

B.A. III
Paper III

Political And Sexual Issues in Margaret Atwood's 'Bodily Harm'

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Q1:- Atwood as a novelist

Margaret Atwood is among the most respected writers of fiction in the modern time. She is a versatile novelist who writes on women issues and concerns over unsettled social issues. Her dealing with these issues is surrounded political, social and economical clouds. She is known as the literary celebrity, media star, the public performer, a critic social historian and political satirist and cartoonist. Her novels explore the position of women in the contemporary society. She describes the inner conflicts and mantle agonies of women in our society. Her deep concerns are the threats to the environment to women's rights and human rights. Atwood presented women as superior to men in several aspects and they can do work in any field more sufficiently than men. To date she has published more than thirty five books and she is fondly read all around the world and her books have been translated in more than twenty two language.

As a writer of novels, Atwood is clearly concerned with alignment of power that exerts physical, political, economical and social control over women to fragment her. If a job is assigned to a woman; she can do it in a better way than her counterpart man can do. They are deficient neither physically nor intellectually. If they are given power, they use it in an effective and efficient manner. In her novels in which the chief protagonist are women, their progress is not smooth yet they emerge triumphant though many tactical retreats. In her novels she concentrates mainly on woman's realization of power central and self awareness.

In most of her novels, Atwood has dealt with theme of the victimization and survival of women. Her female protagonists are displayed as a part of cultural life of Canada and they are actively engage in the problems that are not just national concern, but also the social, political and traditional issues

that determine the survival of the country. The pervasive symbol of American literature, as Atwood mentions says, is frontier, the dominant image of Canadian fiction is survival, the unheroic survival of victimized. Mary Morris Remarks;

"The question of the status of woman has been an issue in Atwood's work and feminists have seized upon her writing as a product of the movement. Atwood has also made other political and philosophical issues themes in her work, such as Canada's Struggle to create an identity and in recent years, her concern for human rights"

As a writer, she is conscious of the dynamics between artist and society in which she lives and operates. She says,

"For from thinking of writers as totally isolated individuals, I see them as inescapable connected with their society. The nature of connection will vary..... the writer may unconsciously reflect the society, he may consciously examine it and project ways of changing it and the connection between writer and society becomes the subject of the writes."

As novelist, Margaret Atwood discovers the anomalies of Canadian civilization in which the women are not given any liberty to make any strategy of occupying the place hold by men. Her novels represent an important development in the post sickles Canadian writing. The women's quest were viewed in terms of marriage and happy ever after wards' ends, nor self actualization or individualization but self effacement and socialization. In her novels she makes an attempt to fictionalize the progress of the female's protagonists quest for distinctive feminine identity.

Atwood has been successful because of her ability to capture and mobiles popular feeling. Her works provide us with a measure of self protection a shared way of looking at the self and relation to society and the wider world. Similarity the heroines of her novels are shown at war with circumstances and society arouse our sympathy not so much because they are outsides as because they register reality identifiable forms of middle class alienation.

Q.2:- Theme of Bodily Harm

As a feminist, Atwood focuses on the theme of gender relation and men's mistreatment of women. As a realist she has made the beautiful use of colour, caste imagery to show the ideas. Atwood takes her themes from the real society as her works show sufferings, mental agonies and victimization of women, who are wives, aunts, hand maids, econowives jezebels' etc. women are treated as super human beings and their individual desires and ambition are suppressed. Her works are replete with the theme of victimization and survivable of women in male-dominate society in which women are treated as only sexual object and are displayed as sexual slaves.

Alienation and exploitation are as the main themes of her novels. In *The Edible Women*, the principal character Marian who works in Seymour survey..... a market organization, faces woman enters like Peter and Duncan and refuse to fall a prey to their lust. She feels identity crisis on account of gender discrimination. She marries Peter and willingly yields to Peter's imperialistic designs. In this way in Atwood's highlighting gender politics woman is as implicated as is man.

In the Handmaids Tale. Atwood reveals females brutalization And graphically depicts the sub servant role of wives, worker and whores.

In Surfacing and Cat's Eve, Atwood takes up another aspect of womanhood..... the life of buried, smothered women to examine the other side of coin.

In The Lady Oracle, the protagonist Joan faster protests against the imposition of sexual and gender roles upon women. It is an ardent protest against the female images as a consumer item.

