



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

(Peer-reviewed, Refereed, Indexed & Open Access Journal)

DOI : 03.2021-11278686

ISSN : 2582-8568

IMPACT FACTOR : 7.560 (SJIF 2024)

Islam and Environment: A Study of Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy

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DOI No. **03.2021-11278686** DOI Link :: <https://doi-ds.org/doi/10.2024-59261847/IRJHIS2405017>

Abstract:

We can observe how the planet is deteriorating due to the ill behaviour of humans. Scientific inventions are rapidly increasing to facilitate all human needs. But the question persists: would these inventions be solving the climate crisis evolving around the globe without any entailment of ethics? The answer is going to be an absolute no. Margaret Atwood's works are incessantly voicing environmental issues at their best to the world's readers. Her works are replete with the themes and concerns of the environment and simultaneously present the atrocities done by anthropogenic activities on the environment. Her MaddAddam trilogy has presented the unhealthy nexus of humankind to the environment in which they inhabit. This paper is an attempt to highlight the degradation of the natural world through the reckless behaviour of humans in the MaddAddam trilogy and Islam ecocriticism to evoke the dead morality of humans. God (Allah in Arabic) has created the whole universe and every single atom and molecule it inhibits. Still, humankind is manipulating and exploiting this universe and environment according to their need. Islam says whatever God has created in this universe has a connection with humans, or we can say, ultimately belong to humans and suggests living in harmony with all the creations (like humans, trees, planets, animals, rivers, oceans and glaciers). Margaret Atwood displayed the reckless behaviour of humans toward their environment artistically through the mouthpiece of the characters. In this trilogy, two characters are presented in the dichotomy of their actions: scientists and the Gardeners. Scientists have created their world to avoid climate change and environmental degradation, which is full of high technology. In contrast, Gardeners have abandoned this worldly life, pledged to spend their lives in the lap of nature, and established their world far from the modern world. Environmental justice is also conspicuous in this trilogy.

Keywords: Margaret Atwood, Islam ecocriticism, Bioengineering, Anthropocentrism, eco/ego consciousness.

Introduction:

Literature is not only about the bygone eras; it also touches the very pulse of our times. Several emerging and significant concepts, such as Environmental Humanities, Blue Humanities, Posthumanism, etc., encompass and elucidate the less-explored worlds to awaken the

conscience of people's estrangement from the environment. Nowadays, discussing such sensitive issues is crucial to prepare ourselves for any cataclysmic events that would put the world on the verge of destruction. It's not nature that is showing her torment on the world rather, humans' insouciant, worst, indifferent behaviour exploits it due to capitalism and consumerism that's why we find to do it. Nature writing is not new in literature; earlier canonical writings from Homer to Wordsworth, have been replete with concern for nature. However, their works have just celebrated nature and failed to provide any corrective measures to save it for future generations. Subsequently, several strong movements arose and reasoned that humans should inhibit certain eco-ethics. Human Ecology deals with survival issues and the instruments underlying environmental complications. The cultural construction of nature is one of the most fundamental ecological issues, which poses a question of how humans apprehend and interpret their environment. One thing is observable: preservation of nature is essential to living a serene and well-balanced life on earth. Human beings' segregation from nature is doom in itself for themselves.

Margaret Eleanor Atwood is a Canadian novelist, environmental activist, inventor, poet, and literary critic. She has written numerous works ranging from poetry, novels, and fiction to non-fiction. The speculative fiction of Atwood demonstrates her concern about the environment. It acquaints the readers of her fears for the planet's future and claims that ecological ruin originates from human's alienation from the natural landscape. We can observe that Margaret Atwood's writings infuse with the spirit of an activist approach to raising ecological consciousness and generating behavioural and political change. Atwood's works are almost prophetic concerning climate change, in which she has illustrated the earth's future due to humankind's hostile attitude and negligent behaviour. Oppression of nature and women are conspicuous in her works. Her works bear warnings for various calamitous changes around us. In the Indian context, Arundhati Roy highlights the deterioration of the environment radically in her writings, but her depiction of the environment is not restricted to India only rather universal. She presents nature's unsullied beauty and its destruction by human atrocity. Roy delineates human beings' atrocities on the environment through several projects like the Hydro-Electric Dam Project/ Sardar Sarovar Project, India's nuclear test in May 1998 and the Mathunga Incident (The Adivasi Gothara Mahasaba promoting Adivasi land rights in Kerala). The Dam project has made 500,000 people to leave their lands and homes with little compensation, and this incident is akin to Atwood portrayal of people's migration from their land in her texts.

