ABSTRACT

Literature from the beginning concentrates on human values and explores the possibilities of good living. While dealing with human relationship writers employ characters and personae in their works to voice their ideas. They identify the factors which prevent man from achieving happiness and instruct their readers to follow the good things necessary to lead a happy life. Literature of this era is different from other ages for it makes the readers realize that they are also part of the creative process. The readers become active participants in the creative process rather than passive listeners.

Writers describe man's purposeless behaviour in every field and also portray his perverted mind through their heroes. They present the evil qualities that exist in a system in the present day world of power domination. It is very clear that in an unequal system happiness finds no place. In Canada also as in other colonial countries like India, female degradation occupies a major place. Problems like inequality, suppression, survival, alienation etc., play a crucial role in the writings of women.

Margaret Atwood is a multi-faceted prolific writer of Canada. She gained international reputation through her writings. She is a well known
poet, novelist, playwright and a notable critic. Apart from a writer she is a notable cartoonist, and a good visual artist etc. As a Canadian nationalist she has contributed much to the growth of the Canadian national consciousness through her works; as a feminist she deals with issues which affect women; as a postmodernist she is against any kind of domination. She longs for an anti-hierarchical human world through her works and often takes up the stance of an eco-feminist. In her writings one can easily identify the fact that she gives voice to the voiceless, breaking the ‘historical silence’ imposed upon women by the technological and patriarchal world. She employs female heroes to deal with the problems women face in their real life in critical situations. This thesis analyses twenty one poems of Margaret Atwood, and presents how Atwood tries to create a positive, humane world, which is lacking today. It also aims at presenting the hidden connotative meanings beyond the surface in Atwood’s poems. In the Indian scenario she is condemned by critics as a pessimist for they have not seen the unseen other side of her writings.

The first chapter presents the origin of Canadian poetry and traces it till the postmodern era through growth and development of the nationalist, local consciousness. It presents the evolution of Canadian poetry, its English influence a short biography of Margaret Atwood, the formative
influences through which she had developed her writing career and also
introduces the main themes discussed in this dissertation.

The second chapter entitled “Reconciliation between inner and outer
worlds” analyses six poems of Atwood: “Journey to the Interior”,
“Thoughts from Underground”, “Alternative Thoughts from Underground”,
“Paths and Thingscape”, “Flying Inside Your Own Body”, “The Woman
Makes Peace with her Faulty Heart”. All the poems selected in this chapter
concentrate on the conflict within oneself and the conflict between the
landscape and the mindscape. This conflict also includes the collision
between two cultures i.e., between the Victorian past and the Canadian
present. Atwood’s personae in these poems feel isolated in an alien
environment but they try to explore the possibilities in adapting themselves
to a new land. The Indian yogic concept also is drawn parallel to some of
the poems selected, for, this chapter deals with reconciliation between the
inner and the outer self, which is one of the major pre-occupations of the
writing in the Indian tradition also. One of the methods adopted by Indian
yogis for reconciliation is meditation. Atwood describes the process of
meditation, which more or less recalls Aurobindo’s concept of
‘Supermind’. In order to cope with the existing environment one should
reconcile with the irreconcilable differences within one’s self before entering the world of chaos.

The third chapter discusses the female hero’s journey across the postmodern chaotic world. The five poems chosen for analysis are “You fit into me”, “The Circle Game”, “He is a strange biological phenomenon” “The Double Voice”, “Looking in a Mirror”. Through these poems Atwood presents how the postmodern society disturbs personal relationships where the female personae are victims of the man-made world of domination, institutions of power etc. As a feminist Atwood tries to reconstruct the power roles in these poems for she feels that the existing power structure is responsible for the existence of chaos. In these poems the persona’s urge to create a systematic world is visible. In order to create a world of order Atwood’s system offers an anti-hierarchal set up (where man and women are equal and there is no hierarchy) as a solution.

In the fourth chapter, four poems namely “Burned Space”, “Today”, “Day Books I”, and “Progressive Insanities of a pioneer” are analyzed in connection with Atwood’s idea of green-vision and great vision. The poems selected in this chapter deal with the kinship between women and nature and also describe how human intervention violates and exploits
nature. Atwood’s great vision is to create an eco-humanistic world, which is the green vision too.

The fifth chapter explicitly represents the Atwoodian concept of life and death. The poems “Torture”, “A night in the Royal Ontario Museum”, “The Deaths of the other Children”, “Resurrection”, “Mushrooms,” describe how the female body is violated and exploited in the patriarchal society, which entertains an artificial structure of order. In Atwood’s creative world, death is not treated as a concept but as a way of life, which leads as a path to the other world. Atwood makes resurrection an earthly affair; presenting the Christian picture that resurrection is definitely a factor to be reckoned with.

Atwood evolves as a social eco-humanist through the poems selected for study. Her concern towards the human and the inhuman envisions an eco-oriented social life. The green vision becomes her great vision. She poses the solution that an anti-hierarchal set up will create a viable human world.