CONCLUSION

A phrase in a poem becomes a theme in a novel; characters sketched out in the barely differentiated personae of the poetry become full human beings in the developing process of fiction; the critical arguments in survival in the latter essays collected in *Second Words* (1984) often develop notions adumbrated in the early books of poetry or anticipate those which are developed in the later novels. (Woodcock, *Introducing* 17-18)

Atwood's works are inter-related to one another in many ways like themes images etc. Generally her works concentrate on the problems of the female race. She presents her concern for the human and the inhuman through her personae in poetry collections and protagonists in her novels. Sometimes these female heroes serve as unifying forces where all the events are related to her in one way or other.

Beyond the organic Unity that exists in a volume of poems and an inter connectedness with in a novel, a close look at her works reveal the fact that she maintains organic unity irrespective of genres. To George Woodcock this is a “capillary link”. He identifies the link between
Atwood’s novel *The Edible Woman* and the poem “The Circle Game” and according to Linda Hutcheon the latter becomes the structure of the Edible woman. George Woodcock describes elaborately about this link. To him,

both concern the cruelties of love the Proustian
impenetrability love encounters, and when I try to think of a
quick way so saying what *The Edible Woman* is about, a
verse from *The Circle Game* comes immediately to my
mind.

These days we keep
our weary distances:
sparring in the vacant spaces
of peeling rooms
and rented minutes, climbing
all the expected stairs, our voices
abraded with fatigue,
our bodies wary. (Woodcock, *The World of Canadian Writing*
153)
In the postmodern environment the modern man finds it very difficult to lead a healthy life because of the constant threat to his own existence caused by nuclear explosion, economic imbalances, inequality, terrorism etc. In spite of the obstacles, the modern mind longs for a harmonious life. Every human being is facing a sense of rootlessness. Every day dawns with new problems, which affects survival itself. The growth and development of science has reduced the world into a global village and science has contributed much to the growth of narrow-mindedness among the people. In the present setup human beings are mad after material gains and have become more self-oriented than in the previous years. Man’s inner urge to live a peaceful life is missing and hence he feels alienated. Distortions and perversions of all kinds dominate in his day to day domestic life.

The development of science and civilization affect the existing setup, for the former reduces human beings to the level of machines and the latter imposes rules and regulations on the human being. It is remarkable that in terms of civilization and development, our life support systems are exploited and polluted and slowly the earth is becoming a place of destruction rather than creation. The innermost self of man is aiming at a world of happiness where inequality has no role to play, for the present
patriarchal setup ignores the active participation of women and nature and maintains inequality at all levels. It is worthy to note that man cannot lead an isolated life and he cannot attain happiness by overpowering others.

In order to lead a happy life, the imbalanced world should be changed. To achieve this happiness, the so called accepted patterns of behaviour should be re-examined and the relationship between the human and the inhuman should be understood i.e. An eco-friendly world will pave the way for happiness because it tries to create an anti-hierarchical setup. Women and nature, the twin neglected creative forces in the patriarchal setup, form a sisterhood, which will heal the wounds that the male dominated world has caused. Hence creating a natural order against the artificial structures is essential for a harmonious life. Viability will find a definite role in an anti-hierarchal setup where human values are respected and contribution of individuals is respected.

Mutual understanding, which is lacking in the present day world is essential for a good living. It is remarkable that throughout the ages man relies on the natural environment to earn his daily living. It is unfortunate that the patriarchal setup has used the natural resources but has neglected and ignored nature.
Writers all over the world through their writing are trying to create a peaceful world. Nature writers like William Wordsworth and Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, Toru Dutt and Tagore tried to create an eco-friendly atmosphere where happiness found a place. Their philosophy was that ecology was very important for man. Writers like Jonathan Swift and Pope condemned the follies of men and wanted to create a flawless society. Feminist writers like Atwood, Laurence, Shoba De, Shasi Deshpande, Kamala Das, Virginia Woolf etc. criticize the patriarchal setup and stress on the need for a powerful world, which has the power to reject any kind of domination.