MaddAddam Trilogy encompasses three novels *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013), in which climate change occurs due to the reckless and unethical behaviour of humans, especially profit seekers and capitalists- they could be business tycoons, scientists or even common harmless people like us. Degradation of lands, forests, and seas is one of the significant problems the world is facing these days. Atwood has presented the damage to earth and

nature in this trilogy so artistically and appropriately that it can assault readers' consciences with fear and remorse. She has coined the phrase: "It's not climate change- it's everything change"(Mary Woodbury, *Climate Change Author Spotlight – Margaret Atwood*). Primarily, to an ordinary reader, the phrase may appear bizarre. But she makes it pertinent climate is changing and swiftly transforming everything that alters the fertile land into sterile, causing drought, flood, and rising sea levels. But the question is, what are the reasons behind this climate change? The answer will be the uncontrollable pillaging of resources and manipulating the environment under the banner of capitalism.

Before discussing the topic in the paper, I think it is crucial to understand Western and Islamic ecocriticism. The official commencement and study of ecocriticism began in the 1980s. In the United Kingdom, it is known as "Green Studies," which originates from the British Romanticism of the 1790s. In the USA, Ecocriticism has drawn from the transcendentalists' writings that depict the representation of nature. Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* (1836), Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1845), and Margaret Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes, During* (1843), regarded as the foundational texts of American ecocriticism and advocacy for the protection of nature are explicit in their works. Cheryll Glotfelty labels Ecocriticism "as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Cheryll Glotfelty 18). It analyses works that explore the relationship between ecology and literature, the impact of human activities on the environment, devastating the earth sooner or later, and making survival dismal.

William Rueckert coined the term 'ecocriticism' in his essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* (1978). He also presented a specific amalgamation of method and commitment in which ecocriticism should undergo an "experiment with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for a human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world we all live in" (William Rueckert 73), that he considered as the core strength of ecocriticism. Jonathan Bate perceives the environmental crisis as the outcome of damaging habits and attitudes of thought, i.e., the wicked ideas that make humanity dominate over nature. Glen Love asserted in his essay, *Revaluing Nature* (1990), that the welfare of humans is the utmost concern in modern society, resulting in ecocidal fascination about internal conflicts over resources. Moreover, he talks about the function of literature in raising human awareness to full contemplation of its place in a vulnerable environment which sparked an uprising in thought that would converse with the existing ideology that could segregate humanity from their environment.

Bahar Davary, one of the eco-critics, points out that all the literary and environmental works in the domain of academia are "Euro- American," and there is absolutely no recognition to those who are struggling in this battle of environmental crisis. But Islam as a religion advocate for the

ideological transition to overshadow Eurocentric temperaments is the best possible solution to the ecological deterioration happening all around the world.

Ecological crisis is increasingly becoming a severe issue in the Muslim world, and nothing has been done till today to evade the Western version of the devastation of the environment and consumerism. The Muslim eco-scholars proposed that the solution to this environmental problem lies at the local cultural and religious levels. Additionally, all religions have enough wisdom to encounter such issues in the best manner. Islam-ecocriticism is rooted on the Quran (direct word of God). The elements of nature in religious texts have been recorded since time immemorial. At the same time, Western philosophy introduced the same in the 1980s under ecocriticism. The Holy book, the Quran and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, Allah's messenger, have addressed caring for the environment. Muslims worldwide consider the Quran and Sunnah (sayings and deeds of the Prophet) as their sole guide, which all seek to emulate. While dealing with nature, humans' intentions become detrimental and avaricious, leading them to treat the environment unethically. Therefore, these immoral attributes have been proscribed by Islam. Manzoor, a critic, pointed out that humans' misconception and inadequate knowledge about the slightest difference between good and evil compels them to commit wrong to their inner souls (*Moralens talesman*11). I consider Adam and Eve's case suitable here to second the argument mentioned above, who were expelled from heaven because of their disobedience and less knowledge about the consequences of violating the rules formulated by God. Any righteous action done by a believer of Islam is assumed to be an act of worship. Islam suggests esteeming nature but strongly condemns its worshipping.

The Qur'an asks human adherence to the natural ambience, "We did not create the heavens and earth, and everything between them, except with truth" (15:85), and human beings are warned not to exploit nature; otherwise, they would be accountable for their irrational activities by God. The Prophet said, "Our Lord is He who gives everything it created from and then guides it" (20:34). This dictum is explicitly giving us a message: whatever the Creator has created must remain in its form, and if the situation demands any change, then transform it according to their use but restrict yourself from excessive use. The idea that everything on earth is for people that the Qur'an supports is a gift from God to humans with some limitations.

