Chapter 2

Discovering Self in Ecofeminist Mode: Surfacing
Discovering Self in Ecofeminist Mode: *Surfacing*

*Surfacing* (1972) is a pioneering novel by Atwood that provides ground to analyse the theory of ecofeminism and its peace politics. The novel focuses on the dilemma of the protagonist who is trying to understand the complexities of human relationships. At a younger stage of her life, the glitter of city life allures her. She manages to escape from the innocent and simple life of the island in Northern Quebec, where her parents live. But things turn out to be quite different in the city. The protagonist finds that the evils are deeply grounded in the life-style and mentality of people in city. She realizes that fake relationships and artificiality dominate modern culture. The protagonist undergoes various traumatic experiences and tries to build false stories in her mind in order to hide those incidents from her own conscience. The news of her missing father brings her back to her ancestral village. It is only amidst nature and its beauty that she is able to gain her new identity. She associates her own exploitation by her lover with the exploitation of sacred land by humans. Her deeply felt concerns for nature and for the freedom of women encourage her to take major steps in the direction of giving a new shape to her life. She decides to break the chains of patriarchy and live a free life.

The novel can be related to many issues that are interconnected e.g. modernity, gender inequality, patriarchy, and rediscovering identity. Women have been trying since a long time to assert their appropriate place in society. Although significant achievement has been gained by them, many oppressive patriarchal practices still plague the contemporary world. Ecofeminism has taken an important step by inter-relating all such practices that are a threat for the peace of the world. By
strengthening their resolve to eradicate the oppressive conceptual framework, ecofeminists are working towards an ecofeminist peace politics in order to establish peace in this world. Their aim is to undermine all the ‘isms of domination’ that are the root cause of violence, mismanagement, and chaos.

In Europe, the feminist consciousness raised its voice against domination after the French Revolution. The liberal tradition that formed the background of the new American nation, made the concepts of freedom and equality central to its way of thinking. But those principles of equality were not applied on women. Mary Wollstonecraft argued in her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) that the principles of equality are as valid for women as men. The First and Second World Wars brought thousands of Canadian women out of their homes to work in factories, farms, stores, and offices. Feminist writing in Canada, during the second wave of the feminist movement in 1970s, played an important role in the attack on patriarchy. It gave voice to women’s grievances against domestic violence and their unequal rights in the public sphere. In Canada, the association called ‘Voice of Women,’ founded in 1960, protested against nuclear weapon testing and addressed peace issues and over the years took up other environmental issues also. Aparna Basu writes:

> New issues emerged in the second phase of the women’s movement. In Canada, international peace became a major concern. The National Council of Women and the Federation of Business and Professional women developed close ties with the United Nations and the women from these organizations were appointed as Canadian representatives of the UN commission on Human Rights. (Basu n.pag.)
It is in this context of peace, environment, and feminism that the novel *Surfacing* has been analysed. The novel was published in 1972 when the second wave of feminism had begun to show its force. As Malashri Lal writes, “While Margaret Atwood never declared ‘feminism’ to be her dominant ideology, she had already worked out *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* with plenty of emphasis on victim position, oppression, anger, the Divine mother and the Bitch Goddess” (Lal 183). The novel *Surfacing* also encompasses similar feminist issues of victimization, oppression, and patriarchy. It gathered quick reputation as a major Canadian classic. The feeling of being victimized can be seen as the prime concern of Atwood in the novel. It becomes evident that Canadians do not want any interference of Americans in their affairs yet they are adopting their ways subconsciously. Victimization of nature, due to various modern practices and increasing mechanization, is also one of the major themes of the novel.

The central theme of the novel is the female protagonist’s search for her identity and real self while living in a mechanical and patriarchal society and the role that nature plays during her search. Nature has been a persistent theme in the works by Canadian writers. ‘Nature’ that was once considered as a monstrous giant in Canada began to be seen as victim itself. The need was felt to save the environment from destruction by human beings. Margaret Atwood writes, “But it is increasingly obvious to some writers that man is now more destructive towards Nature than Nature can be towards man; and, furthermore, that the destruction of Nature is equivalent to self-destruction on the part of man” (Atwood 60).
The protagonist of the novel, on the journey to her ancestral village with three friends David, Joe, and Anna, ostensibly in search for her missing father, feels disappointed on looking at the changed environment. She thinks, “I can’t believe I’m on this road again, twisting along past the lake where the white birches are dying, the disease is spreading up from the south, and I notice they now have seaplanes for hire” (3). The degradation of the environment points towards the rising dominating practices of the modern civilization against nature. The beginning of the novel calls attention towards the degrading environment. Human activities are polluting the water bodies and threatening the marine living creatures. The oil spills from huge tankers and the dumping of hazardous waste into the oceans have increased water pollution to alarming levels. If success of new technologies and industries becomes the cause of destruction of natural beauty and natural ecosystem, then the protagonist’s worry is genuine and well-grounded. Suka Joshua writes in this context:

It is explicit in *Surfacing* that Atwood’s complaint is not against technology but against its abuse, its employment in the services of war and repression. She expresses her anxiety about the uses of large scale industrial technology that leads to alienation, de-humanization and domination. Her stern warning is that the spectacular speed of technological development will leave a far more terrifying impact on people, land and its resources. (Joshua 104)

In *Surfacing*, the protagonist’s thoughts wander in the past and she ponders over the trauma that she had to go through in the dehumanized city culture. The traumatized past makes her lead a life of hallucinations. She imagines that dominance
of her husband in the technologically advanced city had made her feel that her womb was only an incubator. While living in the patriarchal society, she felt helpless about her own baby. She felt about her body as if it was a child bearing machine. Her husband used to impose all his decisions on her. She imagines that she had given birth to a child although in reality she had gone through an abortion. She thinks that she was used as a source for the production of the child. “... he wanted a replica of himself; after it was born I was no more use” (30). The hallucinations of the protagonist depict the deeply embedded emotions of a victimized woman. The protagonist thinks that men use women for bearing their children and keep them subdued in the process of reproduction. They do not give them appropriate respect and identity as a mother. She thinks that men want to dominate all the natural cycles and also manipulate them for their selfish interests.