Unlike many writers who portray the excesses of the world Atwood reveals the excesses and the domination but is against the violation of such excesses and insists on the knowledge of human values. Atwood concentrates mainly on the heart-breaking issues which affect the human race. Through her characters in her fictional world and her persona in her poetic world she tries to explore the possibilities for a good living, though living in a world of negatives. She declares about the human world in an interview with Linda Sandler, “What’s important to me is how human beings ought to live and behave” (Ingersoll 56). From these lines it is very
evident that Atwood's purpose is to identify the ways by which every human being has to live and behave.

While dealing with human behaviour, Atwood describes through her persona both the optimistic and negative sides of life. A serious reader can easily identify the optimistic goal of Atwood which can be attained through negation. There are various views which deal with the pessimistic side of Atwood's works ignoring the optimistic vision of Atwood's world.

This dissertation had dealt with 21 poems of Margaret Atwood dealing with the following themes: self analysis, seeking for an order in the system of things, adherence to nature and quest for a happy living.

Atwood maintains organic unity in all her writings, the issues she discusses in her poetry often find a place in her fiction too. She is capable of visualizing the object or the events perceived, and this reminds the readers of Atwood's competence as a visual artist. Through visual enumerations, aural sensibilities and graphic details described in her poems, she establishes contact with the reader. In the Atwoodian system the reader becomes an active participant rather than a passive listener.

While exploring the possibilities for a good living she pictures the world as it is and the human response to it at all levels. Atwood, being a
feminist, believes that the gender discrimination will stand as an obstacle preventing harmony.

Atwood through her personae in her poems questions the accepted patterns and reverses them not to cause destruction but to create happiness with equal partnership, which her female heroes long for. Hence they try to break the cages of the patriarchal system, which push them to the periphery and try to occupy the center. The patriarchal system also ignored their participation in the growth and development, which the present day world relies on for its survival.

It is important that through her works, the Atwoodian system tries to create an altruistic atmosphere, which will evolve from mutual understanding and equal partnership rather than from the celebration of polarities. While dealing with polarities in the Atwoodian system, Sherrill Grace in her article entitled “Margaret Atwood and the Poetics of Duplicity”, identifies the ways Atwood advocates to emerge from the polarities,

Atwood has said that as long as we insist upon binary opposition we shall remain locked into victor/victim positions or “the tension between subject and object [...]. What we
need is the third way of being that allows us to live in a natural “creative harmony with the world”. Instead of defining ourselves over against our surroundings and each other like the progressively insane pioneer, we must learn to accept our place within a duplistic system which we mirror and in which we are mirrored. (56)

In order to accept the world and to create harmony one needs to be aware of himself. It is worthy to note that in order to realize one’s own self one has to undergo introspection. Understanding one’s own self is too difficult in a world of entrapments. Atwood portrays critical situations, and issues in which her female heroes are trapped. It is significant to note that the tension between the natural and the artificial worlds is one of the major preoccupations of Atwood where the former is associated with creation, metaphorically and biologically associated with females, and the latter is associated with destruction and with males. The domination of the artificial over the natural world finds great emphasis in her novel Surfacing. The body of a blue heron in the novel is killed and cruelly hung upside down from the branch of a tree by a piece of nylon rope. While commenting about the blue herons image David Stouck says “In this vivid image
Atwood reveals man’s wanton instinct to rape and kill as a central and terrifying fact of human nature”. (284)

In Atwood’s works men are fond of artificiality: they are equipped with scientific achievements and are often agents of violence and dictators of power. They are narcissistic in their approach for they use others to gain pleasure without any return and they also use the situation to suit their convenience.

Atwood identifies the factors, which prevent human beings from achieving happiness. One way of achieving happiness is through reconciling the irreconcilable differences like operations of power, binary oppositions inequality etc. and here the collision between mind and the land plays a crucial role in reconciliation. In the process of reconciliation the landscape plays the role of an active participant. The persona in the “Journey to the interior” is caught up in the difficult circles of the natural world and undergoes both physical and mental journeys and realizes herself. This poem stresses the need for the fusion of both the worlds through reconciliation. Reconciliation is further analyzed in the poems “Thoughts from Underground” and “Alternate Thoughts from Underground.” In these poems Atwood clearly portrays the persona’s response to the new land and the obstacles that stand in the way of the
process of adaptation, which includes reconciliation. The fusion of the inner
and the outer worlds is essential for a good living and the fusion
metaphorically suggests man’s union with the cosmic world too. “The
Woman Makes Peace With Her Faulty Heart” is another poem where the
persona suffers a lot to reconcile with her own self for she is the victim of
her own self. It is worthy to note that reconciling the mind and the body is
essential for a peaceful life. According to Linda Hutcheon,

Atwood suggests that all humans are victims of the strife
caused by the inner separation of mind and body, an inner
split that mirrors all outer or social discord (New 24).

