



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

TOWARDS INDIAN ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE THROUGH MARGARET ATWOOD'S TRILOGY

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ABSTRACT

Ecological concern is undoubtedly one of the by-products of globalization. 'Think globally, act locally' was the electoral slogan of the ecological movement. Many of the ecological fields extend beyond the appearances and give true information to instil a kind of awareness in the life of human. One such area is regarding the relationship of the Indo-Canadian studies. Canadian studies in India have strengthened their reciprocal bonds by learning from each other in various realms, especially in areas of environmental stability. Coming to the Indian situation, concern for ecology has been a very distinctive feature of the ancient Indian culture and tradition. The Vedic vision voiced out the great responsibility of human to preserve the environment. However, the present century in India has been witnessing serious climatic changes and ecological disasters.

Margaret Atwood falls into the array of mainstream Canadian writers. Her Trilogy explicitly makes references to the environmentalist movement. The references to the great Indian environmental thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi, Anil Agarwal, and Vandana Shiva in her Trilogy clearly affirm the presence of the traces of ecological consciousness in the ancient and present Indian thinking and spirituality. Atwood's recent key note address in India at Jaipur fest on 31st Jan. 2016, also revealed her concern for Indian environment where the underprivileged and marginalized, can also equally enjoy ecological justice. Human has to self-realise and reflect on the futuristic vision of Atwood through which she tries to voice out the need for an Indian environmental justice. This paper is an attempt to bring out the Indian ecological elements in Atwood's Trilogy and aim at promoting ecological justice so that the poor and the underprivileged can receive greater justice.

Keywords: Futuristic vision, ecological Justice, Indian thinkers, underprivileged, harmony

Ecological concern is undoubtedly one of the by-products of globalization. 'Think globally, act locally' was the electoral slogan of the ecological movement, which has helped in creating a 'global citizen' who keeps in mind the earth's limits within his or her thinking and action. Many of the ecological fields extend beyond the appearances and

give true information to instil a kind of awareness in the life of human. The categorization of ecology can be done in many ways. At the same time, ecology has to be approached from various perspectives.

The study of ecology has been realised as an important area in this rapidly changing world. Many countries and nations are trying to propose

various ecological forums to share their views on the environmental crisis. Some of the developed countries try to extend their support and concern for healthy discussions and deliberations, to create awareness in the developing countries in terms of ecological awareness. One such relationship is the Indo-Canadian studies.

Canadian studies in India have made a strong impact on several academic groups in various parts of the country. It has been understood that Canada and India had very similar types of experiences in various fields of life, such as the colonial and post-colonial, immigration and exile, multi-culturalism, immigration and exile and, above all, the ardent desire for environmental stability. Both the countries have strengthened their bonds in realising and learning from each other in terms of racial, economic, psychological, social, demographic and above all environmental stability.

Coming to the Indian situation, Ecology has been a very distinctive feature of ancient Indian culture and tradition. The Vedic vision has voiced out the important responsibility of human to preserve the environment. The great reflections of *Rishis* and *Maharshis* throw light on the eloquence and wisdom they drew from nature. They expressed their reverence for nature through hymns and collected all the insights and brought it out in the form of Vedas and Upanishads. These collections strongly remind human to safeguard the environment and live in harmony with it.

The ability to practice unconditional love towards nature was the motto of the Vedic culture that included nature experience, by worshipping the Sun, Moon, Trees, Water, Fire etc. as the main elements which preserve the life of the human on earth and help him to live in harmony with nature. Similarly, the Upanishads provided the image of cosmic piety and harmony with the human and the non-human.

The traditional face of India has been gradually forgotten. Various ecological thinkers like Vandana Shiva, Ramchandra Guha, Arundathi Roy and others, through their works have expressed their concerns of upholding dangerous environmental hazards. Despite their constant efforts, India lags behind in terms of environmental ethics. The

underprivileged and marginalized, especially those living in poor environment, are the victims of ecological harmony. They need someone to hearken to their cry.