In *Bodily Harm*, Rennie the chief protagonist wants to live a life of her own choice but falls a prey to man's sensuality and exploitation and ends in jail.

Thus, Atwood is one of the leading women novelists of the world. She is an ardent pleader of women's right and brings out the folly of gender politics, gender discrimination, injustice and exploitation.

The title of novels 'Bodily Harm' is very apt and suggestive. It immediately appeals to the readers because it leads to so many Questions. What happened? Who was harmed? Was it an attack? Was it a fatal injury? Having read the novels, we do not get any real answer. In the novels, both men & women suffer bodily harm. The novels 'bodily harm' is the life story of a woman Rennie who suffers a lot on account of her ailment of cancer but this ailment shrinks to naught when compared to cancer to widespread in the world dominated by man at large. Other women in the novels also suffer because of their sex and they are tortured in many ways which could not happen to them if they had not been women. Atwood brings her novel with these lines, "A man's presence suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you. By contrast, a woman's presence..... defines what can and cannot be done to her." Jennifer Walters also comments in his review;

"The man use their hands to choke, beat, otherwise torture the women in the novels; the women's hands are cut off. They can do nothing on their own behalf except very occasionally alleviate each other's pain within the context of their powerlessness."

Rennie, the heroin of the novels is much harmed then expected when she encounters cancer in her life, her lover's leaves her one by one. They consider her sex machine. She sees herself as rotten and the maggot and split fruit images. Rennie does not give importance herself except in bed and her armour with Paul becomes a ray of hope, but there too, she is deprived of all goodness. She is regarded as taboo and dangerous commodity. She realizes well how people entertain themselves torturing female. Rennie says that the women are abused everywhere like helpless poor. So, she equates woman with poor through the world. She is arrested on her accusation for revolution and from jail she sees violence against women and says,

"There are still things that are inconceivable Here is nothing is inconceivable. I wish you to write about it all I ask you to do is look..... Look with your eyes open and you will see the truth of the matter. Since you are reporter it is your duty to report."

Another character Lora is also a victim of male domination who is neglected. She was badly beaten to death hitting hard on belly and breast. When she dies Renie touches her body and says,

"Lora's face is not a face any more, it is a bruise blood is still oozing from the cuts... .. the mouth looks like a piece of fruit that has been run over by a car pulp, it is the face of stranger, someone without name... .. there is no such thing as a faceless stranger, face is someone's, it has a name."

Lora was, exploited by her step-father and resultantly she had to stab her step-father to save her chastity. When Lora tries to work for her bread & butter, all men around her with to sleep with her. This shatters Renie feminist sensibility to the care. She does not like to live in the company men. Lora is exploited, physically and sexually by many men. In the prison cell, she is brutally thrashed by the some police men who exploited her sexually. Even Renie feels pity for her.

The story of Renie and Lora's prison life explores another segment of Bodily Harm, on women. The prison life of both women there represents the victimization, oppression, and tyranny of men and their authority. The brutal harms imposed on Lora are much greater than the harms done to Renie. Renie find herself ease. The scars of cancer on Renie's body symbolize the scare of the tortured human beings all over the world. Dorothy Jones says,

"Fear of Death by a disease like cancer is weighed against those threats to life which result from human malice-poverty, malnutrition and political violence."

The novelist says that in society bodily harms is everywhere, both inside and the prison, both civilized and uncivilized world both political and personal life. We cannot say that because of their sex, only women are the sufferers in novels. The story of novel moves round Renie.

Q3:- Character of Renie

Margaret Atwood has portrayed the character of Renie as the central character of the novel. The whole story of the novel moves round Renie. She is such protagonist of the novel. She is the heroin of the novel, Bodily Harm. She does not revolt the male dominancy her passions are strangled everywhere & every

time. In the end of the novel she gets the punishment which she does not deserve. She is trying to equalize herself with males but fails in doing so.

Like Shakespeare's hero, she does not suffer for her own faults but she is deceived by her destiny & fate time and again. Atwood has painted the character of Renie from the women point of view. In her interview she remarks, *"I am a writer who is a woman and therefore I write a lot from the point of view of a woman. In other words I do not myself as women who is writing to promote certain things."*

Renie was brought up by her mother and two other women of her family but unfortunately she failed to get her father's love who was living apart from her with some other women in Toronto. She has given her home up for further studies and become a journalist and lived luxuriously and quite comfortably. But when she encounters the breast cancer, her life turns upside down. She is deprived of her lover and well wisher.