Atwood goes further to deal with the theme of reconciliation through
her poem “Flying Inside Your Own Body” where the persona undergoes
the act of meditation to understand her self and also to reconcile with the
world, Hence the process of reconciliation involves conflict between the
exterior landscape and the interior mindscape and between the mind and the
body, where both suggest a way of life which emerges in the world of
Atwood.

It is only fitting here to note that her personae undergo suffering in
the chaotic world and are caught up in prison-like traps. These prisons are
often man-made structures which torture women physically, and psychologically; which prevent them from participating in external activities. They are also treated as slaves and are expected to behave in accordance with the man-made structures and are expected to satisfy men’s physical and psychological needs.

Atwood through her characters envisions the need for an orderly world, which is not an artificial one but an eco-centered natural one. Hence understanding the Canadian environment is essential for a good living. Her personae in her poems suffer a lot to cope with the modern chaotic environment.

Atwood also presents how chaotic situations in life are capable of creating tension and how they affect human relationships. For instance in the poem, which starts with ‘You fit in to me’ the persona (created character) is an innocent victim of the male-dominated power structure where the relationship itself is not understandable and hence it is chaotic by nature. The power of man dominates and the female is “hooked” affecting the psyche of the persona miserably. Atwood being a postmodernist writer reveals the unrevealed truths and politicizes the personal relationships, for the personal and political are interconnected. In this poem also the physical union with her lover is cruel. This clearly shows that the present day world
lacks mutual understanding and equal partnership and hence the persona
seeks to establish an orderly world where the relationship is soft, tender and
whole-hearted. Operations of power occupy a major place in Atwood’s
writings and the female heroes experience pain. But they want to come out
of the existing setup which holds them captive as revealed in the poem
“The Circle Game”. The persona says, “I want the circle/broken.” (Atwood
*The Circle Game* 55) The circles are traditional artificial structures which
represent power and domination causing ill-treatment of others. Jerome
Rosenberg rightly observes,

> Playing out his traditional role of silent hero involves more
> than self-destructive assertions of power over others. Atwood
> sees the traditional myth of the crusading warrior as a major
> obstacle toward becoming human, in the private as well as
> public arena. It forces the man into physical and spiritual
> journeys that both isolate him from the speaker and contribute
to his death; and it keeps the woman in her traditional
> supporting role of patient wife, passive sufferer, waiting at
> home for her warrior to return (67)

Atwood is against the patriarchal setup which expects women to be
passive and hence she reduces the male characters to the inhuman level.
This idea is repeated in most of her poems. In the poem "He is a strange biological phenomenon", the persona undergoes torture because of the cruel activities of the narcissist who "moves like a disease" and spoils the environment in which he lives. The male characters in Atwood’s poems are known for violating the females ‘woman’ and ‘nature’. Here Atwood picture the male commenting as a plague that kills as it moves.

The cages in Atwood are artificial structures and are used as tools of male domination, which affect the human relationship. The persona in Atwood’s poetry longs for a systematic and positive world where the male chaotic world will loose its power and the female-hero will accept and live attuned to the cosmic energy of nature.

Another important factor which gains attention in Atwood’s poetry is the conflict between the artificial and the natural world and this conflict involves a confused and absurd mood, where one overlaps the other as in the poem “The Double Voice”. The right way to lead a happy life is understanding the reality of life for illusion is temporal and will not lead to better understanding. Hence to come out of the chaotic situation, self-understanding and courage are essential.
Atwood as a feminist argues for the welfare of the women and as a nationalist talks about the issues which affect Canada’s growth like Americanization.