The present century in India has been witnessing serious climatic issues in terms of pollution, natural calamities and above all, climatic changes due to the selfish behaviour of human with the non-human. The recent weather condition in Delhi, the capital of India, was an eye opener for many Indians. The Delhi Peace summit conducted by some of the important thinkers of the world, along with Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam, the former president of India; Dr. Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India; and six Nobel Laureates in Peace and three Nobel Laureates in Science, has touched upon some of the ecological concerns and the need for environmental justice across the globe.

Dirak Ficca the executive councillor for a parliament of the World's Religions, Chicago, in the Delhi Peace summit spoke about "A need for social and economic justice", as he expressed:

The purpose of this conference is to invigorate the conscience of all people in India and the world at large, regardless of religion, creed, ethnicity, to a gathering of those who seek to transform the hearts and minds of people and help evolve cultures of peace and healing... to work together for social and economic justice, harmony and peace. (T. D. Singh 108)

Dr. Manmohan Singh expressed his opinion about the attitude human needs to have about other cultures and other nations. The openness of Indians to learn from other cultures reveals their desire to inspire and to be inspired by other nations and cultures. Quoting Rudyard Kipling, he urged the gathering that they should not consider his words seriously:

East is East and West is West, and never the Twain shall meet-to support the notion that Eastern and Western Cultures are so alien to one another; that any attempt to reconcile them is fruitless. (T. D. Singh 163).

Prema Nandakumar, in his paper entitled "The Individual, the Region and the nation", points out that fortunately a good deal of literature written

in the Indian languages brings us close to the smell of Indian earth, the kind of closeness we find in Canadian novels (K.S. Ramamurti 85).

Margaret Atwood falls into the array of the mainstream Canadian writers. Her critical work *Survival*, was received well, as a practical handbook of Canadian literature. She is among the most-honoured authors of fiction in recent history. Atwood is known, both for the quality and the quantity of her writings. Her novels explore a number of themes on environmental concerns. Through them the readers can be helped to broaden their understanding of reality and build a national consciousness for a balanced and harmonious life. Atwood's Trilogy substitutes the missing elements of the Indian environmental writers by offering penetrating insights on various dystopian issues in a creative manner. Viewing them from an Indian perspective can help one to contribute to the creation of a more harmonious and developed society and personal life.

K. Chellappan, in his paper on "The Concept of National Literature in India and Canada: A Comparison", states:

Though Canada is a new nation belonging to the New World and India has an ancient history, there are significant parallels as well as differences in the development of their national literature, not only because of their past but because of their multi-ethnic make-up (K.S. Ramamurti 89).

Margaret Atwood's Trilogy explicitly evokes the environmental movement. The three novels in the Trilogy are *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood*, and *MaddAddam*. Atwood has termed these novels as speculative in form rather than calling them science fiction. Eventually these novels are companion fictions because the characters from the first novel appear in the second novel and the again in the last novel. The brilliant trilogy explores the world of terrifying corporate tyranny, the relentless Crakers, a humanoid species bio-engineered to substitute the human race.

In *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy the main protagonist, is condemned to a negative ethical

ramification. His expertise and knowledge of genetic engineering leads him to use his creative skill for transplanting human organs into pigs. He feels that he is equal to God to create and destroy the physical nature and human nature according to his whims and fancies. When he reaches the climax of his career, a huge pandemic occurs. He is left all alone in the world of pandemic disaster. He undergoes a serious trauma and remains in isolation to watch the Crakers. Towards the end, Jimmy is left in a state of confusion when he loses everything. He is placed into a ruined world, hallucinating about the pangs of death. Atwood's renowned novel *Oryx and Crake*, has an open ending conclusion, which provides readers with an opportunity to choose and decide for themselves about the environmental catastrophe. The reader is free to put himself in such a circumstance and try to make possible changes that could appeal to him the most.

Atwood's recent key note address in India at the Jaipur fest on 31st Jan. 2016, also revealed her concern for Indian environment. She expressed her views on 'historical and dystopian fiction' which brought to light her concern and purpose for writing the cautionary trilogy of love, wisdom and above all life's grand resolutions. Her seven golden points at the fest made a great impression on the minds of Indians about her care and concern for the planet with regard to many other human issues. These points are the major themes of her novels and are applicable for uniting the various cultures and traditions to bring about revolution and the change.