Nature has similarly been considered as a tool for self-fulfilment by humans and they exploit it for their selfish interests. The resources of earth are being extracted at large scale, without any consideration to the consequences. The reverence for earth as a mother has been replaced by greed that is responsible for depletion of its resources. Various technological advancements, that are helping man in this process, are making the condition worse. The fast pace with which nature is being exploited presents a very grave picture of the state of earth and its resources. Man has even reduced the fertility of the soil by introducing ‘monoculture cash crop’ farming instead of the traditional alternate crop farming. The deterioration of environment can be seen as running parallel with the domination of women.
The protagonist in *Surfacing* thinks that marriage further adds to the misery of women when men begin to exercise their control over their wives, considering them only a means of fulfilling their needs. She imagines that her husband had changed after their marriage. He had started expecting things from her and he wanted to be pleased. She wonders how signing a piece of paper could change a man completely who starts thinking about his wife as his property after marriage. She thinks that man tries to become the master after marriage and tries to dominate his wife in order to keep her under control. David openly insults his wife Anna in the novel and even calls her uncultured and vulgar. He thinks that she is dumb and is not worthy of respect. Anna has no identity of her own except being David’s wife and due to this reason she submits to all the abuses.

Simone de Beauvoir writes about the politics behind the practice of marriage in her book *The Second Sex*. She comments:

> Marriage incites man to a capricious imperialism.... Very often it is not enough for the husband to be approved of and admired, for him to be counsellor and guide; he issues commands, he plays the lord and master.... He enacts violence, power, unyielding resolution; he issues commands in tones of severity; he shouts and pounds the table: this farce is a daily reality for his wife. (Beauvoir 483-84)

The relationship between David and Anna symbolizes the degradation in the values attached to marriage. The modern mechanized life-style has turned marriage into a show off business. David and Anna have been married for nine years and the erosion of their marital relationship is an outcome of the artificiality that has
penetrated into their lives. Anna has to wake up early in the morning to apply make-up on her face because she cannot show her natural face to him. Beauvoir opines on this kind of artificiality involved in the relationship of marriage. She writes that “This is indeed a melancholy science – to dissimulate, to use trickery, to hate and fear in silence...” (Beauvoir 487). Anna has to play the tricks because of the hypocrisy involved in married life. Beauvoir also comments on the ‘art’ that a wife must have for managing her husband. “But, above all, a whole tradition enjoins upon wives the art of ‘managing’ a man; one must discover and humour his weaknesses and must cleverly apply in due measure flattery and scorn, docility and resistance, vigilance and leniency” (Beauvoir 487).

In a patriarchal society, women and nature both become the victims of the supremacy of man. Many ecofeminists have theorized upon this dual victimization. Val Plumwood, an ecofeminist, comments, “And it is not only women but also the earth’s wild living things that have been denied possession of a reason thus construed along masculine and oppositional lines...” (Plumwood 157). Men consider it logical to dominate women as well as nature, conceptualizing them as weaker.

The profit based trade that is devoid of ethics, is the characteristic of modern capitalized world. The impact of this type of trade can be seen especially on the forests where trees are cut in large numbers for high profits. Ecofeminists argue that excessive deforestation has severely affected the lives of rural women. Vandana Shiva argues that “Since it is women’s work that protects and conserves nature’s life in forestry and in agriculture, and through such conservation work, sustains human life
through ensuring the provision of food and water, the destruction of the integrity of forest ecosystems is most vividly and concretely experienced by peasant women” (Shiva 65).

The protagonist in *Surfacing* feels the bad effects of cutting of trees in the forest. She finds stumps of huge trees that had been cut very evenly with new instruments and she begins to associate her own exploitation with the exploitation of the forest. “The trees will never be allowed to grow that tall again, they’re killed as soon as they’re valuable, big trees are scarce as whales” (43). The new technology becomes an aid in destroying the trees. The protagonist’s memory carries the past experience when her child was also killed with latest instruments. It was not allowed to live and take birth.

The protagonist’s mother had a close association with forest and nature. She was connected to nature so deeply that she had a protective wall against the evils of the modern world. The protagonist remembers about her mother that “Sometimes she would take breadcrumbs or seeds out to the birdfeeder tray and wait for the jays, standing quiet as a tree, or she would pull weeds in the garden; but on some days she would simply vanish, walk off by herself into the forest” (49). Nature was an essential part of her life and her soul found satisfaction in the beauty of nature. Just as a mother nurtures the children and looks after the family and in the process develops a special bond of love, her mother loved nature with the same intensity and depth.

The protagonist starts feeling that she belongs to that wild island instead of belonging to the city. She resents her profession of being a commercial artist in the city. She had to choose that profession for the sake of earning more money. She is still
not comfortable with her choice and it doesn’t seem natural to her liking. Her work involves designing pictures for posters, covers or books. She has to compromise with her natural talent and has to design more flashy and stylized pictures. “Though what they like best is something they hope will interest the English and American publishers too” (50). After coming to the island, the rationalism that dominated her life is slowly being replaced by her real self.