Atwood evolves as an eco-feminist when she talks about the relationship between women and nature and she identifies the fact that the male dominated setup is responsible for the destruction of the ecology. She tries to construct strategies for an orderly world where equality, happiness, etc., find a definite role to play. The order created by science is artificial and is a threat to human existence and is dangerous too. David Stouck rightly argues,

[...] order that humankind erects against the chaos of natural forces is both stultifying and life threatening” (275)

In order to create a universe of peace and order the existence of the chaotic world should be understood and the human race should stop violations against the natural world in terms of civilization and culture. It is interesting to read that in Atwood’s world, nature is presented as opposite to culture. Atwood’s personae try to understand the codes of nature and her protagonists too try to create an eco-friendly life in her poems and this is also revealed in her novels Surfacing and The Life Before Man. The
present world which insists on western dichotomies or binary oppositions like nature/culture, male/female, victor/victim etc. which are responsible for the split between the human and the inhuman, and the split in one’s own body and mind too.

In the poems of Atwood landscape is used not only as landscape in the literal sense, but also as an active participant in the creative process often speaking to the personae, and sometimes rejecting the artificial structures. It appears that, Atwood is totally frustrated with the existing world, which ignores the natural environment. She gives room for nature in all her works and she stresses the need for an eco-friendly life through her female heroes. Unlike the Wordsworthian concept of nature, Atwood’s concept of nature’s role in human life and the landscape’s functions rejecting the man made structures is totally bewildering George Woodcock in his article “Transformation Mask for Margaret Atwood” rightly argues,

It is man, when he becomes something more than predator, who introduces exploitation: the primary enslavement of domestic animals, the physical victimization of blood sports, the emotional victimization of turning a wild creature into a pet, and, worst of all the cold-blooded victimization in the cause of science, where animals are tortured and killed so that
men may live a little longer but not necessarily more joyfully

(54)

The landscape waxes eloquent in responding to the human.

Atwood's, concern towards nature includes the animal world too. Atwood reverses the process where the landscape assumes the shape of a human being, speaking in a female voice of both (land and human) being neglected in the patriarchal setup. Atwood also presents how human intervention affects the natural vegetation and states that man has to rely on natural resources for his survival and also points out that by using the natural resources man dominates nature as in the poem "Burned Space" where nature is personified as human. It is worthy to note that Atwood's female heroes are also aware of the dangers involved in the wild environment. Atwood concentrates on both the optimistic and pessimistic sides of nature and she stresses the need for an optimistic outlook, which will create a peaceful life where both victor and victim will not exist but harmony will exist. Victimization plays a dominant role in the Atwoodian system where both nature and women are victimized. Rick Salutin in an article entitled "A Note on the Marxism of Atwood's Survival" rightly says, "Victimization is merely the first step in the process of colonization – from the point of view of the Colony at least"(58). It is argued that in order to
discover the optimistic side of nature one should be aware of the dangers involved in it as in the poem “Today”, where the persona’s daughter is introduced and the persona feels that she will learn from nature how to live. It is implied that a communion with nature, is essential to a healthy life at the same time one should be aware of the dangers of the existing situation, which reduces nature. Human intervention with the help of scientific achievements violates nature and reduces it and makes the planet not worthy enough to live upon as shown in “Day Books I” also. Imposing artificial power on nature will lead to dangers and man’s constant fight with nature to overcome it has miserably failed in the poem “Progressive Insanities of a pioneer”. The pioneer tries to impose his idea of “great vision” against “green vision” i.e., the vision of nature. It is interesting to note that the landscape replies his questions and rejects his idea of a “great vision”. Through her persona Atwood tries to stress the idea repeatedly that nature has to be treated as human and hence she gives a human shape and female voice to it. The pioneer’s effort is totally against the natural vegetation and is ego-centric. Sherill Grace in her article entitled “Articulating the “Space Between”: Atwood’s untold stories and fresh beginnings” rightly observes the attitude of the pioneer towards nature and the consequences of it. She states:
[...] the pioneer causes havoc in one of two ways: if he wins the battle with nature, he will destroy something essentially human which he has also denied; if he loses the battle, he will be overwhelmed by a world he has not understood and will be driven insane. (9)

Domination of any kind will spoil the relationship between man and nature, man and woman too. Imposing artificial order against natural order will lead to destruction and will pave the way for a world of scientific achievements but will not heal the wounds that science had already caused. In the postmodern world the human mind is caught up in tight corners and everybody feels isolated and in short the world suffers due to lack of human values.

