for one man to handle. Cedar isn’t the best wood; it decays quickly”(Surfacing 37).

The narrator feels that the sexual intercourse is one of the most painful experiences. In add to this context Carol Ann Howell provides Atwood’s definition about sexual love. The male lover is represented as a wounded animal who tries to liberate itself from a trap, whereas the female is reduced to the ground which is trodden. In the act of sexual intercourse he feels completed and he projects his identity as follows :

You may / into me as though I / am  
wrenching / your way through, this is /  
Urgent, it is your life the / last  
Chance from freedom (Carol Ann Howell 49)

Atwood imposes a similar image when the narrator hears the love making of David and Anna. She thinks of an which is got caught in the trap. So, the narrator concludes that the act of lovemaking nothing but death.

Atwood brings out her major theme of separation through the narrator. She feels disconnected from the people around her, equating human interaction with that of animals. When the narrator goes in search of her father, towards her family cabin near Quebec her misery is doubted and she returns to her 'childhood'. She discovers that the whole place is equally mutilated and violated. The female protagonist in the vicinity this landscape, full of "rock blasted, tree bull dozed over, roots in the air, needles reddening" feels thus, "we 're here too soon and I feel deprived of something, as though I can't really get her useless, I've suffered"(K. Balachandran 80). when she turns back, she is anxious enough for the return to her father. However , her eagerness evades when she comes to know nothing about her father from Paul.

Next, the question of her husband and child arises. She answers to paul that her husband is there, though, she has divorced him sometime back. In a strange atmosphere she utters lifelessly thus : But I'm safe,I'm wearing my ring. I never throw it out, it's useful for landladies"(Surfacing 25). She is prepared to tell him that she has left her baby in the city with her husband. She says that the child has been imposed on her by her husband.

The narrator even confesses that the memories which she nourishes were like "fraudulent passports". In preventing birth she prevented a life from coming to this earth. In that process she has locked herself into a circle of guilt which is a kind of death from which one awaits the release. The embryo not only represents the potentiality as it does for all of us, but also a power that exceeds nature. She says:

" I believe that an unborn baby has  
Its eye open and can look out  
Through the walls of the mother's  
Stomach like a frog in a jar" (Surfacing 28)

In the shamianiotic cults of Canadian Indians 'frog' was regarded as a magically powerful creature which is to be respected and feared. The embryo she hopes is growing inside her as a being a special quality 'a time traveller' with the 'untraveller' paths ,potentially which is already in its protobrain state.

The narrator is almost forced to violate even the commandment of God " Honour thy parents". It leads her to an abnormal state. She is not in her senses, "To her nothing is the same, she says I don't know the way any more". The sin of abortion leads her to doubt the very existence and a sense of alienation grips her.

Woman included tacitly among the felled brutalized object of nature, tree, fish and bird. Anna is brutally humiliated and forced to pose as nude by her husband. Her picture will be included among all the other objects such as the dead heron, the cut fish, the felled log etc. At the end, the narrator breaks through the stereotypes. She asserts her individuality. She is willing to trust and to trust is let go. She realizes, " I have to recant give up the old belief that I am powerless," An awareness of one's colonized state can only be a beginning towards achieving independence.

The narrator transforms through many stages ultimately becomes an ordinary human being. This makes her return to civilization. ". In Surfacing Atwood depicts that the narrator grows from ignorance to knowledge and illusion to reality. It is the predicament of a modern young woman who struggles for a right place in society. Finally, all Atwood's heroine achieves and identity which is cultural and national and she symbolizes the victim nation discovering its strength.

Through this novel Atwood provokes all women. She shows the quest for knowledge and truth which gives direction and dignity to the lives of an individual. Atwood provokes all women to progress with their self knowledge which is the ultimate goal of life.

## **Conclusion**

Atwood offers an unsettling questioning of what it means to be feminine and masculine in a culture already founded upon the basic divisions of subject and object, culture and nature.

Atwood often regarded as a feminist or ecological treatise. In *Surfacing* she throws light on the problems of ecological imbalance, particularly in the countryside of Northern Quebec. She puts extensive focus on the alarming consequences of modern science and technology have drastically affected the procreative potentially and capability of women.

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