The protagonist realizes that the stressful work culture of the profit market compels a person to be involved in the artificial jobs, keeping at stake one’s natural talent. Atwood hints at the gloomy picture of professionals in the modern industrialized world. Karen J. Warren calls the modern job system as a “dysfunctional system.” Robert Alan Sessions emphasizes that these mechanized systems are unable to meet the real needs of people. “... a great deal of what people today compensate for is work related, whether from stress or lack of meaning on the job or from other problematic dimensions of their lives that are related to work” (Sessions 181).

The contrast is clearly visible between the lives of the mother on the island and the daughter in the city. The mother, absorbed in age old values and traditions, had a connection with nature and that made her a confident and self-reliant woman. She was capable of protecting herself and her family in every possible way. The daughter migrated to city and she took up a profession that she didn’t like. She also got pregnant and her lover persuaded her to abort the child. She hated the whole mechanized process in the hospital – “They stick needles into you so you won’t hear anything, you might as well be a dead pig, your legs are up in a metal frame, they bend over you, technicians, mechanics, butchers, students clumsy or snickering
practicing on your body, they take the baby out with a fork like a pickle out of a pickle jar” (79). The protagonist realizes that everything and everybody works like a machine in the city. A baby breathing with life is removed from the body like a lifeless object. Modernization dominates the souls of people and drags them away from nature. The protagonist remembers the time after her abortion:

He wasn’t there with me, I couldn’t remember why; he should have been, since it was his idea, his fault. But he brought his car to collect me afterward, I didn’t have to take a taxi. (80)

The tussle in the mind of the protagonist makes her reflect upon her traumatized past, her association with nature, and her search for truth. She starts suspecting marriage as a contract that binds a woman with subordination of her will. Atwood has highlighted the dilemma and insecurities of young women in the modern world. The complexities involved in the relationship after marriage, add to more confusion and restlessness. Patricia J. Mills comments on Beauvoir’s perception of man in connection to nature and women:

De Beauvoir argues that man sees woman as that which calls him back to his natural state and makes him remember his own mortality.

Woman’s reproductive power, her ability to create new life, is said to be rooted in the immanence of nature, which pulls man back to his body.... Since man wants to forget his mortality, to transcend the flesh, he learns to objectify and dominate nature and to dominate woman as the representative of nature. (Mills 219)
Atwood indicates in *Surfacing* that man finds pleasure in activities like cutting trees and killing other creatures because these activities confirm his power over nature. David clicks photographs for ‘Random Samples’ that are symbolic of his progress. The samples contain the photographs of the interior parts of a fish and a chopped log of tree. David and Joe feel proud of their achievement. “... they stuck the axe in the log, after several tries, and took turns shooting each other standing beside it, arms folded and one foot on it as if it was a lion or a rhinoceros” (81). They have overpowered something, so they are feeling victorious by displaying their superiority. The protagonist begins to realize that human beings do not have the right to kill other living beings. She ponders over the act of killing fish and reaches to the conclusion that it is an inhuman act. “We didn’t need it, our proper food was tin cans. We were committing this act, violation, for sport or amusement or pleasure, recreation they called it, these were no longer the right reasons” (121).

Atwood points out that man is violent and non-tolerant in his relationship with other living beings on this planet. Men have also been violent against women and have dominated them. A research upon “Why are Men Violent?” quotes, “A man grows up thinking he is better off than the fairer sex.... Men also have fewer outlets for their anger. They don’t share what’s on their mind and rarely cry, which comes out in form of anger or violence” (Times News 1). The protagonist in *Surfacing* feels that Hitler is still alive; alive in the behaviour of men. The sight of a dead heron and the realization of its senseless killing, disturb her mind repeatedly. She thinks that there is always an explanation given to justify wars and riots but the death of the heron had no explanation and the act was done only for having pleasure.
The protagonist looks at the scrapbook pictures drawn by his brother when he was small. They represented violence that characterizes men’s nature even at an early stage of their life. The pictures contained “…explosions in red and orange, soldiers dismembering in the air, planes and tanks; …and a man-eating plant, engulfing a careless victim, a balloon with HELP in it squeezing out of his mouth like bubble gum” (90). Her own scrapbook had illustrations cut from magazines – “They were ladies, all kinds: holding up cans of cleanser, knitting, smiling, modelling toeless high heels…” (91). There were drawings made by her that displayed eggs, rabbits, grass, trees, and flowers. There were no monsters, no wars, and no explosions in the pictures drawn by her. The pictures were symbolic of her love for nature, just like her mother. Explaining this kind of difference between girls and boys, Simone de Beauvoir comments upon the origin of violence in the behaviour of men:

At about thirteen is the time when boys go through a real apprenticeship in violence, when their aggressiveness is developed, their will to power, their love for competition; and it is at just this time that the girl gives up rough games. (Beauvoir 353)

The connection between women and peace has been analysed by many ecofeminist theorists. The women’s peace movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries emphasized upon women’s peacefulness. The most common argument that connects women with peace is related to women’s pacifism in their roles as mothers. Sara Ruddick has accomplished a ground-breaking work in her research of conflicting positions of ‘emotions’ and ‘rationality.’ Her analysis concludes that maternal activities give rise to unique ways of thinking that bring women closer to peaceful existence. Maternal thinking is specifically capable of criticizing activities related to violence.
The protagonist in the novel *Surfacing* dislikes the Americanized life-style that is spreading like virus. She thinks that under the banner of development, Americans are spreading their culture everywhere and are becoming a threat to the native cultures. They know that the protagonist’s native island will be strategically important during the war and therefore, they want to have their control over that area. The Americans are running out of clean water and after some time they will swing a deal with the Canadian government to give them cheap water. The government is like a puppet and would give in. People may use riots or kidnappings as their weapon against this decision. Finally, the Americans will forcibly enter Canada for installing industries and exporting water. “They’ll hit the big cities and knock out communications and take over, may be shoot a few kids...” (97).