Atwood’s female heroes struggle to live a happy life in the world, which violates them hence violating human values. Atwood visualizes how the female body is violated in the present day society through her poem “Torture”. Atwood’s concern towards human values rightly emerge through this poem, for violations against women are universal. It is significant to note that through out the ages women are suppressed and especially in Colonial countries like India and Canada they are seduced, raped and are often treated as objects of oppression. They are still in victim positions and
hence the protagonist of Atwood’s novel namely Life Before Man dreams of a life before man i.e., the mile zero life where harmony has a place and power has no role to play.

An encounter with the past finds a definite place in Atwood’s works like Surfacing, where the unnamed protagonist goes in search of her father who is dead. Likewise, in her poems also Atwood deals with the dead which metaphorically represents an encounter with the past and she believes that if the past is understood clearly one can lead a happy life in the present. Learning lessons from the past is essential for a good living, because history repeats itself. In the Atwoodian creative world her female hero’s encounter with the dead leads to understanding the past and also helps to identify their roots. Sometimes they are caught up amidst the dead things like in her poem “A Night in the Royal Ontario Museum”. The persona in this poem struggles hard to come out from the entrapped situation where everything reminds her of the past. It is here that Atwood evolves as a psychologist who deals with the pre-occupations of the past in one’s own mind. The personae in Atwood are sometimes unable to cope with the present situation as the persona in the poems of The Journals of Susanna Moodie. The typical Canadian conflict between the past and the present dominates the poem where the persona is looking for an “EXIT”
sign. Death by nature is typically Canadian and death reminds the readers of the temporal life on earth and is meaningful too. “The Deaths of the Other Children”, and “Death of a Young Son by Drowning” are poems that deal with death by water, which is very common in the Canadian environment. Death is treated not as a concept but as a way of life, in the Atwoodian system and it is also not treated as the end. These two poems deal with death not as an obstacle but only as a sorrowful event in life. The persona in the poem is frustrated with the loss of her children and hence she looks forward to a better life, a better future.

Generally, in spiritual terms death is not an end but a gateway to the other world, as in the poem “Resurrection”. In this poem Atwood’s protagonist is capable of identifying the earthly factor and at the same time identifying supernatural powers too. This highlights the idea that for a happy life one has think about the past i.e., those who “have become stone / voices of the land” and the inevitable present. In Hindu Mythology the concept of resurrection finds no place but it believes in rebirth. Atwood deals with the Christian idea of resurrection and makes it an earthly affair where God is a component of nature. “god is not / the voice in the whirlwind / god is the whirlwind”(Atwood, Journals 59) This clearly
portrays Atwood’s humanizing the Divine. She universalizes and humanizes God.

Atwood deals with creation and death simultaneously in a few poems. For instance in the poem “Mushrooms” she pictures the edible and poisonous mushrooms and their characteristics. She deals with the negative side of things to direct the readers to a positive goal. Critics often condemn her by portraying her as a pessimist by quoting evidences from her text without looking at the real spirit or inner being or the other side of it. She writes about things that are existing in this world. Hence her system always reminds the readers of the post modern world with its follies and through them directs the readers to a better world where an anti-hierarchical (male-female) human world can be established, which is lacking in the day today domestic life.

Atwood identifies the factors, which affect humanity; like inequality, power, binary oppositions, etc. As a reformist, she deal with the problems of the marginalized; women and nature. Her female heroes are representative of the suppressed groups. Atwood in her article entitled “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all” says,
I have supported women’s efforts to improve their shoddy lot in this world which is, globally, dangerous for women, biased against them and at the moment, in a state of reaction against their efforts. But you pay for your support. The demands placed on those seen as spokespersons either for women or for any other group—under-pressure, are frequently crushing: for every demand you satisfy, ten more come forward, and when you reach the breakdown point and say you just can’t do it, the demanders get angry. Women are socialized to please, to assuage pain, to give blood till they drop, to ceciliate, to be selfless, to be helpful, to be Jesus Christ, since men have given up on that role, to be perfect, and that load of luggage is still with us. (20)

