



From Victim to Survivor: Exploring the Journey of Self through Nature in Margaret Atwood's "Surfacing"

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Abstract

Margret Atwood is a Canadian writer best known for her prose, fiction and for her Environmental tract and feminism in her writing. Canadian literature also mainly focuses on the suppression and exploitation of Canadian women. Margaret Atwood presents her works with themes such as Identity, Self – journey, power dynamics and mystery. This paper discusses the journey of the protagonist's search for her father, her Self, memories at her childhood home on a remote island in the borderland between America and Canada. It is a narrative that combines elements of memory, quest for identity, Self journey and Re-birth together.

Keywords: Identity, Self journey, Mystery, Memory, Re- birth and Trauma.

The Narrator's Childhood

The setting of the novel is the wilderness of northern Quebec .The narrator-protagonist of Surfacing is a Canadian woman whose name is never revealed. She is kept isolated. She is socially abandoned. She has no desire to interact. The exploitation of her identity starts from her own home. Her father was a botanist. He doesn't want her to interact with the society. He builds a house and settles his family in the Quebec Island. Her family spent their summers in Quebec when she was a child. She finds herself confined in the narrow world made by her father. She does not

have any opportunity to empower herself. She becomes a victim with gender roles at a very young age.

The Narrator's Dreadful Past

The play opens with the protagonist's journey towards her home. The protagonist starts her journey when she comes to know about her missing father and believed to have drowned, the narrator travels north with her boyfriend Joe and two friends David and Anna, to spend some time in the family's cabin and to look for her father. At her childhood home,



she feels disappointment when she noticed the changes. In the island, she recalls the death of her brother. She observes the adverse effects of the technological development and tourism industries on the natural environment of her native place. She takes her first step against this degradation by breaking David's camera and films. The internal pain that the narrator endures is a "state of amnesia in which she has suppressed the facts of her own life story. She cuts out of her life with her family after a big loss. She feels a lot after the abortion of her child. She believes her own lie, ignores the truth. Moreover, the narrator attempts to make her invulnerable to such pain to protect herself. By doing so, she cuts herself off from relationships that could help her heal. Her affair with her ex-husband causes her trauma when he obliges her to abort her baby. Her trauma rises when she comes to know that he is already married. A sexually abused woman will be neglected by all. It is because of the stereotypes against women created by the patriarchal society. She endures all the pain, because she doesn't want to hurt her family and spoil the reputation of the family. She continues to play a silent role even in her marital life.

The Journey of her Self through Nature

The quest for self-identity and Self Journey take form in the second section of the novel when the narrator descending into water and discovering her father's dead body. She cries to express her traumatic feelings. The narrator encounters the ghost of her aborted child and starts to lose her sanity. The abortion, her relation with parents and husband display her the emotional and artistic death. The narrator's arrested relationship with her parents in the past, has now come out and caught up with the present like her relationship with her unborn child has. She had to accept the death of her child before she could resurrect it. She had to resurrect her parents before she could accept their death. After her abortion, the protagonist comes to develop deep sympathy for the flora and fauna of the Quebec Island. She finds that the beauty of Nature is being destroyed by the Americans. The narrator dislikes

violence towards nature. She watches the Americans who come to the lake for fishing. She disagrees with their harmful acts which hurt nature. She calls it an act of violation.

Victim to Survivor

The Self – Discovery begins when the protagonist delves deeper into her memories. She recollects the loss of her father, her brother's suicide and her estrangement from her Canadian identity. She reminisces about her childhood, her parents' failed marriage and her mother's attempts to adapt American culture. The revelation of her mother's affair and the discovery of her father's hidden manuscript also provide her inner struggles. As she delves deeper and deeper into her memories, she unfolds the painful truths about her family and her past. In contradiction, nature provides her a kind of freedom, a world where these artificial human distinctions no longer exist. She rejects the layers of the society. She identifies her roles as lover, a victim, and even her sense of self as part of human society. She begins to connect herself with the natural world. She submerges in the ancient lake, psychologically **retrieves** the memory of her parents and realizes the vision of her continued existence in Nature. She renews her mind, body and soul in the water. She comes out of the lake nakedly symbolises her rebirth. She restarts her life journey. The victim now becomes a survivor with nature.

Conclusion

Atwood shows how a woman's identity is not self-determined but is instead heavily influenced by external forces, like the patriarchal, societal structures and the trauma the narrator undergoes, especially as a result of her subjugation and the assumptions others have made about her, becomes the centre of her struggle. She dives into the lake and comes naked. Every time she dives in the lake, the physical space of the lake drives her mind to the sentiment of redemption. At the end of the novel, she comes out of her hysteria. She decides to go with Joe. To take this Self - Journey towards self-realization and to regain her identity, she moves



forward towards the natural world. This actual journey is the surface meaning and the deep meaning lies in the inner journey of self-discovery and realising her individual identity.

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