The fear and concern of Canadians for their land and natural resources is apparent in the conversation between David and the protagonist. They are defensive against the dominating and aggressive attitude of Americans. They think that the Americans will pollute their land and would use up their natural resources. This fear among Canadians has been analysed by Robin W. Winks. According to him, “... the cultural impact of the more populous nation upon the smaller has caused Canada to fear a "creeping continentalism," or "cultural annexation," by the United States. In the 1960s and 1970s, this fear led to strains in the Canadian-American relationship” (Winks n.pag.). Winks writes:

The second problem is that Canadians found themselves caught between the United States, which they feared would absorb them, and Great Britain, which possessed Canada as a colony. Further, despite
similarities of geography, patterns of settlement, technology, and standards of living, Canadians came to differ in numerous and fundamental ways from Americans. (Winks n.pag.)

Ecofeminists believe that if there is some hope of peaceful relations among nations, it lies in obtaining a complete understanding of the web of domination. Val Plumwood argues that the strategies for dealing with such a web require cooperation and the creation of political alliances. Ecofeminist peace politics aims at promoting peace with various such strategies. The ecofeminist theorists envision a world where all the nations are free from domination and all human beings are treated equally.

Ecofeminists suggest that the agenda of peace must begin its efforts at the basic unit of families. The societies that are drifting away from nature are dealing with increasing number of divorce rates. Women are facing more domestic violence and they are victimized in various ways. Love for nature and peace in families ensures peace in nations also. In the novel Surfacing, Anna is suffering from mental torture inflicted on her by her husband David. Simone de Beauvoir has opined that a woman wants to ‘hold’ her husband, while resisting his domination. Beauvoir writes about the struggle of a woman in the patriarchal society when she makes an effort to uphold her independence but remains dependent on her husband for maintaining the social status. Due to this double pressure of gaining independence and maintaining social status, she suffers from disturbed state of mind. Beauvoir writes:

To ‘catch’ a husband is an art; to ‘hold’ him is a job – and one in which great competence is called for.... What is at stake is extremely serious: material and moral security, a home of one’s own, the dignity
of wifehood, a more or less satisfactory substitute for love and happiness. (Beauvoir 486)

The protagonist in *Surfacing* dislikes extreme rationality that characterized her father’s nature. He measured everything with reason and numbers. There had to be logic for everything according to him and he never failed in his explanation with logic. “I tried to recall him, picture his face, the way he’d been when he was alive, I found I couldn’t; all I could see was the cards he used to hold up, testing us: 3 X 9 = ? He was as absent now as a number, a zero, the question mark in place of the missing answer. Unknown quantity” (104). The protagonist couldn’t even recall his face. All she could remember were his numbers and after his death he was like a missing number, with no human identity.

Many theorists have argued over the dichotomy between ‘reason’ and ‘emotion.’ Adrian Harris writes that the patriarchal belief system gives preference to 'male' qualities of reason and characterizes emotional 'female' qualities as passive, weak and irrational and therefore inferior (Harris n.pag.). Maria Soledad Iriart argues that it seems emotional values are not considered worthy to be taken into account in the decision making process. How can our actions be carried out with only logic, without considering feelings as essential part of our being? Iriart concludes her analysis about ‘masculine scientific knowledge’ as:

The masculine discourse of scientific knowledge is placed at the disposal of the subject to reveal the relationship between the objects in the external world, which is devoid of mind and thought. This model of knowledge rejects both the body's forms of knowing, its sensual and
emotional responses, and the integration of the subject with the object, either spiritually or personally. These forms of knowing are not only devalued but attributed to women and associated with the conceptual female. (Iriart 17)

The protagonist’s father in Surfacing was a rational person who found reason and order in every aspect of life. The protagonist, who used to be emotional, becomes numb and devoid of feelings after facing the pressure and rationality of city life. “I realized I didn’t feel much of anything, I hadn’t for a long time.... I was nothing but a head, or, no, something minor like a severed thumb; numb” (106,109). Joe proposes to marry her but she refuses as she can no longer love anyone. She could never come out of the trauma of the abortion of her child. The anaesthesia of the process had erased all her good memories. After her stay on the island, she comes to know about the hollow relationship between David and Anna which is also numb like her. It is as artificial as the modern society in which they are living.

The impact of modernity is clearly visible on the island also. Trees are being cut in large numbers with new instruments. “The garden would go but the cabin would survive; the hill would become an eroding sand island surrounded by dead trees” (114). Garbage leaves the trail of civilized people who visit the place for recreation – orange peelings, tin cans and greasy papers. A heron killed by the visitors represents the hostile attitude of humans towards nature. David is excited to shoot the heron for the movie and he finds it ‘great.’ The protagonist realizes that someone had hung it only to display his power to kill.
The protagonist feels concern for the preservation of nature, especially after living on the island for few days. She is deeply upset over the useless killing of living creatures. She can no more gather the courage to kill the fish when they go out for fishing. She feels that she has no right to kill it for any purpose. She frees the frogs that she had caught for fishing and this action makes her think about the frogs on which experiments were performed in her High School laboratory. Atwood has given an indication of the torture that animals have to suffer for all the curiosities of humans. Animals and other living creatures are made the source of experimentation as if they are lifeless objects.