- On Historical and dystopian fiction:
- On Inspiration for *The Heart Goes Last*:
- On Justin Trudeau:
- On Game of Thrones:
- On a Superhero with an Identity Crisis:
- On High and Low Culture:
- On Women's rights

Atwood also stated about her novel *Oryx and Crake* at the Jaipur fest that has an open ending conclusion and it is up to the reader to make a difference. Atwood's ardent desire to promote ecological justice on the Indian soil shows her love for environment.

The second book of MaddAddam Trilogy, *The Year of the Flood*, has a small band of

survivors namely, Toby, Ren, Amanda and a few others who escaped the waterless flood. These survivors try to protect themselves from criminally insane painballers and from pigeons. They share some of their past experiences of ten years ago before the pandemic disaster wiped out the face of the earth.

As these survivors struggle for their livelihood, they come across the key members of once thriving God's Gardeners who constantly remind them of the environmental practices. The peaceful green resistance group was also called as eco-cult because they used mainly natural resources and proclaimed environmental ethics by their way of living. They observed many great occasions to thank and venerate the great deeds of the important environmentalists like Rachel Carson, Mahatma Gandhi, and Anil Agarwal etc. who have strived hard to create awareness about the human relationship with nature.

Atwood uses Indian elements by stating the names of great people in India whose lives mirrored their love for environment. She highlighted the Gandhian vision of non-violence and tries to acclaim him as Saint Mahatma Gandhi (429) for his noble deeds and also his simple way of living in peace and harmony with nature. God's Gardeners in the text try to promote the Gandhian way of love and service to mankind, as they desire to reduce technology and adopt natural resources and a genuine love for human and non-human.

Some will tell you love is only chemical: where would any of us be without chemistry? But science is merely one way of describing the world, another way of describing it would be to say: where would any of us be without love (429).

Atwood has also referred to the great deeds of Anil Agarwal who constantly reminded Indians about the threat to environment. He tried to motivate people to say no to the over-usage of science and technology. Though these references are indirect, the Canadian writer tries to pinpoint the great work and service rendered by Indian environmental thinkers.

The year of the Flood closes with the hope for a change. Towards the end, the characters are

made to self-realise the importance of the environmental harmony. Despite their brokenness and past guilt, the survivors understand their role to protect the environment. Later, a new religion is founded by Zeb who emerges as MaddAddam. The followers of this religion are newly formed Gardeners trying to search for their founder Adam One who is found missing. The novel *The year of the Flood* unfolds the need of the hour for the organic way of living and protecting the environment.

The third book *MaddAddam* begins with the hope to repair the broken world with green movement. The characters are engrossed in making natural attempts to rebuild the loss. Their pre-plagued life reminds them of the struggle they would have to face if they don't self-realise. Once again, Atwood tries to remind the survivors of the flood of the great works of Vandana Shiva, an Indian environmentalist. She is termed as Saint Vandana Shiva of seeds (208), as a seed has the possibility of bringing forth a tree which can bear fruits in due seasons and provide shelter to the other creatures, so also the efforts of Vandana Shiva are praised, as she quotes:

Saint Vandana, tireless warrior against bio-piracy, who gave to herself for the good of the living vegetable World in all its diversity and beauty, lend us the purity of your Spirit and the strength of your resolve. (208)

The MaddAddam Trilogy closes with hope where all the characters strongly determine to fight against environmental hazards. The glimpses at the Indian references of great environmental thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi and Anil Agarwal in the Atwood's trilogy clearly present the traces of Indian ecology in the ancient India. The last book *MaddAddam*, once again points at Vandana Shiva's efforts to strive for ecological justice in the Indian scenario with courage and determination as Shiva proved it through the Chipkoo movement.

Atwood's speculative novels have glimpses of Indian thinking which can contribute to fostering ecological justice. The underprivileged and marginalized, especially those living in poor environment, need someone to voice out their feelings. Human has to self-realise and reflect on the

futuristic vision of Atwood through which she tries to voice out the need for Indian environmental justice and march towards peace and harmony.

This paper is an attempt to bring out the Indian elements in Atwood's trilogy and aim at promoting ecological justice where the poor and underprivileged can attain greater justice and peace.

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