

Anthropocentrism to Dystopia : An Analysis of Margaret Atwood's *Oryx And Crake*

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Abstract- This thesis paper, talks mainly about how the anthropocentric attitude within humans may lead our world in to a kind of Dystopia. For substantiating the given statement I have given here a detailed analysis of Margaret Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake*. Through her novel, the great writer is trying to give a warning to her readers about the Dystopian future.

Index Terms- Anthropocentrism, Dystopia, Margaret Atwood's Fictions, *Oryx and Crake*, Apocalyptic future.

Many environmentalists lamented that universe is being destroyed by humans because the manifold ecological problems arise from the growing human population and also by the human exploitation of nature. These issues are revolving around the concept of anthropocentrism. The term anthropocentrism is an ideology, which values humanity over non-humanity. From a philosophical point of view, it is a concept which argues that human beings are the central or most significant entities in the world. This is a belief embedded in many western religions and philosophies.

Anthropocentrism has negative impacts, as it is considered to be responsible for several environmental crises ranging from global warming; ozone depletion and drought etc. The domino effect of such crises would lead to the severe climate changes resulting in the extinction of various species due to their habitat-loss. For example, because of the anthropocentric view point, people cut down trees to build huge buildings and offices for

making money to satisfy their greedy minds. This will finally result in the deforestation which leads to the increase of carbon dioxide gas in atmosphere. Then its severe outcome would be enhanced greenhouse effect and global warming.

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx And Crake* is a novel which tells us about our futuristic dystopia. Margaret Eleanor Atwood is a Canadian poet, novelist, literary critic, essayist, inventor, teacher and environmental activist. Atwood and her writing have won a lot of awards like Man Booker prize, Franz Kafka prize etc. Major themes of her writing are gender and identity, religion, myth, climate changes and power politics. Her other works include *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing* etc. Poetry collections are *Expeditions*, *True stories* etc. Atwood has a special interest in ecology. Moreover, she has many relatives who are scientists, which might have influenced in her writing. Her *Maddaddam* trilogy comprises *Oryx And Crake*, *The Year of the Flood*, *Maddaddam*. *Oryx And Crake* is basically a speculative fiction, published in 2003. The novel is a warning against future of

technology fuelled by capitalism and corporate greed. Humans are completely driven by greed and laziness. In their attempt to develop robots and other technological developments, they themselves will lose their existence. Humans develop technology for making themselves more carefree. Technological developments are, of course, beneficial but on the other side it had made man lazy in his life. *Oryx And Crake* tells its readers about how technological developments will contribute for destroying the world. The protagonist of the novel is Jimmy, who is struggling to survive in a world where he had already lost his friend Crake and his beautiful lover Oryx.

The second book in the trilogy, *The Year of the Flood* came six years after *Oryx And Crake*. In this book, a reader can see the melding of religion and science. After the natural disaster occurred, the human life has obliterated. Two women have survived; Ren and Toby. Meanwhile, genetically engineered species like the lion/lamb blends the Mo'hair sheep with human hair, the pigs with human brain tissue, are proliferating. The third book, *Maddaddam* takes us to more challenging dystopian world and holds up a mirror to our own possible future. Jimmy and other survivors are united in facing the struggles of dystopian world. Atwood also poses the questions about the creation, the infallibility of god and the evolution of religion.

While reading the novel *Oryx and Crake*, one can easily come across the notion of anthropocentrism. The character Crake is depicted as a kind of ruler or god, who can make the biologically and fundamentally different beings on earth. These beings have even resistance to the sun's ultraviolet radiations. Here, a man is trying to be a god, as humans consider god as the creator of whole living beings and the whole universe. This illustrates the anthropocentric attitude of a man like Crake in our world.