Islam ecocriticism extensively covers some recognised ecocritical concepts, such as moderation and animism, providing a holistic approach to earth and its inhabitants. One difference that should be clear to the readers of the environment is that the idea of "nature" in ecocritical discourses is much broader in the Islamic sense than assumed by any other philosophy of the so-called enlightened works. Abu Bakr, one of the first among Caliphates (Khalifahs), ordered his troops not to harm women, children and the feeble; he also added not to harm animals, destroy crops or cut down trees. This story's underlying message is to understand nature's value in our lives and

respect the Creator's creations. Islam has posed some limitations to its followers; they are welcome to do what is right and refrain from wrongdoings, and their actions should be balanced and moderated.

Representation of Environment in Islam and *MaddAddam* trilogy:

The environment presented in *MaddAddam* trilogy subverts the earth warned for in the Quran. Islam talks about the amiable nexus of humans to nature to maintain harmony on earth. In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, human atrocities devastate and manipulate the environment according to their needs. Economic progress and developmental ideas of humans subjugate nature, directly indicating a threat to the same. Extraction of the planet's resources may lead to progress; but it will give us the hollow mean only that would remain momentarily and sooner or later return to nature. This unethical development will impact not only nature but all creatures (humans and non-humans) of any kind being part of it. Eventually, the whole ecosystem would follow the trajectory of destruction. It is apparent by how we've allowed the world to be too much with us (William Wordsworth).

Islam opposed deforestation, sea pollution, extracting resources, and exploitation of land unnecessarily. The portrayal of the environment in Islam is based on the Quran and Sunnah. Prophet Muhammad motivated men and women for plantation of trees and cultivation of forests which are considered noble deeds. Anas bin Malik (RA) narrated that Allah's Messenger said, "There is none amongst the Muslims who plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, but is regarded as a charitable gift for him" (Bukhari). The Quran asks us to eat and drink according to our needs, not waste, because He does not forgive squandering beings.

This paper reflects on how Margaret Atwood's novels have unravelled the destruction of the environment by anthropogenic activities through various themes and characters' unethical approach to nature. Margaret Atwood's work emerged as the conduit of noticing the unnoticed cruelties being done to the natural world by advanced scientists for human progress. One of the most striking things about this trilogy is that whatever Atwood has demonstrated is not restricted to the mentioned setting but serves universally. Through this trilogy, she has presented modern-day industrial development and technological advancement, greenhouse gas emission, scarcity of water resources, deforestation, the insensible approach of humans to the environment, etc., as the significant issues that result in the barrenness of nature along with the sterility and oppression of women and animals.

Oryx and Crake and *The Year of Flood* correspond in their narrative. The trilogy also divides society into scientists (violators of the environment), Gardeners (religious folks), and Commoners. Two worlds have been presented: Compounds (affluent and highly technologically protected arenas dominated by only scientists) and Pleeblands (the most dangerous and derogatory cities crowded by Commoners). Jimmy, alias Snowman is a central figure in the *MaddAddam* trilogy and has access to travel between the Compounds and Pleeblands, providing an unparalleled insider's perspective of

these two precincts. His narrative renounces his life in the pre-apocalyptic present and the post-apocalyptic past. Crake, a young scientist, creates genetically engineered "dehumanised" humanoids called Crakers who possess no flaws of what he considers "human's destructive features"- "racism, hierarchy, territorialism, fear of death," besides "harmful symbolism" such as "kingdoms, icons, gods, or money" (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 305). Jimmy is the only character at Compound with empathy and moral understanding. Humans create these humanoid Crakers to replace humanity with a lethal virus, "Reejooven Essence," invented by Crake, who contaminates the whole population globally by permeating the virus in BlyssPlus pills as a lure to strengthen sexual potency, beauty and motherhood but turns into a camouflage to wipe out humans' race from the earth. Jimmy was the only human survivor of the global pandemic caused by the BlyssPlus Pill and emerged as instrumental in the advertisement of the pills in the worldwide market with the assistance of diverse media under the flagship to make the environment hospitable enough to sustain green lives.