The protagonist feels surprise at the artificiality that forms the basis of the relationship of marriage in the modern world. The superficial pretension is more important than true love. Anna becomes worried because she has forgotten to bring her make-up kit along with her to the camp. “God,” she says, “what’m I going to do? I forgot my make-up, he’ll kill me.... He wants me to look like a young chick all the time, if I don’t he gets mad” (123). Anna is only an object of display for David and he treats her in an insulting manner. She cannot express her thoughts freely and cannot act according to her free will. This kind of dominating behaviour by men has been analysed by Simone de Beauvoir. She describes the psychology of a tyrannical husband and writes that “He is so firm in his rights that the slightest sign of independence on her part seems to him a rebellion; he would fain stop her breathing without his permission” (Beauvoir 484). In Surfacing, Anna tells the protagonist:

He’s got this little set of rules. If I break one of them I get punished, except he keeps changing them so I’m never sure. He’s crazy, there’s
something missing in him, you know what I mean? He likes to make me cry because he can’t do it himself. (123)

David behaves like a dictator in his role as a husband. Anna feels that he doesn’t want her to love him and he doesn’t want her to be happy in any way. He seems to have a right on her happiness. Anna says, “Sometimes I think he’d like me to die... I have dreams about it” (124). Atwood indicates that the urge of man to exercise power over his wife makes him tormenter and dictator. In the novel, David dominates Anna and kills other creatures for amusement. Another domination highlighted in the novel is concerning Americans who pollute the environment and exploit the weaker countries. These kinds of domination make evident that ‘patriarchal oppressive conceptual framework’ works at the grassroots level of oppression. The theory of ecofeminism asserts that all forms of oppression are connected to each other and the structures of oppression must be addressed in their totality. “Oppression of the natural world and of women by patriarchal power structures must be examined together or neither can be confronted fully. These socially constructed oppressions are formed out of the power dynamics of patriarchal systems” (Hobgood-Oster n.pag.). The dualisms on which the structure of patriarchy is based have been highlighted by ecofeminists:

Ecofeminism claims that patriarchal structures justify their dominance through categorical or dualistic hierarchies: heaven/earth, mind/body, male/female, human/animal, spirit/matter, culture/nature, white/non-white. Established oppressive systems continue to manifest their
abusive powers by reinforcing assumptions of these binaries, even making them sacred through religious and scientific constructs.

(Hobgood-Oster n.pag.)

The central argument of Simone de Beauvoir’s critical work *The Second Sex* is that from the origin of patriarchy, women have been forced to occupy a secondary place in relation to men and the secondary place has been further imposed by educational and social traditions, under the control of men. Even today woman feels handicapped, though her status is changing. Beauvoir opines, “From humanity’s beginnings, their biological advantage has enabled the males to affirm their status as sole and sovereign subjects; they have never abdicated this position...” (Beauvoir 109). Some theorists have extended this tyranny upon nature and woman to the tyranny of war. Wars that are fought cruelly not only claim many lives, they are ecologically destructive also. Mary Mellor argues that destructive behaviour exists because masculine values are too dominant and more emphasis on feminine values is needed to restore the balance (Mellor 181).

The leading deep ecologist Warwick Fox suggests that selfishness in the form of excessive personal attachment is the fundamental cause of greed, exploitation, war, and ecological destruction. Deep Ecologists believe in the equal value of non-human world and the human beings because they are inherently connected in the cosmos of existence. They oppose the position of humans at the top and the placement of others at inferior position. The protagonist in *Surfacing* also criticizes this anthropocentric behaviour. She thinks that “... there is nothing inside the happy killers to restrain them, no conscience or pity; for them the only things worthy of life were human,
framed in the proper clothes and gimmicks, laminated. It would have been different in those countries where an animal is the soul of an ancestor or the child of a god, at least they would have felt guilt” (129).

The protagonist feels that the aggressive behaviour of Americans was responsible for senseless killings. Americanization had influenced the culture of other countries and also their business practices and political techniques. Atwood points out the political situation in which American economy is a dominating force in the world. Canadians are against the American companies that are trying to control the Canadian industry. They feel that the process of Americanization should be put to an end in order to maintain traditions, culture, and independent economy of other nations.

The protagonist feels worried because Americans are turning everybody like them – rational, competitive and aggressive. She feels that the heron was also killed with an American attitude of useless and senseless killing. Americans were like Hitler; the devil who was alive even after his death. Several other countries were mutely submitting to their dictatorship. The people of those countries were not doing anything to stop the disease of Americanization from spreading. Suka Joshua comments on the disappointment of the protagonist. She writes, “The Americans have crossed the border, invaded the Canadian landscape, littered, and spread disease, greed, violence, and destruction” (Joshua 103). With the similar oppressive attitude, the protagonist’s brother used to catch little creatures and kept them in jars and tin cans. She didn’t remain passive and emptied the jars near the swamp to liberate them. She was always in favour of freedom, harmony, and peace. “I didn’t want there to be wars and death, I wanted them not to exist... I wanted everyone to be happy” (132).
The protagonist’s brother was more realistic because the real picture of the world was that of violence and murders. He was a part of that destructive wave of the modern times that was engulfing the conscious of co-existence. The effect of this wave could be felt everywhere, especially in human relationships. David was also a part of that wave and felt pleasure in humiliating his wife and proving his dominance on her. He liked exhibiting his power of creating violence. Anna had accepted humiliation as a part of her fate. There was a compromise in their relationship but emotionally, they had no feelings of love for each other. Simone de Beauvoir has commented upon the forceful binding of marriage for a wife, “... the chains of marriage are heavy, and the wife must somehow accommodate herself to a situation from which she cannot escape” (Beauvoir 494). Barbara Andrew also opines, “... those who speak and act against men’s dictatorship are killed. Women are silenced and enslaved by their fear of male violence” (Andrew 126).