A pigeon is the creature in the novel that can grow five or six kidneys is highly desirable because it drastically reduce the cost. This is another instance of anthropocentrism in the novel. Humans are afraid of death. They find various ways to get rid of it. Here in then novel, humans are becoming the ultimate problem solvers and also the solution makers. They are showing that they can even avoid the death through their inventions. One such invention is the pigeon. After making pigeons, the corporations sold the animal meat with human genes in it simply to make profit. It is notable that they are only forced to do so because of the same corporate greed and scientific advancements. According to humans, everything is business. Humans are not at all concerned about other creatures; they only want to make money for satisfying their individual needs.

Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* depicts the idea that is, anthropocentrism can lead to the creation of a dystopian world. Generally, every human in this world yearns for the creation of a Utopian future. The Cambridge Dictionary defines utopia as "a perfect society in which everyone works well with each other and is happy." But the thoughts and deeds of humans are leading them to a dystopian future. Atwood gives the illustration of this idea in her novel "Oryx and Crake."

In the beginning of the novel, a reader can see that human population of the earth has been wiped out by a deadly plague. Then genetically manipulated group of beings that is Crakers, who are similar to but not the same as humans are surviving easily in the environment but, the last man, snowman struggles to survive. From this, what a reader can infer is that now, Snowman is living in a society, which is the result of Crake's greedy, selfish calculations. Humans generally gave prior importance to time in their life, but in the morning when Snowman looks at his watch, he finds that it is not working. Snowman is in a world where crackers, pigoons, exist, which is considered as great scientific advancements. But as humans have learned more and more about technology, their clocks have stopped working. So, this illustrates that when man goes behind great advancements, they can lose the basic elements in their life. For example, Snowman has no any idea about accurate time and he tells that he was eating probably the last mango in that world.

The character Crake is the main reason for the destruction of humanity. He believes those things which are traditionally referred as "distinctly human"- love, art, language, self-awareness, knowledge of mortality, are a kind of evolutionary mistakes. He finds them to be "inelegant" solutions to the problem of life and survival. Crake's solution to these problems, on the one hand is the invention of the crackers, whom he considers to be superior genetic combinations of humans, plants and animals that share neither human intelligence nor sexual desire. On the other hand, he solves what he sees as the problem of human beings by developing a plague that effectively wipes them off the earth. So, an anthropocentrically driven man's misconception about love, sex, humanity has led to the destruction of human species itself.

Crake never shows any love for his parents, and Jimmy suspects that Crake killed his mother and Uncle Pete in order to test the deadly viruses that he was developing. Crake seems to view everything that contributes to human relationships as messy and unnecessary, tries to eliminate that messiness. From all these scenes in the novel, one can understand how human relationships will fare if rapid scientific advancements and corporate greed continue to have an increasing effect on the life of the individual. Trust and love are hard to find in this world. Greed in humans arises from their anthropocentric attitude. The book imagines a world where humanistic questions regarding ethics, morality, and responsible decision making have been pushed aside in the name of scientific progress. So, a reader can find that scientific progress will lead to the absence of humanistic thinking, which has a dehumanizing effect on culture.

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"But love was undependable, it came and then went, so it was good to have money value, because then at least this who wanted to make a profit from you would make sure you were fed enough and not damaged too much." These lines tell that in the flashback, Jimmy learns about Oryx had a horrible, joyless life. She had been sold to Uncle En. After his death, she had to work with an adult filmmaker named Jack. He taught her English in exchange for sexual favours. She is then purchased from Jack by a San Francisco artist, who saw her on TV. From her life, Oryx learned that there is price for everything. Crake meets Oryx through prostitution service sponsored by his school Watson and Crick. And then he hires her for project paradise. Though she is not fond of Crake as she is of Jimmy, she deeply admires Crake and his project. Because she believes Crake wants to end human suffering. But her concept about Crake and his project was wrong as instead of ending human sufferings, his vision was to wipe out the human race.