In order to create a better world Atwood reverses the power roles and questions the patriarchal system, which impose power on her female heroes. She also suggests the idea through her personae and protagonists that power should be redefined, where stereotypes have no role to play. To redefine power, Sherill Grace suggests. “Learning how to see is the best way to break out of the vicious circles in Atwood’s world.” Learning how to see itself is one of Margaret Atwood’s major concerns.
To create a viable world "vicious circles" should be broken. Her coming out from these circles would be a difficult task. To change the existing system of follies our perception should be re-examined, for a healthy perception of the world alone can bring happiness to the earth. The Atwoodian system offers a creative, non-victim world where killer and the killed have no role to play. Atwood as a postmodern writer allows her characters to live in the postmodern world and they identify the obstacles before them in leading a happy life.

Atwood as a social scientist identifies the modern man's relationship with the world and his responsibility. She is obsessed with the present patriarchal setup and gives reason for writing about women. Atwood in her article entitled "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all" says,

I write about women because they interest me, not because I think I ought to. Art created from a sense of obligation is bound to be static. Women are not Woman. They come in all shapes, sizes, colours, classes, ages and degrees of moral rectitude[...]. To define women as by nature better than men is to ape the Victorians; 'Woman' was given 'moral
superiority' by them because all other forms of superiority had been taken away. (20-21)

It is worthy to note that the Atwoodian system tries to reject the notions of direction, which are harmful to humankind and her system is also against imperialist ideologies. Her system will co-exist with the eco-centered life and her world is always viable and anti-hierarchical, where happiness finds a place. Atwood tries to create “creative harmony” not with a victim or victor but with a creative non-victim. Atwood says,

The ideal would be somebody who would neither be a killer or a victim, who could achieve some kind of harmony with the world, which is a productive or creative harmony, rather than a destructive relationship towards the world. (Ingersoll 16-17)

It is very evident that Atwood’s ideal world is optimistic and creative and it presents the creative non-victim position which is neither a killer nor victim. The creative non-victim accepts life as a process, taking up the fourth position which “is to follow native Indian cosmology which can serve as the necessary model for a more integrated, holistic view of life.” (Grace Atwood Language 9-10)
There is also a life journey portrayed in the order of the poems selected. They are not in chronological order: starting with the victim positions of women in Canada, the dissertation goes into the analysis of the female into her inner and outer worlds (psychological and physical) and then slowly tries to discover how the woman is living in the chaotic, male-dominated world. This leads into a study of the world and its position keeping the writer's vision in view. Then comes the argument between the great and the green vision, where Atwood strongly feels that to make harmony a green world should be established which will be great. Ultimately through a host of negatives which are present in the existing world Atwood arrives at a solution for women. In fact, she is a great moral thinker. She is of the view that if a human being can survive in an eco-friendly environment and can adapt herself to it, then a peaceful existence is possible where co-existence will become imminent. So, to arrive at a positive stance and to establish a happy life Atwood's suggestion is that a human being should be free, adaptable and eco-friendly. Through a constant evolution in her poems Atwood slowly emerges as a socially conscious, ecologically committed and humanly dedicated person. This only leads to a social and eco-oriented philosophy. That is why we can say that Atwood is a social eco-humanist mingling sociology, ecology and
human all in one. It is admirable that though Atwood presents gory, horrible, negative and nightmarish images in her poems she arrives at positive position in the end. The world she says in full of horrid stuff and one has to live with it, but if one can go hand in hand with nature then happiness and peace are possible. This is a unique message. To quote John Gardner in his *On Moral Fiction*

> True art is by its nature Moral. We recognize true art by its careful, thoroughly honest search for and analysis of values.

(19)

Though one cannot say that Atwood presents morality as such in her poetry, one can assert along with Rosemary Sullivan that,

in a peculiarly Canadian way Atwood is a staunch moralist, essentially a writer of ideas – coldly, often brutally, insisting that modern man must reinvent himself. Her work challenges us to become human. (qtd. in Woodcock, Introduction 8)