The protagonist remembers that she was ‘silenced’ by her unborn child’s father and she had to abort the child according to his wish. She was feeling utterly helpless when she had seen the child’s remains curled up in a bottle. It was at that moment when she had lost all her sensitivity as a female and had become hard and numb. The remains of the child seemed like accusing her for not letting it to be born in this world. “It wasn’t a child but it could have been one, I didn’t allow it” (144). The realization of the guilt comes to her when she ‘surfaces’ after diving for the last time in the water of the lake. The bad memories of the abortion of her child start haunting her. Her lover, whom she loved dearly, didn’t accompany her for the abortion because his real children were having a birthday party. But he came afterwards as if to collect whatever was left of her. She recollects in her mind:
He said I should do it, he made me do it; he talked about it as though it was legal, simple, like getting a wart removed. He said it wasn’t a person, only an animal; I should have seen that was no different, it was hiding in me as if in a burrow and instead of granting it sanctuary I let them catch it. I could have said No but I didn’t; that made me one of them too, a killer. (145-6)

The comparison of an unborn child to a ‘wart’ by the protagonist’s lover had made the child an unwanted, disease causing thing. His insensitivity towards the seed of a human being proved his tyranny. Its comparison to an animal and its brutal murder again proved his dominating behaviour. “After the slaughter, the murder, he couldn’t believe I didn’t want to see him any more... others, he said, wouldn’t have bothered” (146). He expected gratitude from her for arranging the murder. Simone de Beauvoir writes about the tyranny involved in the abortion of a child, “Men tend to take abortion lightly; they regard it as one of the numerous hazards imposed on women by malignant nature, but fail to realize fully the values involved” (Beauvoir 508).

The protagonist dives into water as a confused woman but she comes out like an enlightened woman. All the mysteries that disturbed her earlier begin to unfold the truth, one by one. She realizes that her father must have undergone a spiritual experience after studying the rock paintings and the history behind them. His logic and reasoning must have failed after he would have visualized the truth of existence. His thinking must have started resembling the protagonist’s spiritual way of looking at things. “When it happened the first time he must have been terrified, it would be
like stepping through a usual door and finding yourself in a different galaxy, purple trees and red moons and a green sun” (146). The protagonist’s father must have realized that life was not blind logic rather it was much more than that on the spiritual plane.

The protagonist’s experiences with nature make her more alive and aware on the island. From being a numb person, she starts regaining her feelings. “... feeling was beginning to seep back into me, I tingled like a foot that’s been asleep” (147). The harsh and bitter experiences of the city begin to fade away and they give way to a new and fresh connection with nature. Ecofeminists also ground their theory on the basis that women have a deep connection with nature and their feminine qualities bring them closer to nature. The protagonist feels that her life is taking a new form in the wilderness. Living in the city for a long time had made her numb and she was leading a hollow life. The island connects her back with nature and she starts associating her existence with its beauty. She can feel herself as an inseparable part of nature and she realizes that she would be able to regain her lost identity in the lap of nature. She recollects that she was always against any sort of violence and had wished peace and happiness everywhere. The protagonist’s desire for peace can be related to the ultimate goal of ecofeminist peace politics, as Karen J. Warren explains:

... it makes a central place for considerations of care, appropriate reciprocity, friendship, kinship, appropriate trust, and love – in addition to whatever place more traditional considerations of rights, utility, or fairness have in contexts of justice. These considerations
centralize “relationship” or “relational” values which apply to and describe humans in relationships to others, including the nonhuman natural environment. (Warren 189)

As the protagonist in *Surfacing* goes through a mystical experience after diving in the water of the lake, she gains inner strength of her mind. She can now delve deep in her heart, just as she had dived deep in water. She can realize that it was her aborted baby that was creating guilt in her mind all the time. She accepts her fault that if she wanted she could have saved her baby. It was the non-acceptance of her fault that was the cause of her confusion. The sense of guilt was rooted deeply in her heart after the abortion. She could not tell about her abortion to her parents as they were very innocent people and could not understand the evils of the advanced society. The acceptance of her fault brings her mind back to the normal state and she starts a new journey with the innocence and love for nature that her mother had. P.R. Aruna Devi comments on the protagonist’s efforts for a new future:

> Her present identity as a victim, a colonized, powerless subject makes her ruminate over her past and the intuition guides her to take the help of the past to understand the present status which in turn would be indispensable in shaping her future. (Devi 113)

The journey of the protagonist towards peace begins after she experiences truth with nature. The picture of her past suddenly becomes clear to her. She no longer needs to frame stories in her mind to hide the bad incidents from herself. She now had the courage to face truth in its bare form. She realizes that her lover’s relationship with her was only a ritual for him; a tag to remind him that he was still
young. He wanted to keep the relationship separate from his married and routine life. “For him I could have been anyone but for me he was unique, the first, that’s where I learned” (150).