"Homo Sapiens, Sapiens was once so ingenious with language, and not only with language. Ingenious in every direction at once." These are the lines from the novel which tells that Jimmy thinks back about humanity's past greatness: a greatness that has been squandered, resulting in a post-apocalyptic society. Jimmy is an eloquent man who loves words and language. He is the last human on earth after the plague, but he is one of the last true human even before other humans die from the disease. His humanistic or general thinking as Crake calls it is what saves him, figuratively and literally. The novel depicts worries about a progress-obsessed culture which only looks forward, and fails to attribute meaning and significance to the past; this led the people to stop seeing themselves as members of a unified human culture: that might cause them to cease to be human. Crake is the reason for this as he tried to breed such cultural and humanistic needs out of the crackers. So, a man himself is the reason for the creation of such an undesirable world. It is a world controlled by profit seeking corporations, everything has been commoditized.

Everything is for sale. There are no moral considerations or concerns. The corporations are freely exploiting the people's insecurities and weakness to sell sex, beauty, health, and the promise of happiness. In order to preserve their high profits, health companies have even begun to manufacture and release diseases to profit off their cures. This is as much as abuse of corporate power as it is as abuse of advanced scientific knowledge. Just as health, beauty, and happiness have a sale value, evil and violence have entertainment value and are thus similarly commoditized.

"Maybe the guards tried to get out of RejoovenEsense just like everyone else. Maybe they, too, hoped they could outrun contagion." These lines tell that when Snowman visits the guard tower of a major corporate building. He realizes that there are no dead bodies inside the building, suggesting that even the guards were trying to run away from the mysterious contagion. There is no law and order outside of the corporate compound. Corporation's security enforcement services protect corporate interest over individual interests. In such a society, a man who wants to live a meaningful life finds it difficult to survive there.

Corporations are the companies or institutions controlled by a group of greedy individuals. So, it's almost clear that anthropocentrism is creating such an unwanted society.

In all aspects, this novel depicts a true dystopian world because even after the end of human race, Snowman's and Craker's lives are under the control of Crake. Before the human race's end, their lives depict a clear undesirable world. Atwood has philosophically presented the concept of how anthropocentrism can lead to a dystopian or undesirable world in the novel. Humans are the main reason for the increasing pollutions, for satisfying their greedy mind, they cut trees, hunt animals, and even another man, which is in their own species. Recently the flood occurred in Kerala is a warning from nature. But still man is not ready to give up their anthropocentric way of thinking. But at last what will happen is that, the creation of a dystopian world.

In *Oryx And Crake*, the human race is characterized by a constant desire to achieve immortality. The creation of Anoooyo Spa and genetically mutated pigeons are the symbols of society's need to preserve beauty and prevent death. This idea of immortality is also demonstrated through the crackers, who have no understanding of the concept of death and as a result exist in an eternal present. Then science without ethics is explored in the novel. Jimmy's twisted and morally questionable childhood Crake is behind the collapse of humanity and the overall is a symbol of all of the negative possibilities that can result from scientific thinking detached from ethics.

Snowman thinks a great deal about his own species' extinction of Homo Sapiens brought by Crake's plague. In addition, he notes the current flora and fauna on the earth and which species are thriving and which are declining. He also compares his own poor adaptations to those of the crackers. He suffers from sunburn, infection, starvation, and more in the environment where crackers are perfectly suitable to live. In this book, humans go on controlling evolution, from creating new species and inadvertently causing the Extinction of existing species but this has resulted into a new story of evolutionary history.

Through her novel, Atwood is trying to give a warning to her readers as she is not a prophet, she cannot ensure that dystopia will be the future of this world. Atwood tells that all these are possibilities. Humans yet have enough time to change their attitude. If they are ready to choose the right path of meaningful survival, then they can avoid the creation.

In the conclusion, I would like to state the relevance of this thesis in the current society. We all are now facing the pandemic covid 19, so our present world can be related to the Apocalyptic world presented in the novel *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood. Through this thesis I would like to state the how the warning of Atwood about anthropocentrism is so relevant in our present situation.

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