Renie is made the caricature of all her successive problems which does not leave her ever for a moment. These problems and troubles are not of single women but they are presented as belonging to all the women of contemporary Canada. She suffers all trouble. Her personal life falls flat on ground of dominating realities of life. She is the mouthpiece as novelist who wants to show her real life.

Renie is a simple woman. She is not clever. She falls a prey to Lora's tricks and goes to the airport to receive her. Box- She should not have taken their decision Paul & Lora Implicate her in their illegal dope trade. She has to pay for her simplicity and ends up in the prison.

Three men come in her life. They are Jake, Dr. Daniel and Paul. None of the three men loves her. She also knows that Jack is not sincere in his love for her. He is hungry to get her body. He wants to exploit her body as much as he can. She does not think of a home, a settled life a devoted husband. She wants to enjoy herself. She wants some men to be with her when Jack leaves her because of the cancer in her breast. She is attracted towards Dr. Daniel who is married. He is

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Paul is the third man who comes in her life. Renie starts her affair with him. She frequently sleeps with him. Like Shakespeare's hero's, Renie also suffers punishment in the end of her life she is responsible for exploitation. Renie is a tragic heroin. Renie is an embodiment of helplessness in the male dominated society as to save herself from exploitation.

Thus, Renie is a loose female. She has to suffer the punishment for without her own fault. She does not deserve the punishment given to her she is innocent and has no role in revolution. We feel pity for Renie.

Atwood's novel 'Bodily' Harm is a famous novel. The story of the novel moves round the story of Renie who is the principle character in Bodily Harm. All the incidents and episodes of the novel directly or indirectly related to her. The story of the novel is interesting. There comes many turns in her life. She grows of, receives her education and become a journalist, falls in love with Jake. She suffers from cancer. She operated and comes into contact with Dr. Daniel who cuts off a portion of flesh from her breast and saves her life. After it she falls into the trap of Paul. She is arrested in suspicion and put in a prision cell with Lora.

The plot is simple the incidents and episodes in the novel are arranged in a logical sequence. They are connected with one another. There are incidents and episodes in the novel. The plot of the novel cannot be called a compacts a compact of locked plot. There are incidents and episodes in the novel that can be easily moved from the novel without hurting the main story of the novel.

Atwood has used streams of consciouness technique in the novel. The story frequency moves back and forth. The novelist goes to the past of Renie's life and describes. What she did and aspired in her childhood. She jumps into future and tries to connect the past and the future with the present.

This makes the plot of the novel a little complicated. Sometimes the reader's find it difficult to understand.

Renice dreams to go into word of imagination. She imagines things that do not seem relevant in the given contexts. The reader's feel it a little pertured when they find that these things do not have any connection with the present situation. All of a sudden, Renie comes back from the world of imagination. Then the readers realize that Renie has escaped the world of imagination and the story runs an is tracks.

The plot is not formless. It has a form. It has a mixture of traditional plot and modern formless plot. We find in this novel about the plot that these are not too many characters in the novel. These are four or five major characters and only two women characters, Renie & Lora. All have a given important role and they help the plot to bring it to its logical end.

The theme of victimization and survival of women especially in Canadian literature & civilization over shadows all her novels. Her novels progress step by step under these heads civilization psychology and Revolution. We can mark out some of basic trends in her novels. In the light of these three heads. A major theme of Bodily Harm is power. Howells, Carol Ann says,

"As in many of the heroin's of Atwood's novels Renie is addicted to negative relationship. She feels "hooked like a junkie" to her relationship with Jake, and becomes unable to distinguish between sadomasochism and genuine aggression"(1)

The novels protagonist, Renie, is a travel reporter. After surviving breast cancer, she vacations on the fictional Caribbean Island, St. Antoine. The Island, however, is on the brink of reevaluation. Renie tries to stay away from politics. but drawn into events through her romance with Paul, a key player in the uprising.

Thus, Atwood is concerned, with the miserable conditions of women. She is a lover of positive values and her works answer the question-how to live?

(References)

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