The protagonist can now understand her mother more clearly and can visualize her mother’s strong association with nature. She can analyse the rationality that dominates men’s behaviour. She can feel the change inside her as she gains strength and courage to follow the path of freedom. She desires to be alone to experience her connection with nature. Malashri Lal writes about the present state of the protagonist:

Herein the Atwood protagonist begins to feel the power of the self. Beginning with the denial of the father’s authority, she proceeds to reject all forms of male authority – that of the married lover who had abused her body, that of her present lover Joe who now proposes marriage. The log cabin on the island is an opportunity for creating another kind of home, outside of institutionalised expectations of woman’s nature. (Lal 186)

The revelation that the protagonist experiences regarding nature, is related to the concept of ‘Green anarchism,’ also called ‘ecoanarchism.’ It is a school of thought within anarchism that puts particular emphasis on environmental issues. American anarchist Henry David Thoreau and his book *Walden* (1854) were very influential in promoting this thought. In *Walden*, he advocates simple living and the book details his experiences of living in a cabin near Walden Pond. Thoreau emphasizes upon self-sufficiency among natural surroundings and he resists advancement of industrial civilization. While living in the cabin amidst woodland, he immersed himself in
nature and hoped to understand the society through personal introspection. The protagonist in *Surfacing* also realizes that man had adopted artificiality in the modern world and had lost his originality. “Second hand American was spreading over him in patches, like mange or lichen. He was infested, garbled, and I couldn’t help him: it would take such time to heal, unearth him, scrape down to where he was true” (154).

While searching for any message left by her mother, the protagonist gains the realization that giving birth to another human being is a form of nature’s beauty. Through this process, a woman gains control over her body and is also able to gain confidence and strength needed by her to reclaim her existence. Adrienne Rich has, in her book *Of Woman Born* (1976), sought to reclaim women’s bodies from patriarchal domination. She is of the opinion that women’s disempowerment is the result of loss of their control over their own bodies. She argued that to be confident women should reclaim and gain control over their bodies.

The protagonist in *Surfacing* starts dismantling the methods of domination as a form of protest. She decides that she will not marry but she will become a mother. She had always felt resentment against her lover who had not let her give birth to her child. By becoming a mother she would follow the course of nature and she would never let herself and her child become a part of the artificial world. She would not fall in the trap created by men. She unwinds the film of David’s camera and throws it into the lake. The film contained pictures that symbolized the oppression of women and nature. David had felt amusement while capturing killed fish, dead heron, chopped tree, and nude Anna in the photographs. Metaphorically, the action of the protagonist
connotes the unwinding of the structure of oppression. Aruna Devi comments upon this kind of rebellious act:

> The manipulation of male power plays a vital role in puncturing feminine identity in all aspects. Her conflict gets intensified and the rebellious instinct in her makes her usurp the film and throw it in a lake that symbolizes the submersion of women’s subjugation. (Devi 114)

The protagonist decides to keep herself away from the evils of modern culture. She realizes that she is emotionally and spiritually alive whereas her friends are only physically alive. She takes a canoe and glides it away from them. She decides to stay with nature for gaining the complete experience of truth. “It’s true, I am by myself; this is what I wanted, to stay here alone. From any rational point of view I am absurd; but there are no longer any rational points of view” (173).

The protagonist starts discarding everything that is artificial in order to see the true picture of her being. She discards her clothes and the canned food that are symbolic of civilization. She even avoids the food that grows in the garden of the house because that also shows man’s manipulation of the natural order. In a purely natural state, she wants to become a part of the cosmos and the secret of its creation. Catriona Sandilands comments upon the search for identity by a woman with the help of nature. She writes, “… ecofeminism is focused on women’s empathy with nature, women’s identification with nature, women’s self-identification as natural. This privileging of connection with nature, this desire to be nature at the apparent expense of human subjectivity, represents an interesting construction of a politics of identity” (Sandilands 69).
After coming close to nature, the protagonist in *Surfacing* can see the image of her dead mother who is feeding the birds. Finally, it is the union of the material and the non-material world. The protagonist is far removed from the materialistic city life. When five men come to search for her, she manages to hide. “That is the way they are, they will not let you have peace, they don’t want you to have anything they don’t have themselves” (192). At night she dreams of her parents heading out of the bay in a green canoe. She needed their help to connect herself with her origin. They came and then disappeared, leaving her to decide her future on her terms. “The rules are over. I can go anywhere now, into the cabin, into the garden, I can walk on the paths” (194). Her actions are now going to be guided by her natural instincts. There is no longer any need to live a forced life. She is confident that her future is safe now, after she is true to herself. She can judge her lover more clearly now. “... he was only a normal man, middle-aged, second-rate, selfish and kind in the average proportions; but I was not prepared for the average, its needless cruelties and lies” (195).

The protagonist finally becomes one with nature. After her experience of being at a purely natural state, she is now free to go anywhere. Her inner strength would guide her and not let her fall apart. She decides to go back to the city but only to remain as a true citizen of Canada, not to become Americanized. “They exist, they’re advancing, they must be dealt with, but possibly they can be watched and predicted and stopped without being copied” (195). Americans were spreading everywhere with their competitive and capitalist culture. They were destroying the natural environment and they were erecting huge buildings with their development strategy. Nature-lovers were no longer a part of their community. “This is the real
danger now, the hospital or the zoo, where we are put, species and individual, when we can no longer cope. They would never believe it’s only a natural woman, state of nature ...” (196).