Margaret Atwood has highlighted how the environment devastated at the hands of scientists affects women's health, confining them to some meagre roles in society, explicitly seen in the character of Zeb as caretaker of Crakes introduced in *The Year of Flood*. They were the ones who were affected mainly due to the environment's deterioration and becoming infertile. Commoners, residents of Pleeblands, were restricted from entering the Compounds and forced to sustain their lives on scavenging. However, she has held responsible the scientists for the deterioration of the environment through their unethical experiments. She points out Painballers, ruthless commoners whose exploitation and violence for their freaky sport have institutionalised and cheered them to kill each other. This sport has given them to hold their little authority by murdering, raping, and trading people after the occurrence of a waterless flood that sterile the land. This trilogy has depicted how much humans can degrade their morality to exploit each other for their benefit and what can be worse than killing humans who are obliquely part of nature. However, one idea is explicit: humans have forgotten God entirely due to their technological advancement. Islam invokes us to be fair, and justice should prevail for everyone.

Bioengineering highlights multiple pros and cons in the novels where it offers hope of creating all possible substitutes a human can imagine. Atwood has imaginatively presented the dire situation created by the radical experiments in genetic engineering and gene splicing through the character of Jimmy, who was highly shocked and experienced everything first-hand. Animals like Pigoons are protected in highly innovative capsules to keep them safe for organs' transplants, and their value surpasses humans'. Humans have done everything possible to ruin the environment and fabricated the whole environment. The idea of Crake's posthumanism venture is the debacle that lies in the unethical experimentation of human bodies. Jimmy's persona is the most striking element of this trilogy; he chose his role of a shepherd of the Crakers and tried to inculcate some basic ethics so

they could mingle with the rest of the deserted population.

We can observe in this trilogy how capitalism has objectified humans' and animals' bodies which lacks ethical constraints. In *The Year of Flood*, the Gardeners took the matter of protecting the environment into their hands. They built a new religion to govern people and show them the trajectory of salvation based on survival because establishing a new government was the situation's demand. They left the ruined space and inhabited far away from the crowd on the Edencliff Rooftop Garden. Foucault discusses the purport of redemption in religion "It was no longer a question of leading people to their salvation in the next world but rather ensuring it in this world" (*The Subject and Power* 215). The Gardeners built their theocracy and pledged to live their lifestyle vegetarian so they could live together as a community in depopulated America under the motto "respect of all creatures is paramount" (*The Year of Flood* 160-161). Their intentions were crystal clear to avoid the ethical corruption of humans by bringing them close to the environment in the form of spiritualism.

Consequently, the conspicuous sanguinity of the Gardeners' spiritualism of recreation after the environmental destruction happened into exodus to their demesne. Migration (*Hijrat*) has significant relevance in Islam, which defines the physical movement from one country of disbelief (*Kufr*) to another country of believers of Islam. Prophet Muhammad, Nuh A.S. and Musa A. S have migrated from their birth land on the command of the Creator. Therefore, the Gardeners' migration relates to Islamic migration, who segregated themselves from the disbelievers (scientists and a few commoners). Margaret Atwood projected the Gardeners' approach to the environment as a prototype of living morally. Through them, she is trying to convey that humans should practise their religion which obliquely yields ethical consciences in their attitude and behaviour while contacting nature to avoid the ecological crisis in future.

Conclusion:

Recently, we can observe how people live in a chaotic, modernised world hegemonized by technological advancement which obliquely coerced them to indulge in immoral activities. They are seeking refuge or appeasing by the sheen of technological allurements which persuades them to abstain from sustaining harmonies among the communities they are part of. The concept of individual interest in the existing economic system is steadily leading everyone on the verge of the devastation of the environment. Islam asks humans to restrict their avarice of materialism rather than adhere to minimal use of the same, which parallels any environmental movement's core motto. Ironically, it is considered nature is the conduit of giving solace to burdened souls in a disarray world and despite the fact, people are still exploiting and extracting resources from the planet, making it worse than before which directly perturbing the ecosystem. Pacifism is the core of any religion, and Islam is the appropriate religion to pursue life by following the Quran. It is mentioned in the Quran that the earth is a place to live in and to return to, which obliquely suggests its importance in human life, so in this

case, the land should not be violated or polluted. Humans should use the resources given to them with some limitations and keep checking their behaviour and attitude toward nature. Whatever humankind attains in this world, the void of serenity will always be missing in their lives that could be filled by getting closer to spiritualism and engrossing themselves in the lap of nature. Harmony with Nature and worldly pleasure should go together; escaping from any of them would create an imbalance in life. Indeed, materialism is vital to growing oneself so that one can contribute to the development of one nation, but that development should not rely upon the cost of the environment's destruction. The government should formulate environment favouring policy and also limit capitalists' extraction of natural resources in abundance. Capitalists are the two faces of one coin for any nation, their efforts reach countries to the pinnacle of the success and ill-treatment of environment leads those countries to its doomsday too.

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