

VOICE OF THE OPPRESSED IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S "SONG OF THE WORMS"

J. Augustina, Ph.D. (P/T), Research Scholar

Dr. B. Kavitha, Assistant Professor, Research Supervisor

Department of English and Research Centre, SeethalakshmiAchi College for Women, Pallathur

Abstract:

Margaret Atwood one of the leading figures in the Canadian literature portrays the hardship encountered by the natives in the hands of the oppressor in the poem "Song of the Worms" taken from the poetry collection, Songs of the Transformed which is the second section of the poetry collection You are Happy. The researcher investigates and examines the poem with Postcolonial lens. This collection portrays the relationship between humans and the animals. It also depicts the human tendency of dealing higher power with utmost respect and the ill-treatment attitude towards the inferior people through the portrayal of animals. This paper focuses on the dominant attitude of the coloniser and the oppressed state of the colonised.

Key Words: *Oppressor, coloniser, colonised, postcolonial.*

Margaret Atwood is one of the leading figures in the Canadian Literature. Her contribution to the literary world is endless. She is an internationally known, read translated Canadian writer. She has published more than twelve novels, ten books of poetry, three short story collections and two books of literary criticism.

The poem taken for the study is "Song of the Worms", from the second part of the poetry collection *You are Happy*. The poem is written in the "worms" point of view. The worms are the speaker in this poem. The poem opens with the complaining of worms for being underground for an endless period. They express their satisfaction that they have finished their work without any procrastination. They declare that "they are many and one" which represents the fact that though the multiplicity is seen in them they join their hands and stand together for their liberation. The worms recall that in their previous birth they were humans and now they are recreated as worms.

The second stanza reflects the ideas of worms which utter their routine life and their habitation. They say that:

We have lived among roots and stones,
we have sung but no one has listened,
we come into the open air
at night only to love
which disgusts the soles of boots, (*EF 148*)

The researcher portrays worms as the colonised and the "boots" as the coloniser. This poem is the mere reflection of the oppression faced by the worms (natives) in the hands of oppressors for "too long". The worms complain that they feel disgusted when they see the "soles of boots". The boots represents the oppressors which smashes the lower creature while it stamps over it. Likewise, the liberty and the space of the natives are usurped by the higher powers. The connotative diction such as 'disgusts', "boots", leather strict religion" represents the oppression faced by the lower beings which also means the marginalised.

Through the projection of animal images the speaker of the poem highlights the emotion and mental state of the victimised.

Applying Morris' findings, we may infer that the English Canadian projects himself through his animal images as a threatened victim, confronted by a superior alien technology against which he feels powerless, unable to take any positive defensive action, and survive each crisis as he may, ultimately doomed. (*Survival*, 79, 80)

The repressive attitude of the boots is addressed by the worms in the next stanza. They utter that they are aware of the boots and its attitude. According to the worms, they consider boots as a “kicks and ladders”. As every coin has two sides it also leaves an indelible mark of suppression, loss of self-identity, at the time of colonisation and it also states about the legacies and the various upliftment of the society in terms of business, education at that time. In spite of this the fear remains constant in the minds of worms when they see “boots” from underneath. Atwood in her critical work *Survival* imposes this idea that “...Canadian themselves feel threatened and nearly- extinct as a nation, and suffer also from life- denying experience as individuals” (78).

The speaker shifts the low tone into fierce and aggressive. It also remains as a warning to the oppressors. This is due to the long-time suppression faced by the oppressed people. The worms' numbers increase like the “weeds” not eventually but gradually. This portrays the unity of worms to overthrow the oppressive “boots”. They are ready to wage war against the oppressors to obtain freedom.

.....
the captive plants will rebel
with us, fences will topple,
brick walls ripple and fall,
there will be no more boots. (*EF 149*)

The “captive plants” may also symbolise the other minority group who faces the suppression. The worms along with the captive plants will begin to rebel with the oppressive boots. This paper points out the powerful idea that, “... the Canadian animal bare survival is the main aim in life, failure as an individual is inevitable, and extinction as a species is a distinct possibility” (78). This shows that they are not ready to lead their life as the victims and being oppressed in their own country. Every action has its own reaction likewise how much the people undergo the pressure from the higher powers they will react at one point or the other like the “worms” in the poem.

Works Cited

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