The protagonist refuses to be a victim. She has gained the power a woman needs, to rise against domination and exploitation. “I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless ...” (197). She has gained the knowledge of her true identity. She is now capable of bringing changes in order to preserve nature, tradition, and culture. Her inner being is at peace and she has found solace among trees. She would no longer let men bind her in chains again. R. C. Shiela Royappa comments upon the strength gained by Atwood’s heroines in her novels. She writes, “Atwood’s heroines, when threatened and thwarted by domineering patriarchal structures, assert themselves by acquiring their identity. She rises above gender sensibilities and fights for human dignity in her novels” (Royappa 125). Roland Tombekai Dempster’s lines of his poem are also significant:

I am not you –
But you will not
Give me a chance,
will not let me be me.

......................................

You meddle, interfere
in my affairs
as if they were yours
and you were me.
God made me me.
He made you you.
For God’s sake
Let me be me. (Brown 104)

The voice that the protagonist raises in the end speaks for the rights of women as well as nature – Leave women and nature to remain in their pure and free forms rather than dominating them. An important issue raised in the novel is the interference of modern technology in the lives of indigenous people, harming their traditional lifestyle. The invasion of their lands by big landlords, the huge mining companies, hydroelectric projects, and highways, these are responsible for violence against them. The colonizers have employed violence to subjugate them. Consumerism has led to the exploitation of the earth with the help of technology. Capitalists want to overpower the small-scale professionals who are making efforts to preserve healthy and natural environments. Val Plumwood envisions a place where ecological feminism succeeds in its efforts:

The story of a land where women live at peace with themselves and with the natural world is a recurrent theme of feminist utopias. This is a land where there is no hierarchy, among humans or between humans and animals, where people care for one another and for nature, where the earth and the forest retain their mystery, power and wholeness, where the power of technology and of military and economic force does not rule the earth, or at least that part of it controlled by women. (Plumwood 7)
The contemporary world is dominated by the West and there is a threat to the native cultures in the globalized world. The recognition of the importance of diversity within different cultures is the need of the contemporary world. Vandana Shiva, an Indian ecofeminist, has been one of the most influential voices who struggle for the maintenance of biodiversity. She has felt inspired by rural women and tribal people of India who think ecologically. She has campaigned against the prevailing ‘maldevelopment’ linked to unsustainable agricultural technologies and reproductive technologies. The diversity of people and cultures is being lost under the effect of model of modernity. “The diversity of the natural world is sacrificed for industrialized agriculture and genetically engineered crops. The subsistence, use-value-based way of life of women and peasant peoples is sacrificed for profit-driven commercial production and trade” (Mellor 64). Shiva argues that the whole process of maldevelopment is based on the patriarchal practices of western culture.

In the novel *Surfacing*, the spiritual association of the protagonist with the forest symbolizes her sense of harmony with nature. She gains knowledge of the forest as the source of fertility and productivity. Her ecological insight helps her in discovering her true identity as a woman. She can feel tranquillity and inner peace in the forest and that helps her in gaining real insight of her identity. She can associate her well-being with the well-being of the forest and her destruction with the destruction of the forest.

Atwood calls the attention towards the fact that the destruction of the forests is occurring at an alarming rate in the world. The densest biological diversity in the world is found in the Central America’s rainforests. Two-thirds of the forests have
been destroyed by capitalists. The private control of the natural resources sustains the industrial economy of rich countries. These countries extend their access to poor countries for natural resources and other products in exchange for the monetary help they give to them. The agriculture has been also turned into ‘scientific agriculture’ which is in reality a western patriarchal model of agriculture. The overall control has been shifted to multinationals for fulfilling agriculture needs. Instead of organic manure, fertilizers produced in the factories are the only source. Instead of proper cropping patterns used for pest control, poisons are used for killing pests. The centuries old knowledge of agriculture is vanishing and replacing itself with green revolution or reductionist pattern of agriculture. When the ‘Green Revolution’ began in India, nature and women, the primary producers of food, were replaced by profit oriented scientific methods. The role of women and the natural methods that maintained the soil fertility were not taken into consideration.

The novel *Surfacing* highlights multiple experiences that the protagonist undergoes, especially in relation to nature and patriarchy. The protagonist’s discovery of her connection with nature acquires a democratic impulse in the end when she refuses to accept any sort of inequality or domination. Ecofeminists have commented on the link between the search of identity by women and democracy. Sandilands comments that “... most ecofeminist invocations of identity, even many essentialists and naturalized ones, are very political indeed.... In its invocation of identity, ecofeminism is thus located in a tradition of democratic social movement politics” (Sandilands 28).
Beginning from 1970s, the bond between women and nature evolved in multiple theories. Some feminists argued that woman-nature connection is a male cultural artefact and a tool of patriarchy. Sherry Ortner, an American cultural anthropologist, argued that women should reject their presumed link with nature. In the late 1970s Susan Griffin called for a feminist re-evaluation of the woman-nature connection. She critiqued that although this bond has been criticised as a tool of patriarchy in the oppression of women and nature, it is in fact an empowering bridge for women. Their natural cycles have significance in their lives that associate them with nature. Ecofeminism forms a bridge between feminism and environmentalism envisioning this bond as significant and instrumental in the betterment of both women and nature. This special connection brings a new realization to the protagonist in the novel and changes her life by giving it a new meaning and identity. Her attainment of peace after being one with nature enlightens the idea that human beings should revert back to nature for harmony and peace.
Works Cited


